

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ROLE OF THE AFRIKAANS LANGUAGE IN INDEXING THE INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE SELF AMONG SOME TOWNSHIP YOUTH IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This article builds on the exploration of the negotiation of identity via language in a post-apartheid South African township in greater Cape Town, South Africa begun in 2004 (see Dyers, 2004 and Blommaert *et al.* 2005). Specifically, it looks at the ways in which the Afrikaans language underpins the individual and collective identities of mixed-race 'Coloured' school children marginalized by poverty, location and race.

Key words: identity, Afrikaans, space, multilingualism, language varieties, 'Coloured'.

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is as follows:

- To investigate how high school pupils in a township school in South Africa report on their use of, and attitudes to, their first language, Afrikaans;
- To use the findings to show how, given their particular situation, the language remains an important index of both their group and individual identity.

Most studies on language attitudes and language shift in South Africa have shown that English is the dominant common language in South Africa, despite the numerical supremacy of Zulu, which is spoken as mother tongue by 23.8% of the

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population¹ (Webb, 1999; Dyers, 2001; Anthonissen and George, 2003). At the same time, we also see minority groups like the Afrikaners asserting their collective identity through language, as can be witnessed by the ongoing *taaldebat* (language debate) on the use of Afrikaans as medium of instruction at the University of Stellenbosch, a university traditionally associated with Afrikaans. The other indigenous languages have never featured in this type of debate, as studies by, e.g. Mawasha (1996), Barkhuizen (1996), De Klerk and Coulmas (2000) and Kamwangamalu (2003) have shown a strong preference among black South Africans for English as the language of education. It is nevertheless very important to determine the exact role of language in the socio-cultural identities of the different ethnic groups in South Africa in order to foster better inter-group understanding and to gauge the survival prospects of all the other languages.

A number of sociolinguistic studies have been carried out in the township of Wesbank, which forms part of Greater Cape Town in South Africa. These studies have looked at the language attitudes of high school pupils (Dyers, 2004), the peripheral normativity in the literacy skills of such pupils (Blommaert, *et al.* 2005) and the degree of multilingualism among some of these pupils (Dyers, 2006). The interest in the township stems from its position as one of the first racially integrated housing developments in post-democratic South Africa.

This article continues our longitudinal exploration of how ‘Coloured’² South African high school children in Wesbank, negotiate their individual and collective identities through language. Our longitudinal study wanted to find out how high school children from diverse backgrounds and marginalised by poverty, location and race reflect a sense of individual, collective and national identity through language. The article is based on data collected from these pupils in the first three years of our research. The data consisted of classroom responses to a questionnaire on their use of Afrikaans in different domains, written responses on the importance of the language in their lives, focus group and individual interviews. The classroom and written responses, as well as some individual interviews, were collected in the first two years. The respondents were 70 grade 8 (first year of high school) and 34 grade 9 pupils. In

¹ In 1996, the South African government declared eleven languages as official languages, viz. English (8.2%), Afrikaans (13.3%), Xhosa (17.6%), Zulu (23.8%), Ndebele (3%), Swati (2%), South Sotho (7.9%), Pedi or North Sotho (9.4%), Tswana (8.2%), Venda (2%) and Tsonga (3%). The figures in brackets reveal the percentages of mother tongue speakers of each language according to the 2001 Census.

² The term ‘Coloured’ remains problematic because it is fundamentally pejorative. On the other hand it is a firmly entrenched term. In this article inverted commas and a capital letter are used to indicate the dilemma of researchers. In the interests of consistency capital letters are used for Black and White as well.

the third year, the focus shifted to individual and focus group interviews with 12 selected grade 10 pupils.

2. Identity, the ‘Cape Coloureds’ and Afrikaans – a socio-historical perspective

There can be little contestation of Appel and Muysken’s contention that: ‘...the identity imposed by one’s group membership is a crucial factor for language choice’ (1990:23). South Africa is made up of many diverse groups and languages, and the diversity of identities were engineered to be seen as even more separate and distinct by the *apartheid* (separate development for all races under white rule) regime of more than 40 years, as well as 300 years of colonialism. As a language, Afrikaans has suffered historically because of its association with the 40-odd years of *apartheid*. It was the language of the rulers of this period, the Afrikaners, and became known during the years of struggle against this system as ‘the language of the oppressor’.

