

ENGLISH IN SOUTH AFRICA: EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND THE POLICY DEBATE

INAUGURAL LECTURE
DELIVERED AT RHODES UNIVERSITY
on 19 May 1993

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Mr Vice Chancellor, my former teachers, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a special privilege to be asked to give an inaugural lecture before the University in which my undergraduate days were spent and which holds, as a result, a special place in my affections. At his own "Inaugural Address at Edinburgh" in 1866, Thomas Carlyle observed that "the true University of our days is a Collection of Books".¹ This definition - beloved of university library committees worldwide - retains a certain validity even in these days of microfiche and e-mail, but it has never been remotely adequate. John Henry Newman supplied the counterpoise:

. . . no book can convey the special spirit and delicate peculiarities of its subject with that rapidity and certainty which attend on the sympathy of mind with mind, through the eyes, the look, the accent and the manner. . . .

. . . if we wish to become exact and fully furnished in any branch of Knowledge which is diversified and complicated, we must consult the living man and listen to his living voice.²

In some measure, this remains the justification for universities and, I suspect, for inaugural lectures.

I am grateful for the voices I have heard during my time at Rhodes, first as an undergraduate in the English Department with Professor Butler; later as a teacher there with Professor van Wyk Smith. I am grateful, too, for the teaching I received in other departments of the university, particularly the department of Economics. I had occasion some time ago to look through my undergraduate notes. I was struck by two things. The one was, how very good they were - the content, not the form - and the second was, how little I remembered of them! Like many before me, I wish I had learned all the things my teachers tried to teach me.

Next year the Institute for the Study of English in Africa will be thirty years old. Since its inception it has given rise to three independent organizations, The National English Literary Museum, The Dictionary of South African English and the Molteno Project. The first two are separate, nationally funded institutions, while the Molteno Project, dedicated to the up-grading of language learning in black primary education, is now an independently funded project of Rhodes University. Periodicals produced in the Institute include *English in Africa*, a scholarly journal devoted to African writing in English and now in its twentieth volume; *New Coin Poetry*, a magazine which has fostered some of the best of South Africa's poetic talent over a period of twenty eight years, and *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*, the journal of the Shakespeare Society, and the baby in the stable, in its fifth year of publication.

We are currently engaged in research towards easing the difficulties experienced by learners from township backgrounds entering Open schools; in writing textbooks which will encourage a transformation in the way literature has traditionally been taught in black high schools - the first in an innovative Shakespeare series will appear this year - and in commencing a combined research and implementation programme for the provision of regular Adult Literacy classes in the Albany District. Although we continue to host visiting scholars engaged in pure research, the central thrust of the Institute's work has always been a practical one. The concept of the Institute originated with Professor Butler, who stated at the outset: "The purpose of the Institute is to improve standards of spoken and written English for all sections of the community".³

This brings me to the topic of my lecture this evening, which concerns the function of a language standard in promoting effective communication in English for a future South Africa, both internally and in relation to the wider English-speaking world. I have chosen this topic because it appears to be at present subject to widespread misunderstanding. There is

general agreement that the English language is going to play a vital role in some very important aspects of our collective future. The terminology varies; people talk of a language of wider communication, a linking language, a language of record, a *lingua franca*, and so on. In a multilingual society with our political history the policy issues surrounding the language question are complex and ideologically sensitive. But whatever the emphasis, English is a key component in most recipes for our linguistic future.

