

TEACHING AFRIKAANS AS EMANCIPATORY DISCOURSE

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1. ATTITUDES TOWARDS AFRIKAANS

There is not a teacher of Afrikaans as second language (L2)¹ in South Africa to-day who does not face an attitude problem in his/her classroom, especially at secondary and tertiary level. Antagonism of a socio-political origin is to be expected from mother tongue speakers of the indigenous languages and from Indian students who are mostly English first language speakers². Surprisingly however, teachers report³ a dauntingly derisive attitude from white English speakers - an attitude that the students are often loathe to admit to, never question and can seldom adequately explain⁴. This attitude is clearly reflected in a letter to the *Daily News*, one of two major daily English newspapers in Natal, on 4 March 1994:

Brush up the Afrikaans commentary

SIR — What an exciting weekend of cricket! Our guys did us proud and we wish them very well for the games to follow.

But — the commentaries in Afrikaans! The word for wickets ("paaltjies") and for runs ("lopies"), sound rather like terms in a child's game. Couldn't "pale" and maybe "lopins" be more appropriate for a grown-ups' game? And on Saturday rather

strange words were introduced to describe the exciting moments, "koekde water". I couldn't believe my ears. I know that one cannot translate literally, but, "cooked water"? Of course, only people in this country can understand Afrikaans, so we need not be embarrassed that the Aussies would be able to translate and be highly amused at a game of cricket being de-

scribed as "cooked water".

It's as bad as the Afrikaans word for a golfer's caddie, "jokkie". And the chap that rides horses is also a "jokkie". Where's the connection?

I'm not knocking the language but I wish the Afrikaans academics would invent some imaginative but reasonable translations.

(Mrs) B. le MAITRE
Morningside

For the teacher the situation is compounded by a dismissive attitude from colleagues and administrators as a consequence of uncertainty about the status of Afrikaans in a new dispensation, an attitude eloquently verbalized in another letter to the *Daily News* towards the end of 1993:

Afrikaans to die like Latin

SIR — In regard to Mr Louis Pienaar's restaurant problems, as a Cabinet minister he should be totally bilingual.

So how can he dare criticise a poor waitress, who might even be a new immigrant. It is about time that people touting the Afrikaans language realised that in the New South Africa their language will not be used, at least not in official circles. Afrikaans will be dead as Latin as it represents the language of the oppressor.

D. MITCHELL
Gullitts

The result is a negativism which leaves many Afrikaans L2 teachers disempowered and disenchanted⁵. Such attitudes are also likely to affect the students' performance in Afrikaans, attitude being widely accepted⁶ as one of the key social-psychological factors in successful second language acquisition. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1992:183) refer to Le Mahieu (1984) for a scheme that represents a vicious circle for the negative L2 learner of Afrikaans:

Variance in	cause ---->	Variance in
attitudes	<---- cause	L2 proficiency

2. A ROLE FOR CRITICAL LINGUISTICS

In this situation one of the main tasks of the language teacher should be to help Afrikaans L2 learners to question their stereotyped attitudes and those of the people around them in a changing context. It is a central tenet of this paper that work done in critical linguistics⁷ has a role to play in, among others, accessing alternative perspectives for L2 learners of Afrikaans. In exploring this tenet, I draw heavily on an article by Janks and Ivancic (1992): **Critical Language Awareness and Emancipatory Discourse** in which they offer an interesting perspective on the role of critical linguistics in language teaching. The research

I wish to refer to centres on two key concepts, viz. **critical language awareness** and **emancipatory discourse**.

The term **language awareness** refers, generally, to a conscious attention to the properties of language and language use as an element of language education and specifically, since the early '80's, to a movement by a group of language professionals to introduce such a component in the British school curriculum⁸. **Critical language awareness (CLA)**, according to Fairclough (1992:14), would entail "approaching the important issues of language awareness from a critical view of language, highlighting how language conventions and language practices are invested with power relations and ideological processes which people are often unaware of." McKenzie (1992:225) describes CLA as "an attitude of critique towards and scrutiny of the meanings in language and discourse that are propagated by dominant groups and often accepted without question by subordinate groups". Along the same lines Lancaster and Taylor (1992:256) argue that **critical language studies** enable students "to develop an explicit understanding (= CLA - J.M.) of themselves as language users in the society in which they live". For Janks and Ivanic (1992:305) this explicit understanding includes a consciousness of "how language can be patronizing, demeaning, disrespectful, offensive, exclusive, or the opposite".