But at the same time, Afrikaans is the mother tongue of the majority of the group which was classified ‘Cape Coloured’ during the *apartheid* era in South Africa (1948-1994). The majority of this group resides in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, where 55% of the population speaks Afrikaans as their mother tongue, followed by 23% who speak Xhosa and 19% who speak English (SA Population Census 2001). The group also displays varying degrees of bilingualism in Afrikaans and English, as well as multilingualism in Afrikaans, English and Xhosa, depending on their levels of literacy, education and location. Other languages that play smaller roles in this group are Arabic (particularly in the Muslim community) and German (which was a popular school subject in the previous dispensation).

It is indisputable that the ‘Coloured’ population of South Africa participated in the development of Afrikaans out of the Dutch spoken by the first European colonists, who arrived in South Africa in 1652. Many of the ‘Cape Coloureds’ are descendants of South Africa’s earliest inhabitants, the San and the Khoe, as well as unions of members of these tribes with the European settlers and people from Asia and other parts of Africa who were brought to South Africa as political prisoners and slaves by the Dutch, French and English colonists. Cape Dutch (later Afrikaans) developed out of the need for these extremely diverse linguistic and ethnic groups to communicate (Malan, 1996:127).

Language plays an important role in defining who we are, and makes us instantly recognizable to other members of our particular speech community. As

Joseph (2004:39) puts it: ‘...we read the identity of people with whom we come into contact based on very subtle features of behaviour, among which those of language are particularly central.’ Most ‘Cape Coloureds’ do not, and never have, identified with White Afrikaners who share their language, as White Afrikaners, apart from their role in the colonization and enslavement of the ancestors of the ‘Cape Coloureds’, introduced the *apartheid* legislation which deprived them of their basic civil liberties. Neither have they ever displayed the same ‘...emotional investment in keeping the language pure’ (McCormick, 1989:206). But the majority identifies closely with the vernacular variety of Afrikaans that they use everyday, which McCormick (1989), Malan (1996) and others regard as a mixed code which incorporates many English loanwords. The strong attachment of many members of this group to the works of poet and playwright, Adam Small, who wrote in vernacular ‘Cape Flats’ Afrikaans, the immense popularity of the music of rap and hip-hop artists who use it (e.g. Brasse vannie Kaap, Prophets of Da City) and the success of theatrical productions using the vernacular, like *Joe Barber* and *Ghoema!*, provide evidence of the close identification with this variety. While its speakers acknowledge its low status in relation to the standard Afrikaans³ used by the more economically powerful White Afrikaners, it is fair to say that it enjoys a certain status as well as strong vitality in the poor, working-class townships of the Cape Flats. This is a large area on the periphery of Cape Town, which includes Wesbank Township, to which the ‘Coloured’ population of Cape Town was forcibly moved at the height of the *apartheid* regime.

During a focus group interview done in the third year of our research with Wesbank teenagers, one girl had the following to say about the variety of Afrikaans spoken in the township:

Os praat yntlik regte Afrikaans nie, Os praat Kaapse Afrikaans, Engels en Afrikaans deu'mekaar. (We don't actually speak proper Afrikaans. We speak Cape Afrikaans, a mixture of English and Afrikaans).

For this informant, her variety of Afrikaans was not proper, standard Afrikaans, but an informal mixture of Afrikaans and English. According to Hendricks (interview, 10 October 2006), it would be more accurate to use the term *Kaaps* (reportedly first used by the writer Peter Snyders) for this variety instead of the more commonly used Cape Flats Afrikaans, as there are variants within this variety. These variants will either display more or less code-mixing with English as one travels from

³ Prof Frank Hendricks, of the Dept. Afrikaans and Nederlands at the University of the Western Cape, points out that so-called ‘Standard Afrikaans’ has three main varieties: super-standard Afrikaans, an idealized ‘high’ form; formal standard Afrikaans used in formal situations like lectures; and informal standard Afrikaans for more everyday use. For more information on these varieties, see Carstens (2003).

the centre of Cape Town to its suburbs, peripheral townships and surrounding rural areas. The further one moves from Cape Town, the lower the degree of code mixing in Afrikaans, until one finds people speaking very close to standard Afrikaans in their day to day interactions. Location, education and role models all have a role to play in the varieties of vernacular Afrikaans spoken by 'Coloured' people all around South Africa, and there are a number of studies of these different varieties (e.g. Combrinck, 1978; Roberge, 1995; Webb 1989; Hendricks, 1996). The two extracts below from the focus group interviews in year three are typical examples of the spontaneous, unmarked code-mixing prevalent in Wesbank:

S1: *Well...met my ma is ek meer relaxing, like ek en my ma praat, ek sal my ma alles vertel.* (Well...I'm more relaxed with my mother. When my mother and I chat, I will tell her everything).

