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Methods for the study of post-apartheid Afrikaans language shift

1. Outline

Afrikaans (orginally 'Afrikaans Hollands', i.e. South-African Hollandic Dutch) is one of the youngest offshoots of the stem of Germanic languages. It developed out of a group of 17th century, mainly Hollandic dialects of Dutch, under the influence of both autochtonous African languages (initially merely Khoekhoe, from approximately 1840 onwards Bantu languages) and imported nonautochtonous languages as well as a Dutch-based pidgin which used to be spoken in and around the Cape colony. It can thus be considered a result par excellence of extensive language contact.

   During a considerable part of its (yet relatively short) history, Afrikaans has also been in the middle of language conflicts, which started after the British took hold of political power in 1795. Ever since the demise of the 'apartheid' regime and the introduction of the new consitution in the early nineties of the 20th century, Afrikaans is one of many official languages of the Republic of South Africa (RSA) - but its main competitor is again English (§ 2). How does Afrikaans fare in the new, post-apartheid RSA, both as a 'langue légitime' (Bourdieu 1984) and in dialy life? Is it undergoing language shift? (§ 3). Methods are sketched to collect data to answer this basically sociological question (§ 4). Some of the main points are summarized in § 5.

2. Afrikaans, language contact and language conflict

A question that, for the past century, has been bothering linguists (in the Netherlands and the RSA as well as abroad, historical linguists, dialectologists and creolists alike) is for one part to which extent Afrikaans in its various linguistic components should be considered a continuation of structural tendencies (e.g. Sapir's drift) which were already present in the dialects spoken by the 17th century Dutch colonizers and settlers and to which extent these dialects have koineized in South Africa.

   Another part of the question is to which extent Afrikaans should be considered as the partially creolized outcome of longlasting, intensive contacts between specific 17th century dialects of Dutch, the koiné which, around 1750, had developed out of this and which was refered to as Kaaps-Hollands (Cape Dutch), other European languages spoken by the settlers, indigenous African languages (especially Khoekhoe), traditional as well as contact varieties of Malay, and a Portuguese-based creole. Many consider Afrikaans as the descendant of Cape Dutch and creolized Hollandic Dutch.

   The general view is that this extensive multifaceted language contact is probably responsible for the partly heavily impoverished nature of the Afrikaans grammar, which is characterised by the loss of important parts of the Dutch inflectional system (Donaldson 1993; Ponelis 1993).

But the issue of the present contribution does not lay so far back in history and it is of a social and political, rather than strictly linguistic, nature, namely the present-day position of Afrikaans

in South-African society and the question if it is indeed changing.

2.1. The eighteenth and nineteenth century

After the British took over political power in 1795, public life, including education, became more and more anglophone. In 1822 Dutch was replaced by English as the official language of political power and the administration of justice. In the constitution from 1853 it was also excluded from use in the parliament. The conservative Dutch Reformed Church was the only stronghold of Dutch and of the developing Afrikaans, which had an exclusively spoken status.

Merely in the provinces of Transvaal and Oranje Vrijstaat, where many of the Boers who had fled from the Cape Colony in the famous Grote Trek (1836-9) had settled and where they came into contact with speakers of Bantu languages, Dutch held a strong position. At the end of the 19th century it was even proclaimed the official language in these provinces.

After the British took over the Vrijstaat diamond fields in 1871, a language conflict began, which led to a restoration of Dutch in the parliament (1882) and justice (1884). In the course of this conflict, in 1875, the 'Genootschap van Regte Afrikaanders' (lit. Society of Genuine Afrikaanders, i.e. speakers of Afrikaans - of Dutch descent) was founded, which aimed at the emancipation and codification of Afrikaans (Stoops 1995: 21). However, the movement concentrated at the white, at the exclusion of non-white, varieties of Afrikaans. In the 20th century there were outspoken tendencies to purify Afrikaans from foreign influences and 'dutchify' it (De Vries et alii 1994: 283).

In 1902, after the second Anglo-Boer War, in which the British had conquered both Transvaal and Oranje Vrijstaat, Lord Milner tried to anglicize South Africa. However, with the introduction of the new law concerning the official languages in South Africa in 1925, which occurred in the wake of the social reconstruction following British colonization (Ponelis 1997: 597, 603), Afrikaans was given an official status; the 1925 law was actually an amendment in which it was layed down that from then on 'Hollands' could refer to both Dutch and Afrikaans. For decades, Afrikaans coexisted with Dutch, with which it maintained a semi-diglossic relationship in which Afrikaans was the oral colloquial code (Ponelis 1997: 604; Deudney 2000: 96-97). The 'Zuid-Afrikaanse Akademie voor Taal, Letteren en Kunst', founded in 1909, from the very beginning set itself a target of maintaining and furthering "de Hollandse Taal en Letteren". The same manifesto defines this Hollandse Taal as one of "de beide taalvormen gebruikelijk in Zuid-Afrika", i.e. of one the two language varieties in common use in South Africa (Deudney 2000: 97).