I wish to argue that by leading Afrikaans L2 learners to develop an explicit and critical understanding of themselves as language users in the South African society, the teacher can bring about a remarkable change of attitude in his/her students. To substantiate such a claim, I wish to share my experiences in teaching Afrikaans as a second language to multicultural and multilingual groups of undergraduate students at the University of Natal (Durban) over the past two years. My findings are borne out by a number of senior Afrikaans teachers doing a course-work Masters in **Teaching Afrikaans as a Second Language** at UN, who are experimenting with this approach in their classrooms.

Janks and Ivanic (1992:307) see CLA as a "first step" towards the realization that there are "underdogs" language-wise who need "liberation". The second step follows when "awareness is turned into action" and people consciously start contesting the subjection of themselves and

others through language. In contesting the practices which disempower themselves and others, their discourse becomes emancipatory. **Emancipatory discourse** then, is discourse that resists disempowerment but also discourse that does not disempower others. In the rest of this paper I will approach the teaching of Afrikaans as L2 from these two points of departure.

3. TEACHING AFRIKAANS AS EMANCIPATORY DISCOURSE

3.1 The L2 learner and discourse that does not disempower

In teaching Afrikaans as emancipatory discourse to L2 learners, my emphasis at the outset is on creating an **awareness** that language can and is used to disempower others. In keeping with the recommendation by Janks and Ivanic (1992:320), the CLA part of the course is not taught separately, but rather forms the orientation or approach to the language development part of the course. A general discussion, for example, of how language is used to subject others through being patronizing or demeaning or exclusive is easily integrated with a lecture on word order in Afrikaans by a careful choice of examples. Students enjoy being actively involved by illustrating with examples from their mother tongue. Social responsibility in language use is addressed, especially with reference to groups of people who are powerless and/or stigmatized such as the handicapped, women, homosexuals and ethnic minorities. Appellations such as "kaffir", "native", "non-European", "non-white", "Bantu", "African" and "black", the sensitivity of which most students are aware of, are discussed. The more oblique, and therefore more dangerous, use of language to stereotype and disempower through mechanisms such as euphemism (e.g. **Third World driver**) and metaphor (e.g. **the Iron Lady**) is illustrated from the media.⁹ The students are encouraged to turn awareness into **action** by actively eradicating such offensive and disempowering language from their own spontaneous use and to adopt language that recognizes the identities and values of others.

The focus then moves to Afrikaans specifically. The goal is to create awareness of the fact that not only are there derogatory and disempowering terms, expressions and images which

should be avoided when speaking Afrikaans, but also when speaking about Afrikaans and the Afrikaner. The overtly offensive appellations can be divided into two categories:

- (i) derogatory English terms such as **Dutchman/Dutchies, rocks, rockspider, Valies, Hertzogite and talking code;**
- (ii) Afrikaans expressions that are used derogatively in English such as **boer, Afrikaner, taal/taaltjie/die taal and die volk.**

In an effort to encourage both awareness and active avoidance of similar practices, letters to the press such as the two included in this paper are analyzed. Fact can then be separated from what is simply an expression of attitude, based on stereotyped views and misinformation. Attention is drawn to the fact that terms such as **embarrassed** and **highly amused** may express an attitude directly, but that this can also be done in a more covert fashion by using linguistic mechanisms such as the diminutive (**taaltjie, volkie**) to minimize and ridicule. Imagery commonly used in referring to Afrikaans implying that the language is human (Afrikaans is **alive and well**; Afrikaans **to die** like Latin) or involved in a war (Afrikaans **survives** in Argentina; Tyd om met die taal **in te grawe**) is deconstructed along the lines of Bolinger (1980) and Lakoff & Johnson (1980). This facilitates the examination of the full and often negative implications. A further topic for discussion in this regard concerns the issue of language choice as a tool for subjection. Afrikaans speakers are regularly disempowered by the refusal of English speakers to switch to Afrikaans in any given situation - the Afrikaans speaker is always expected to switch to English. Well-meaning invitations to speak Afrikaans even although the others continue speaking English, leave the Afrikaans speaker feeling patronized.

In advocating discourse that does not disempower others, the following paragraph from Janks and Ivanić (1992:313) bears repetition:

"People sometimes object ... on the ground that attitudes need changing and then language will look after itself. But educators cannot just sit back and wait for attitudes to change: they need to help learners to question their attitudes and to gain access to alternative perspectives. ... (Emancipatory discourse - J.M.) is a particularly important practice, since language shapes attitudes ... and is in turn shaped by them."

3.2 The learner and discourse that resists disempowerment

Instilling in Afrikaans L2 learners an awareness of the need for social responsibility in discourse in and about Afrikaans is only part of teaching Afrikaans as emancipatory discourse. Emancipatory discourse, according to Janks and Ivanic (1992:315) is also discourse that resists disempowerment by "not letting our own needs be neglected, not allowing ourselves to be effaced". Viewing Afrikaans from this perspective is often a totally new experience for the student.