S2: Ja...maar my ouma wat nou oorlede is... Ek en sy was eintlik *close* aanmekaar. (Yes...but my grandmother who died recently...She and I were actually close to each other).

According to Extra (2005) group identities link us to infinite social categories which are context-dependent in terms of their relative importance in an individual's life. One of these social categories is that of ethno-cultural identity, which implies a group identity signified by a shared language, culture, religion, ancestry or race, and Extra notes the way in which such links 'can survive in spite of many cultural changes and adaptations', even when different groups and cultures converge in particular spaces. In the group identity of the 'Cape Coloured', constructed as this identity might be for some, Afrikaans has historically always played a significant role, particularly in the absence of a clear culture and identity (Dyers, 2004:31), given the huge diversity of origin in this group. It is however the maintenance of this role in post-*apartheid* South Africa that interests us here.

Thim-Mabrey (2003:2, cited in Schmidt, 2006:15) distinguishes between linguistic identity on the one hand and identity through language on the other. Linguistic identity means the features of a given language which distinguishes it from other languages, but also the identity of a person with regard to his/her – or in fact any – language. Identity through language, on the other hand, describes "...the identity of persons insofar as it is constituted or co-constituted through language and language use". It is this latter category, identity *through* language, which is of most relevance in the current study. How important is their variety of Afrikaans, *Kaaps*, in the group identity of our teenage respondents?

Apart from investigating the construction of group identity via language, we also have to take individual identity into account. Tabouret-Keller (1998:324, cited in

Mills 2005) views identity as both a social construct, characterised by objective features (such as language), and a personal, subjective construct, characterised by individual mental processes and choices. Stressing the need for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of identity, Suleiman (plenary speaker, AILA 2005) contends that identity is polycentric and cannot be compartmentalized. According to him, individual identities are complex and unique, stable and changeable, mutable, always in a state of becoming.

Individual choices in terms of language can therefore be far more varied than the choices dictated by membership to a particular group, depending on one's particular circumstances and environment. An individual's linguistic choices can

- reflect almost exactly that of the group the individual belongs to;
- show degrees of overlap, but with varying degrees of difference, e.g. sounding more/less accurate than the source group or greater use of code-switching and experimentation with the language; or
- reveal varying degrees of rejection of his/her group's dominant language/s – this could include the increasing borrowing of terms from a more preferred language, adopting a way of speech that makes the individual sound different to the rest of the source group, e.g. more/less polished, or refusing to speak the language despite having grown up with it.

In Wesbank, most of the individuals interviewed by us either fitted into the first or second category. We also found individuals who were multilingual in Afrikaans, English and Xhosa as a result of growing up in multilingual families which use all three languages (Dyers, 2006). However, even in these multilingual families, Afrikaans played a dominant role in their intimate domains. On the whole, it is probably fair to say that, with this particular group of respondents, there were only finely-nuanced shades of differences between group and individual identity through Afrikaans.

3. Space and Afrikaans: the township perspective

Wesbank Township, which has only been occupied since 1999, is a by all accounts a peripheral township marked by poverty, unemployment and crime (Dyers, 2004). The current demographics of the area shows that approximately 75% of the inhabitants are mixed-race, mainly Afrikaans-speaking 'Coloured' people, while the rest are predominantly Xhosa people, many of whom have recently migrated to the Western Cape Province of South Africa from the Eastern Cape Province, where this ethnic group constitutes the majority population. There is also a small population of

foreigners from other parts of Africa like Somalia and Nigeria living in Wesbank. The township consists of small housing units, a high school, three primary schools and a supermarket. There are no public amenities such as a community centre, parks or sports fields and those who work mainly travel to the more prosperous suburbs of Cape Town by minibus taxi, which is the most common and cheapest form of public transport.

It can be argued that everyone in Wesbank is a migrant from elsewhere, and that each member of this 'created' community now has to negotiate this new space and their group and individual identity within it. The question therefore arises: How does this new space organize people and their patterns of language use? The issue of space and multilingualism has been investigated extensively by Blommaert *et al.* (2005), whose overarching interest is in how "...people are positioned and the communicative potential they display and have attributed to them in diverse, scale-sensitive situations and practices" (2005:210). Their research has led them to conclude that multilingualism is not what people have, or don't have, but what their environment enables or disables them to use. As a recent study has shown, such enabling and disabling environmental forces are also present in Wesbank (Blommaert *et al.* 2006), and we need to examine more closely the role of Wesbank as a space that influences the personal and linguistic identities of our young informants.