Such a prospect seems calculated to gladden the hearts of native English speakers. Perhaps it should, in the long term, but for anyone with some knowledge of the educational gap between that vision, and the reality as it exists in the majority of our schools, the prospect is also a daunting one. Until the early 1950s, South Africa's schools and Universities were educating relatively competent speakers of English, though the numbers were small. Professor Lanham holds the view that the country was in fact turning out some of the most proficient black speakers of the language that Africa has ever produced. This is not to imply that the education on offer wasn't deficient in many respects; merely that in terms of English language competence, it delivered a good product. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 devastated that education system. As far as English is concerned, it largely separated black learners from native speakers of the language, destroyed most educational environments in which English language competence could be systematically developed, and left the English of black South Africans to evolve haphazardly in the townships. The teachers there did what they could, but for years they were without the support of requisite knowledge concerning the problems of second language acquisition. As school-generation has followed school-generation, Black South African English (BSAE) has deviated more and more from the norms of standard English. It has reached the point where loosely-defined non-native varieties of the language can be identified in different regions of the country.⁴ This situation is, of

course, the linguist's happy hunting ground, but it is also cause for serious concern. In general, white urban South Africa doesn't realise the extent of the problem, for the very good reason that members of the English media point their cameras and microphones only at the most competent speakers of the language they can find. Black South Africans in business and industry usually speak English relatively well. And very often those who have come to prominence in the civics, in religious, cultural, political and sporting organisations, have done so in part because of their competence in English. For the majority of black South African school leavers, and particularly the so-called 'lost generation' which went through the schools from the mid-70's onward, the situation is very different.

In many supposedly English-medium classrooms in DET⁵ schools, there is in fact little sustained English-language discourse. The teacher makes a series of statements in English which is then 'translated' for the benefit of the class. What one hears very often is vernacular discourse interspersed with English phrases and terminology. The majority of black South African school-leavers is composed of struggling compound bilinguals whose English-language competence, at whatever modest level may have been achieved, exists in a complex relation of interdependence with their home language. In using English, some portion of their linguistic energies is deployed in feeling for levels of verbal, emotional and conceptual equivalence between their mother tongue and English. In contrast, those black announcers on the SABC with immaculate "English" accents are good examples of what are known as coordinate bilinguals: individuals who have grown up and been educated in a primarily English-speaking environment, often in exile or in privileged private schools. The tones, rhythms and structures of English are second-nature to them, and this language capacity exists independently of any level of competence in or emotional attachment to their mother tongue. The language problem for South Africa as a whole is hidden behind these appearances, and

it is vast. One has only to compare the English of an average school-leaver from a DET school, with that spoken by someone from Lesotho or Zimbabwe, to realise what *apartheid* education has done.

In this situation, any linguistic triumphalism on the part of native English-speakers, while readily understandable, is at best premature. The fact is that English is not an ideal language for South Africa, far from it. English is a relatively difficult language (so too, for different reasons, are the southern Bantu languages): if simplicity were the sole criterion, Afrikaans would be a better choice. Also, a linking language should ideally have a substantial sprinkling of native-speakers spread through the polity to help anchor the language standard and provide a model. South African demography has native English speakers clustered largely in the urban centres - though radio and television do to some extent mitigate this problem. Thirdly, the linking language should be uncontroversially indigenous, but such is the linguistic diversity of Africa that seldom is this the case. Most 'linking' languages of the continent are, for better or worse, part of its colonial legacy.⁶

There are no serious indigenous candidates for the role in South Africa. Dr Neville Alexander, building on the work of Jacob Nhlapo in the 1940s, has put forward proposals for a standard Nguni tongue to be constructed from Xhosa, Zulu, siSwati and Ndebele, and a standard Sotho to be created from Tswana and North and South Sotho. This process of harmonizing or standardizing - Alexander uses these terms interchangeably, though they in fact mean very different things⁷ - seems a worthy academic project, even if its implementation and acceptance by the people is open to question.

But few can pretend that the Nhlapo-Alexander proposals could deliver a national linking language.⁸ Even if, say, a standard Nguni could be developed sufficiently to serve the needs of the economy, the language would run into serious demographic problems, quite

apart from the fact that Zulu- and Xhosa-speakers together make up only about 40% of South Africa's population - scarcely the basis for an indigenous linking language.