A discussion of language rights as a fundamental human right, enshrined in the new Bill of Rights for South Africa, leads to an exploration of the language rights of Afrikaans speakers, either as first or second language users. As a rule the speakers of English report that they would never use Afrikaans towards an Afrikaans speaking person in the company of English speaking peers, for fear of ridicule. Statements by Afrikaans speakers that they feel too embarrassed to insist on their language rights in any given situation are studied, as well as the type of reaction such action is likely to meet with. I usually put forward for comment views such as those of the Dutch journalist Lydia Lijkendijk in *Die Burger*¹⁰ of 15 February 1993 who refers to "... een levensgroot Afrikaans-talig minderwaardigheids - complex" and who comes to the conclusion that "In Zuid-Afrika gelooft zelfs de Afrikaanstalige blijkbaar niet meer in zijn eigen taal." She bases these judgements on, for example, the lack of Afrikaans sub-titles to English news items on television, where all Afrikaans items carry English sub-titles. She also refers to the strong tendency among Afrikaans speakers to address all strangers in English. It is interesting that the Afrikaans second language learners

invariably report feeling disempowered by the Afrikaans habit of switching to English when hearing Afrikaans spoken with an English accent.

Teaching Afrikaans as emancipatory discourse entails encouraging the L1 as well as the L2 speaker of Afrikaans to develop the self-assurance to speak up, even in situations where he/she feels dominated: the second language learner in the Afrikaans class, the Afrikaans speaker in a meeting or an interview. To this end the possibilities are explored for contesting practices that silence the speaker of Afrikaans and denies him/her a voice. Janks and Ivanic (1992:321ff) make a few suggestions for practising critical and oppositional reading, listening and viewing that work well in the Afrikaans classroom. Role playing such as placing a student in a position where his/her Afrikaans is responded to in English, offers practice in acceptable ways of resisting. Students are encouraged to report on TV interviews where they have observed power relations at work through interviewing the Afrikaans speaker in English and vice versa. Selected discourse such as the letters quoted in this paper are re-written from alternative subject positions.

4. CONCLUSION

Students in general have reacted favourably to the introduction of a CLA component in their Afrikaans studies. They have been interested in and enthusiastic about the alternative perspectives offered by teaching Afrikaans as emancipatory discourse. All the teachers involved have reported experiencing a remarkable improvement in attitude towards Afrikaans. It is notoriously difficult to evaluate the influence of a single factor on attitude, and at this stage no empirical studies have been carried out to substantiate the claim that teaching Afrikaans as emancipatory discourse does in fact result in improved attitudes.

Should this perception be borne out by fact, Afrikaans can only benefit. Janks and Ivanic (1992:317) state that "There is a time when the struggle is at its height, and every individual choice helps to shape the future possibilities for others". This ties in well with the observation by Steyn (1984:21) that the market value of Afrikaans is increased by anyone who uses Afrikaans in any place, from the shop on the corner to contact with the

municipality. Having said this, the irony of writing this paper in English must be addressed by referring to Janks and Ivanic (1992:318):

"Any good communicative language teaching will show learners how to conform to the conventions. CLA additionally helps people to conform with open eyes, to identify their feelings about it, and to recognize the compromises they are making"

ENDNOTES

1. Used throughout this paper as a blanket term for any language that is not the speaker's first language.
2. These students are the product of an educational dispensation which included the enforced teaching of Afrikaans at school and obligatory instruction through medium of Afrikaans at certain levels.
3. Personal experience and personal communication with senior teachers of Afrikaans as a second language throughout Natal/KwaZulu.
4. Interestingly enough, informal surveys done at the University of Natal (Durban) indicate that these attitudes are not necessarily linked to political antagonism. Speculation about possible causes falls outside the scope of this paper. There are indications that what Lydia Lijkendijk (*Die Burger*, 15 Febr. 1993) calls "... een misplaatst superieuriteitsgevoel van Engelse zijde, stammend uit de tijd dat 'Brittania rules the world' ..." could be a factor.
5. A more detailed discussion of the reasons for this negativism falls outside the scope of this paper.
6. Cf. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1992:176ff.) for relevant references.
7. The term **critical linguistics** refers to an approach in linguistics in which studies in language ecology form the framework for active resistance to institutionalized forms of discrimination against groups as well as individuals.
8. Cf. Doughty et al (1971), Hawkins (1984), James and Garrett (1991), NCLE (1985) and DES (1988/89).
9. Based on the work of Bolinger (1980) and Lakoff & Johnson (1980).
10. A major Afrikaans morning newspaper in the Cape.

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