From 1914 onward, Afrikaans found its way into the educational system and in 1919 it became the language of the protestant churches; the first Afrikaans bible translation appeared in 1933. In 1925 the language made its entrance into the parliament (where Dutch had made its comeback in 1910 already) and later several professorships for Afrikaans were founded.

Afrikaans had reached the peak of its geographical spread in the first decades of the 20th century; apart from the RSA, it was spoken in Namibia, Kenia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana (Ponelis 1997: 604) as well as Angola - by the so-called Angolaboers, most of whom returned in 192829 and settled in Namibia.

2.2. The post-apartheid era

The early nineties saw the demise of the apartheids system. The first democratic elections

were held in 1994.

From 1925 until 1994 South Africa had had two official languages, namely Afrikaans and English. The regulation that became effective in 1994 as part of the new constitution gives official status to no less than 11 languages, in a sense the legal recognition of the RSA as a 'rainbow nation', as bishop Tutu has baptised it. These 11 languages are allowed equal rights; the autochtonous languages enjoy official furthering, for the sake of which special bodies have been installed. Apart from English and Afrikaans, all official languages are autochthonous languages of the Bantu family. Within this family, languages such as Zulu and Xhosa belong to the group of the Nguni languages, while North and South Sotho and Tswana belong to the group of the Sotho languages.

According to "reliable sources" cited by the Taalsekretariaat (an independent civil organisation which advocates multilingualism and which furthers the rights of Afrikaans as well as the autochthonous official languages of the RSA) in Stellenbosch, in the year 2000 the official languages had approximately the following numbers of speakers (Table 1).

Zulu	8,3	million
Xhosa	6,6	million
Afrikaans	5,7	million
Setswana	3,6	million
IsiSepedi	3,433	million
English	3,432	million
Sesotho	2,6	million
Xitsonga	1,3	million
Sisiswati	926 094	
Ndebele	799 216	
Tshivenda	776 324	

Table 1. Numbers of native speakers of the 11 official languages of the RSA (2000)

According to the results of Zietsman's analyses of data from the 1996 census, overall Nguni languages are the first language of 44.3 % while Sotho languages are the first language of 24.9 % of the South African population. As first languages Afrikaans and English can claim 14.3 and 8.5 %, respectively. The only of the nine provinces of the RSA in which Afrikaans has less first language speakers than English is Kwazulu/Natal (1.6 and 15.6 % respectively), the province which holds position 1 in the rank order of the number of inhabitants (N=8,774,120). As first language Afrikaans is big in the provinces of Western Cape (58.5 %), the province which holds number 5 in the rank order of the number of inhabitants (N=3,973,780), and Northern Cape (68.6 %), the smallest province as far as the number of inhabitants goes (N=837,700). In all, Afrikaans is the mother tongue of some 5,7 million people. According to census data, in 1990 there were some 6 million native speakers of Afrikaans (after Ponelis 1997: 604).

INSERT MAP 1 ABOUT HERE

Map 1. South Africa, its provinces and provincial capitals.
Reproduced from Stoops, Yvette (1995) *Bobbejane of baviane. Afrikaans versus Nederlands*.
Mechelen: Coda

Again according to recent statistics (Zietsman), 2.7 and 5.4 % of the entire population claim to speak Afrikaans and English, respectively, as a second language, while Sotho and Nguni languages are spoken as a second language by 2.7 and 2.6 %, respectively, of the population. Interestingly, 82.8 % claim to speak several languages as second language. As second languages, Afrikaans and English are biggest in the province of Western Cape (10.1 and 12.6 %, respectively). In 8 out of South Africa's 9 provinces English exceeds Afrikaans as a second language, the exception being Northern Cape (Afrikaans 7.5, English 4.8 %). In all six metropolitan areas, namely Cape Town, Johannesburg, East Rand, Pretoria, Port Elizabeth and Durban, English exceeds Afrikaans as a second language.

Traditionally, in the RSA English is the language of the financial world and economical power, while until recently Afrikaans used to be the language of the state machinery, administration and education (Stoops 1995: 22-23).

Of the white part of the population (the 'witmense', lit. white people), some 60 % has Afrikaans and approximately 38 % has English as the first language (Stoops 1995: 22). However, the majority of the native speakers of Afrikaans does not consider themselves white (Deudney 2000: 97).

3. Language shift?

One of the most radical contact-induced types of change is language shift, i.e. the abandonment of a language by its speakers in favor of another language.

Especially in post-apartheid South Africa, and despite the 1994 law, Afrikaans is in conflict with English. According to many of its speakers, Afrikaans is gradually being ousted from South African society. Many people owe this to the fact that the official multilingualism, in their view, in practice only furthers English (Stoops 1995: 23, De Vries 2000: § 3). The RSA thus seems to bear out De Swaan's (2001) dictum "the more languages, the more English".