Language engineering is difficult. We are not talking about creating a standard language from its various dialects, but about standardizing different languages from the same language group.⁹ It would have to be a highly-skilled, costly, long-term enterprise to be pursued steadily and consistently over generations. In my view, the likely outcome of any hasty attempt to implement the Nhlapo-Alexander proposals in an environment where English already has a foothold would be to destabilise the authentic African languages and encourage a further proliferation of unstable local varieties analogous to Sheng in Kenya; that volatile mixture of English, KiSwahili and other vernaculars which some hold to be a language, others a pidgin, and still others just an instance of code-mixing carried to extremes.¹⁰ This is not an attractive prospect.

We are left with English, and if English is not ideal, its attractions are manifest. It is an international language, the language of western "success", and, increasingly in South Africa, the language of power and politics. It carries with it unrivalled access to pedagogical, scientific and technological resources. Moreover, it is relatively free from ethnopolitical controversy and the *apartheid* taint.

In general, the one consistently valid argument in favour of English in South Africa is the purely pragmatic, instrumental one that the country needs an additional language which allows communication between different speech communities within and without South Africa and which has the technical resources to allow South Africa's formal economic and educational sectors to operate effectively. To fill this function successfully, English has to **work**.

Several contributors to current debates on language policy in South Africa have been eager to assert the identity and viability of Black South African English (BSAE) in the country's future language dispensation, but they have neglected to examine in any depth questions concerning its intelligibility and comprehensibility. There is no 'invisible hand' ensuring that the development of English in this multilingual land will be such as to secure its international or intra-national intelligibility.

The *locus classicus* in the debate is Professor Njabulo Ndebele's statement in his address to the English Academy in 1986 that:

. . . South African English must be open to the possibility of its becoming a new language. This may happen not only at the level of vocabulary . . . but also with regard to grammatical adjustments that may result from the proximity of English to indigenous African languages.¹¹

This is temperately put, in contrast to some of the more robust expressions of similar viewpoints.¹² But what are its implications? Could we say that advocates of Black South African English are seriously proposing the creation of a new standard language? If so, they risk losing the advantages for South Africa of English as an international language, its educational resources, its commercial and diplomatic functions, its possibilities as a *lingua franca* in Africa, and so forth. Let us imagine for a moment that a radically non-standard English were to be accepted as a new standard and institutionalized - assuming this to be a practical possibility, which many doubt - what would a user of this language feel when his or her attempts at participating in the wider world of English failed? This is not to imply that all South Africans are itching to communicate with speakers of standard English, merely that to attempt to establish a language standard of inherently limited viability would not be sensible.

Fortunately, this is not what proponents of BSAE really mean. What they are arguing for is acceptance of greater flexibility in interpreting the norms of standard English. Given the current state of English in the majority of black schools, this could be a perilous vision indeed. The communicative demands of a modernising society, such as South Africa, are in fact greater than those in a first world industrial society, because increasingly the majority of the population, from a rural or township background, has to interact effectively with the first world component of the society, characterised by a high level of abstract communicative cooperation. Where the mother tongue option is not available - and one hopes that less and less will this be the case - the linking language has to serve. The cosy assumption that, even if considerable loss of meaning occurs in exchanges between native and non-native speakers of English, effective communication will normally be achieved between non-native speaker and non-native speaker - this assumption is refuted by the available research evidence. There isn't as much research on the topic as there should be, but an important general conclusion seems to be that, under conditions which favour neither party above the other, a native speaker has a somewhat better chance of comprehending a non-native speaker than has a fellow non-native speaker.¹³ The possibility of communication breakdown is ever present.

No one doubts that the English language in South Africa will continue to go through a process of indigenization over time. Acculturation of languages is to be expected in situations of continuous language contact in multilingual societies and will take the form of deviations at the phonological, grammatical and lexical levels. Left unhindered, this process normally results in increasingly significant deviations from the standard until the emerging non-native variety becomes culture-bound, its intelligibility confined to the speech community which sustains it. This is fine as long as members of that speech community are linguistically self-sufficient (meaning that their economic, social, political, educational and religious needs

can all be secured within the speech community). However, if the possibility of communicating successfully outside the speech community is desired, adherence to the standard form of whatever linking language has been instituted is vital. It is only the language standard which offers society - any society - security against the possibility of communication breakdown.

We must therefore ask ourselves 'What is the language standard; what is standard English?'

2

In March 1992, the immediate past-president of the English Academy, Professor Elwyn Jenkins, put forward a submission to CODESA which stated that "The official standard of English in this country should be standard British English".¹⁴ There were howls of outrage in the press, and elsewhere. (I wish I could report that they came simply from concerned members of the public. In fact, correspondents included language advisers and tertiary language specialists, people whose training should have given them a better grip on the subject.) The thrust of the objections was this. How could the English Academy have come up with such a blatant piece of chauvinistic neo-imperialist propaganda! Perhaps the Academy held a vision for the country in which everyone would speak what Daniel Jones called 'Received Pronunciation', or perhaps Oxford English, or Southern British standard, or what used to be known as BBC English, before that institution woke up to the way citizens of the United Kingdom actually speak. Were we being urged to adopt the demeanour, the manner of speech, particularly the accent, of that P G Wodehouse character in the pith-helmet whose annoying laugh is meant to attract South Africans to the joys of day-night cricket?

Nothing could be further from the truth. Behind that statement in the Academy's submission the public heard, or thought it heard, the ghost of Lord Macaulay in his magisterial minute of 1853, written at the height of Empire:

"In India", said Macaulay, "English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities which are rising, the one in the south of Africa, the other in Australia; communities which are every year becoming more important. . . . Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects."¹⁵

The 'usefulness' of English has, in fact, outlasted the demise of the British Empire and of entities known as native subjects, but none of this had any more than a tangential relation to the Academy's bland statement that South Africa should adhere to the British standard. In fact, what the Academy was getting at was something so obvious, so mundane, that that organization could perhaps be criticised for misjudging the extent of popular misconception regarding the nature and function of a language standard.

Standard English is generally conceived as a system of grammar and vocabulary, firmly established in text, and not tied to accent. People worldwide speak standard English with a huge variety of accents, although the underlying system of pronunciation is maintained in native English dialects throughout the world. Standard English can also accommodate considerable - but not infinite - variation in vocabulary and syntax.

To put the matter another way, it would be accurate to say there is no speech community on the planet speaking something called standard British English. English has always been dialectal. "There was never a standard language from which dialects diverged."¹⁶ The roots of a standardizing process can be detected in the 18th century with the rise of

certain notions of correctness, of which the provision of popular grammars and dictionaries, including Dr Johnson's great work, may be taken as symptomatic. This tendency is particularly associated with the upwardly mobile middle classes. The social power of the public schools in Victorian England ensured the prestige of a range of upper-class accents deemed socially acceptable. The inception of state-funded primary education in the latter third of the nineteenth century introduced the stabilizing force of universal education and, in cooperation with the proliferation of the print-media in the 20th century, education has been the dominant force in lifting the language standard from its ties to any particular speech community, and entrenching it as an international system whose norms are defined primarily by usage in printed text.

This is not to deny that 'Received Pronunciation', itself subject to phonetic change over time, has not persisted as an influential variety of the international standard. It certainly has. Rather the claim is that there is no longer any necessary connection between 'Received Pronunciation' and the demands of effective communication in English.