A factor that plays a role is that Afrikaans is often regarded as "the language of apartheid". This connotation has its historical roots in the nationalist 'Nasionale Party' (dominated by rednecks who called themselves 'Afrikaners'), which was in power from 1948 onward and which implemented conservative and segregationist policies. "Afrikaans stinks" was one of the slogans which featured in the 1976 Soweto riots against Afrikaans as a compulsory subject, in which several people were killed. As De Vries (2000: § 2) sees it, the connotations with white nationalism make Afrikaans unacceptable for huge parts of the people of the RSA.

No need to point out that, essentially, the idea that Afrikaans is "the language of apartheid" is not correct. Afrikaans is the language of apartheid just as little as German is the language of

national socialism. Afrikaans is also the language of people such as the authors Breyten Breytenbach and André Brink, who fought the apartheid system for decades. The names of many other white, colored and black Afrikaans speaking fighters against apartheid could be added.

Just as there were pro-apartheid speakers of Afrikaans, there were native speakers of South African English who supported the system. Unlike Afrikaans, however, English is a world language and therefore it cannot be considered as the language of apartheid. In the present-day RSA, the position of English is said to grow disproportionally. This is to be understood partly as a manifestation of globalisation and the demands of international economy. Another reason is the fact that English is often considered as the language with the widest 'reach', also by the government and government related institutions, such as universities as "nasionale bates", national assets (De Vries § 3).

With respect to both its status and its demographic basis the question is: is Afrikaans endangered? Will the language gradually shrink until it has the status of a 'whisper language' (Peter Nelde, p.c.), i.e. a language that people dare not speak in public?

4. Methods

The question if Afrikaans is undergoig language shift should be considered at two levels: 1) the position of the language in institutions such as government, the administration of justice, education etc., and 2) the actual use of the language in daily life.

At both levels the approach should be both diachronic and quasi-longitudinal. Diachronic comparisons can be made on the basis of collections of relevant data from, say, 10 years before and 10 years after the demise of the apartheid system - in as far as such data are available. As the necessary data data may be either partly lacking or biased, they ought to be supplemented with quasi-longitudinal data, i.e. data from comparable older and younger groups of South Africans.

In order to address the research question at level 2), data ought to be gathered regarding the actual use of Afrikaans in *various parts of the country* where the language has traditionally been spoken, in *urban as well as rural* settings, in the relevant *ethnic groups*, among both *men and women*. These data will then in principle enable one to determine in which of these dimensions Afrikaans is loosing ground.

Ponelis (1997: 604) distinguishes matrilectal and allochtonous varieties; among the latter is Pidgin Afrikaans and Flaaitaal (or Tsotsitaal), which functions as something between a lingua franca and a jargon among the younger urban black males. Of course, in connection with the above implementation of the research question, the main geographical and social matrilects should somehow be taken into account. This is one of the points at which the research design obviously needs further elaboration.

To reach a general insight into changes in the actual use of the language in daily life, two types of data should be collected: first, data concerning reported language use in a variety of domains and the reported 'aptitude' of Afrikaans in a variety of interactional situations. These data can be collected with the aid of questionnaires. Especially the latter technique will render data which shed some light on Afrikaans speakers' attitudes towards their language and, ultimately, the speech community. Are the attitudes positive or are the speakers internalizing the outside world's negative attitudes?

The second type of data concerns actual language use. These data can be collected through what Labov (1972: 65-69) has labeled 'rapid and anonymous studies / surveys'; both methods have been applied in Hinskens 1993. The rapid and anonymous study can e.g. consist of telephonic job applications or applications for rooms to let: have somebody make a phone call. First s/he speaks Afrikaans, then (say, the next day) s/he speaks English, then (say, the day after that) s/he speaks the main autochthonous language of the region. The results of this method can only be fully understood and interpreted if one has data regarding the primary language of each interlocutor.

With respect to the possible shift of Afrikaans at level 1), the method can e.g. involve writing letters to official, more or less national government-affiliated, provincial as well as local institutions in *various parts of the country*, in *rural as well as urban* settings, to beg for support for
1. a particular non-language related initiative. The request should be done under slightly different guises - one in Afrikaans, one in English, and one in the main autochthonous language of the region (or, e.g. for Rand, where this is difficult to establish, one of the main autochthonous languages);
2. an Afrikaans (or English or, say, a Nguni language) literacy project. This request should equally be done under different guises in Afrikaans, in English, and in the main autochthonous language of the region.
Especially the latter approach will render data regarding the actual political concern with Afrikaans.

5. Concludion

Afrikaans is the epitome of language contact and language conflict.
As a result of both the understandable but hardly warranted association of Afrikaans with 'apartheid' and the general globalisation manifested in the further expansion of English, Afrikaans seems to be loosing ground in the RSA. This alleged process would amount to a further decrease in linguistic diversity and, also through the eventual bleeding to death of e.g. Afrikaans literature, cultural impoverishment. In the preceding section of this contribution, methods have been sketched which could render a clearer insight into the supposed decline of Afrikaans in the RSA.

6. Literature

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