This text-based international standard has only two fully institutionalised varieties: American English and British English. An institutionalised variety is one which is "fully described and with defined standards observed by the institutions of state".¹⁷ There are, of course, several standardizing native varieties of English such as Australian English or South African English, varieties which are on the way to developing the institutions - the dictionaries, grammars, language bureaux, syllabi and curricula - which may eventually establish them as institutionalised, standard forms; though it is doubtful whether there is sufficient impetus behind the standardization process in these countries to bring it to completion. There is also a vast number of non-native varieties of English. These tend to be unstable and their relation to the language standard uncertain. To the best of my

knowledge, there are no standardizing non-native varieties of English. Non-native varieties are studied and documented. They enrich the expressive potential of the language, a potential which is exploited by ordinary folk in daily life and by imaginative writers. They contribute to a sense of regional and community identity. They are valuable. Yet the very characteristics which allow them to perform these functions unfit them for service as a standard language. To attempt the construction of a language standard from a non-native variety defeats the purpose of having a standard. The truth may be unpalatable to some, but it seems unavoidable that in today's world of interdependent national states, the only English standard which educational authorities can reasonably implement is the international standard. This is not to deny the value of non-standard forms which certainly enrich our communicative repertoire, both in the classroom and elsewhere.

As far as the international standard is concerned, British and American English divide the English-speaking world between them. Despite the influence of American English in commerce and in the entertainment industry, British English is very much in the ascendent, particularly since 1989 and the collapse of the communist order across Europe. The current turmoil over the Maastricht treaty is only a temporary glitch in a gradual process of consolidation which has been going on in Europe since before the second World War. The European Community has chosen the British version of the standard as its first language. The newly liberated states of Eastern Europe now seeking admission to or at least some formal relation with the European Community will naturally follow suit. Eventually the former republics of the defunct Soviet Union may take the same route, resulting in a massive European linguistic power-bloc of some 850 million users of the British standard.¹⁸ American English is likely to dominate the whole of North and South America and the only real site of contest between these two giants is the Pacific rim, where countries like Japan, Indonesia

and China are still uncommitted. The Indian sub-continent falls irredeemably within the British standard, so does nearly all of Oceania, lead by Australia and New Zealand.

Africa, unsurprisingly, has also adopted the British standard. Nearly 50% of its population lives in states where English is an additional language whose reference point lies in British English. Even in the francophone states of West Africa, English related to the British standard is increasingly used for trade and diplomatic purposes. South Africa has always adhered to the British standard.

So when the President of the English Academy says that "The official standard of English in this country should be standard British English", I hope we are now in a position to recognise what an utterly uncontroversial, even banal, statement this is. All he means is that our spelling and our grammar should in general conform to the British standard and not the American, and that he really doesn't think it a good idea for South Africa to invent its own language standard.

3

Apart from the English Academy, and the furore its submission to CODESA occasioned, there has been a deafening silence concerning the practical value of the language standard in South Africa. It is perhaps worth asking why such an important matter has received so little attention in the flurry of position papers, policy statements and constituency reports produced in the last few years. Surely, at a time when the prospect of a new political dispensation has rightly prompted language specialists and others to re-think the South African language conundrum in detail, this is a little strange. Reasons for this neglect are to be found both in the prevailing ethos within the academic language community and also in the partial notion

of language policy which has dominated the policy debate.

In general, language policy stems from attempts to solve, ameliorate or circumvent language problems. To state the obvious, the kinds of language policy statement which appear for consideration are largely dependent on the kinds of language problem identified for solution. Over the years there have been a number of attempts to classify language problems, but one of the most useful and suggestive taxonomies - especially in the South African context - remains that of Neustupný.¹⁹

Neustupný distinguished two approaches to language problems, the policy approach and the cultivation approach. The first treats matters such as national and regional languages, standardization, problems of language stratification, literacy levels, orthographies, and so forth. It is usually characterised by a high level of ethnopolitical concern focused on underprivileged communities in modernizing societies. The cultivation approach, on the other hand, emphasises questions of correctness, constraints affecting language competence, problems of style and usage, appropriacy of linguistic registers for specialised functions, and so on, and is generally associated with modern industrial societies.

In current South African debates on a future language dispensation there has been a tremendous imbalance in the degree of attention the two approaches have received. Language policy has been emphasised to the virtual exclusion of any attention to language cultivation. Yet an adequate language dispensation can only emerge when both policy and cultivation receive appropriate and coordinated attention. The language standard is properly part of language policy, while the means to attaining accepted standards are the essence of language cultivation. Without a realistic grasp of the language cultivation problems South Africa faces, language policy is academic pie-in-the-sky.

The enthusiasm for speculative language policy is easily appreciated. First, language policy meshes directly with key sociopolitical and developmental concerns crucial to the transformation South Africa is currently attempting. All stakeholders in these broader debates have some interest in influencing a new language dispensation from their own perspectives. In contrast, language cultivation questions are more heavily reliant on specialised linguistic knowledge and information, and therefore less open to popular participation. So, too, language policy can easily become an explosive political issue, as South Africa learned to its cost in the Soweto riots of 1976. There, rejection of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in schools in favour of English was much more than an expression of linguistic pragmatism. The particular language question focused wide-ranging political dissent, and many would date the now-imminent collapse of *apartheid* to that time. Mass eruptions are rarely called forth by matters under the language cultivation heading where popular concern - insofar as there is any - is more likely to express itself in crisp letters to the Editor, beginning, "Dear Sir".²⁰

Secondly, academic language commentators are in general thoroughly aware that accommodating the language needs of dispossessed and neglected speech communities is an important aspect of political transformation. There is genuine concern for the resuscitation, elaboration and increased institutionalisation of African languages. Language specialists, many of whom belong by birth or assimilation to relatively privileged social strata, are deeply and rightly impressed by what Fishman calls "Whorfianism of the third kind":²¹ the conviction that linguistic and cultural diversity is valuable in itself as an irreplaceable human resource. Most are at least well disposed towards multiculturalism, though whether its full implications have been dispassionately thought out may be doubted. The case for some form of bilingual education is a strong one. In concentrating on these worthy imperatives, language

specialists tend to play down the exigencies of effective national communication for a modernizing society in which first and third world energies are mixing and interacting with increasing momentum. Often they will beat the drum for acceptance of linguistic change and diversity in preference to acknowledging the important economic and social benefits which flow from the adoption of standard forms.

Thirdly, language cultivation problems raise the spectre of 'language purism', a concept wholly at odds with the non-prescriptive ethos in which the current generation of language specialists was raised. Linguists are rightly intrigued by the fecundity of the human capacity for 'linguaging' and the astonishing varieties of language which result. Aware that idiolects generally include not only standard forms but many non-standard kinds of language, involving code-switching and style-drifting in everyday use, tertiary language specialists commonly resist the notion of 'correctness'. This can be justifiable, but only in particular circumstances. For instance, premature and inappropriate correction of 'errors' will inhibit successful acquisition of a second language, where much depends on confidence and the initial willingness to attempt communication using immature or imperfectly grasped linguistic means. In such a context, the relative term 'inappropriate' may usefully substitute (however euphemistically) for the baldly authoritarian 'incorrect' which peppered the discourse of old-style grammarians, phoneticians and lexicographers. However, should such an approach be interpreted more broadly by the teaching profession, any emphasis on standard English runs the risk of being dismissed, along with splenetic letters to the Editor over minor questions of linguistic usage, as wholesale linguistic chauvinism.

This revolt against purism has a particularly sharp edge in post-colonial societies where ideologists are quick to affirm that colonisers continue to rule through the norms of their linguistic legacy. Such viewpoints, while readily understandable as expressing a

yearning for linguistic and cultural autonomy, effectively reduce language issues to a struggle for authority, failing to distinguish between matters essential for effective communication and those which are rightly matters of cultural preference. If English really is the best solution for South Africa, as a means of national communication, we cannot afford ideological gestures which hamper its capacity to do the job.

But the points raised so far, 'technicism', 'populism', and 'purism', become insignificant next to the pall of disaffection which smothers the general question of standards. Here is the problem: all over the developing world the notion of standards has been interpreted by many as a code-word for preserving colonial hegemony. Any talk of the standard language or standard English raises in some minds the suspicion that standards are there mainly to keep other people out.

The insistence on standards can have this effect. One has only to think of the example of Afrikaans. The early varieties of the language, as it developed after the Dutch settlers, were increasingly adopted and used by black people (or "non-whites" in general) for their own purposes. With the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism at the beginning of this century, there was a rather successful attempt by Afrikaans scholars to "re-Dutchify" the language, to make it 'purer'. Standard Afrikaans came to be this purified version, thereby exacerbating through language a division along colour lines between Afrikaans-speaking blacks and the white Afrikaner establishment. Clearly, this culturally engineered standard had the effect - intended or otherwise - of promoting one racial group and subordinating another. Surely standard English must have an equally undesirable impact?

Not necessarily. Standard English in South Africa does not mean SAE (South African English), largely the language of white South Africa.²² Standard English is that system of grammar and vocabulary, firmly established in text, and the underlying system of

pronunciation, which underwrites all the native varieties of English spoken in the world. SAE is just one variety of standard English shaped by its speakers' social history and their experience in South African conditions. Given informed and systematic attention to its development, there is no intrinsic reason why Black South African English (BSAE) shouldn't become another. To achieve this, it is necessary that the English taught in our schools and universities, from pre-primary to post-graduate levels should conform to the norms of standard English and, also, that the educational processes supporting second language acquisition for speakers of southern Bantu languages be informed by a real understanding of those features of BSAE which compromise its intelligibility.

This is a tall order, and there is no guarantee that South Africa will succeed. However, we have no alternative. To advocate the institutionalising of non-standard English - attributable in large measure to *apartheid's* legacy of low educational standards - would be neither radical nor progressive, but a profoundly conservative attitude, imposing and enshrining mediocrity. On the other hand, there is some promise of success for an educated variety of BSAE closely linked to the norms of standard English.

It follows that the English Academy's emphasis on the language standard is very far from a call for language practitioners to play Henry Higgins to the Eliza Dolittle of Black South African English. Quite the reverse. We should avoid at all costs a misguided onslaught on the emerging identity of Black South African English. As far as language practitioners are concerned, only those features of BSAE which militate against effective communication need be targeted for correction. There are two implications. First, language practitioners need to know where exactly the danger points are, which features of BSAE are the chief culprits encouraging communication breakdown. This lecture, in fact, has been an expansion of my introduction to a book produced in the Institute called **Getting the Message**

in South Africa: Intelligibility, Readability, Comprehensibility, whose principle author is Professor Lanham, and which sets out to specify these danger points for the benefit of language educators, editors and book publishers. Secondly, we need to acknowledge more fully that there is in fact scope for the standard language to develop a Black South African identity without compromising communicative effectiveness. Understood in this way, perhaps Professor Ndebele and the English Academy are not as far apart as might at first appear. What South Africa needs is an educated variety of BSAE which retains its African identity but fulfils the purpose of effective communication because it is tied to the language standard.

NOTES

1. Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, Ashburton Edition, 3 (London: Chapman and Hall Limited, 1888), p.562. Delivered on the occasion of his inauguration as Rector of Edinburgh University.
2. John Henry Newman, *Historical Sketches*, 3 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), pp.8-9.
3. F.G. Butler, "Institute for the Study of English in Africa", Information Leaflet (Grahamstown: Rhodes University, 1964).
4. A state of affairs consonant with developments elsewhere in Africa. See, for example, Rachel Angogo and Ian Hancock, "English in Africa: Emerging standards or diverging regionalisms?", *English World-Wide* 1.1 (1980), pp.67-96.
5. Department of Education and Training: the 'black' education authority under the *apartheid* dispensation.
6. Amharic in Ethiopia and KiSwahili in East Africa are exceptions, at least in potential.
7. Clarified by John Cloughton at the NLP conference on language policy, UCT 12-14 Sept., 1991 (see report by Daryl McLean, *Language Projects Review*, 6.3\4 (1991), p.7).
8. Alexander himself seems relatively sanguine: "Since the majority of our people are mother-tongue speakers of one or other indigenous African language, it is more than likely that another *lingua franca* may eventually displace English in this function for internal purposes and that English will remain no more than a language of wider communication in an international sense" (Neville Alexander, *Language Policy and National Unity in South Africa/Azania*, Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1989, p.61).
9. A point made by Sydney Zotwana (see Alexander, *op.cit.*, p.76).
10. See Kembo Sure, "The Coming of Sheng", *English Today* 8.4 (1992), pp.26-7.
11. Njabulo S. Ndebele, "The English Language and Social Change in South Africa", *English Academy Review* 4 (1987), p.13.
12. Some random examples: Abram L. Mawasha, "Requiem for a Purist Model in Language Education Policy in Southern Africa", paper read at the HSRC's conference on "Relevant Education", Pretoria, 27-28 October 1992; Khetiwe Marais and Robin Trew, "Language and Democracy", *Mayibuye* (Feb. 1992), pp.28-9; Lydia McDermott, "Conquering the tower of 'standard' mythologies", Proceedings of The English Academy of Southern Africa Conference, Cape Town, 1-3 July 1992, pp.17-27.

13. c.f. P. Strevens, *Papers in Language and Language Teaching* (London: OUP, 1965), p.119; W.B. Tiffen, "The intelligibility of Nigerian English", unpublished Ph.D. thesis presented in the University of London (1974), p.227; D. Gennrich de Lisle, "Theme in conversational discourse: Problems experienced by speakers of Black South African English, with particular reference to the role of prosody in conversational synchrony", unpublished M.A. dissertation presented in Rhodes University (1985), p.98; L.W. Lanham, "Stress and intonation and the intelligibility of South African Black English", *African Studies* 43.2 (1984), pp.217-230. Cited by L.W. Lanham in *Getting the Message in South Africa*, ed. and introduced by Laurence Wright (forthcoming).
14. The CODESA submission is reproduced in the Proceedings of The English Academy of Southern Africa Conference, *op.cit.*, pp.186-87.
15. G. Otto Trevelyan, ed., *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, 1 (New York: Harper & Brothers, [1875]), p.354.
16. P.J.H. Titlestad, "Standard English Phonology and South African English", Proceedings of The English Academy of Southern Africa Conference, *op.cit.*, p.47. This paragraph as a whole is indebted to Titlestad, though the emphasis is my own.
17. Randolph Quirk, "Language Varieties and Standard Language", *English Today* 21.6.1 (1990), p.6.
18. John Honey, "Hello . . . and howdee: What will be the model for the teaching of English to nearly a quarter of the world's population?", *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 31 July, 1992. The 'model' referred to by Honey refers simply to the choice between the American and British standards. It implies nothing about the state of the language in the various countries. In Africa, particularly, English as a means of effective communication is struggling.
19. Jiri Neustupný, "Basic types of treatment of language problems", *Linguistic Communications* 1 (1970), pp.77-98.
20. There are exceptions. In his book *Linguistic Purism* (London: Longman, 1991), George Thomas notes that in the 1930s "there was a strike by the print unions in Warsaw against innovations in Yiddish publications" and "in April 1970 there was organised a successful picket of the offices of two New York Yiddish dailies because of their refusal to move away from an anachronistic German spelling" (p.107). Unless the school system regenerates rapidly and the intelligentsia lends some support to the cause of standard English, it is conceivable that South Africa could in the future experience mass pressure in favour of non-standard English.
21. Joshua A. Fishman, "Whorfianism of the third kind: Ethnolinguistic diversity as a worldwide societal asset", *Language in Society* 11 (1982), pp.1-14.
22. The acronym WSAE (for White South African English) would be misleading in that SAE is in fact spoken by many black South Africans.