As the following excerpt from a focus group interview in year three will show, the teenage respondents in this study revealed a reluctance to say that they were from Wesbank. Their strongest allegiances were to the places where they had originally come from, and they did not yet feel that they had a particular 'Wesbank identity'.

I: Wat sal jy sê, waar kom jy vandaan? Suzy, sal jy begin vir my? (What would you say, where do you come from? Suzy, will you begin for me?)

S: Ek sal sê ek kom van Sutherland af, want ek is daar gebore. (I would say I come from Sutherland, because I was born there).

I: Sutherland, OK. Jy sê nie jy's van Wesbank af nie? (Sutherland, OK. You don't say you are from Wesbank?)

S: hmm-mm (Negative)

I: Jy voel nie of jy van Wesbank is nie? (You don't feel you are from Wesbank?)

S: (shy laugh) Ek voel nie ek is van Wesbank af, want ek is meer gelukkig om te sê – (I don't feel that I am from Wesbank, because I am happier to say-)

I: Jy's meer trots op Sutherland? (You are prouder of Sutherland?)

S: mm (Affirmative).

I: Interessant. Monica, waar sal jy sê kom jy vandaan? (Interesting. Mona, where would you say you come from?)

M: Ek sal sê ek kom van Kraaifontein. (I would say I come from Kraaifontein).

I: Ja, daar's baie mense van Kraaifontein wat hierso in Wesbank bly, ne? Het jy nog baie familie daar, Mona, in Kraaifontein? (Yes, there's lots of people from Kraaifontein living here in Wesbank, hey? Do you have lots of family there, Mona, in Kraaifontein?)

M: mm (Affirmative).

The first respondent still identifies strongly with her place of birth, the rural, predominantly Afrikaans-speaking town of Sutherland. While the second respondent originally came from a town quite close to Wesbank, Kraaifontein, she prefers to say that she comes from there rather than Wesbank, and that she still has strong family ties with Kraaifontein. This pattern was repeated with virtually all of our respondents, who all hoped to move out of the township eventually. When the space one is forced to live in does not enhance your sense of personal identity, you instinctively look for other, more positive markers of identity. One of these is likely to be your mother tongue – in the case of these teenagers, Afrikaans.

The value of Afrikaans as an important component of their identity can be seen in another extract from the same focus group interview:

I: Nou wat is die belangrike taal vir jou? (Now, what is the important language for you?)

E: My – my huistaal is vir my belangrik. Is Afrikaans. Meeste vannie tye, met meeste vannie mense wat ek ontmoet, praat ek Afrikaans. (My home language is important for me. It's Afrikaans. Most of the time, and with most people I meet, I speak Afrikaans).

I: Baie interessante antwoord. Mona? (Very interesting answer. Mona?)

M: My moedertaal is Afrikaans, en ek was gebore daarmee. En ek sal meer Afrikaans praat as anner taal. (My mother tongue is Afrikaans, and I was born with it. And I shall speak more Afrikaans than any other language).

I: Suzy?

S: Ek sal sê Engels en Afrikaans, want by my huis, waar ons nou Afrikaans praat, maar tussenin onse familie is Engelse mense, so ek sal Engels en Afrikaans gebruik. (I would say English and Afrikaans, because at my home, where we mainly

speak Afrikaans, there are also English relatives, so I would use English and Afrikaans).

We note here that Afrikaans is referred to as ‘my home language’, ‘my mother tongue’, ‘the language I was born with’ and the language spoken ‘most of the time’, unless English-speaking relatives are present. For these teenagers, the language still has considerable vitality in their new space, which enables them to use Afrikaans, and to some degree, English.

The teenagers’ use of and attitudes towards the three main languages of the Western Cape, also revealed the dominant role of Afrikaans as an index of their individual as well as collective identities. The following narrative is based on one of the individual interviews conducted during year three:

John is 15 and in Gr 10 at Wesbank High. His Afrikaans-speaking family moved to Wesbank from Eerste Rivier, another large township close by, when the bank foreclosed on the mortgage. His father completed Grade 11 of high school, and speaks good English. He assists John with his homework. His mother completed Grade 6, and was the one who decided that everyone in the family would speak Afrikaans. Because of the family’s poverty, his one sister is being raised by his maternal grandmother. He expresses no love for English (*‘Ek voellie om Engels te praatie’*), and regards himself as an *‘Afrikaanse Kaapenaar’*. Although he has English speaking cousins on his father’s side, these cousins do not visit John’s family, whom they regard as ‘too poor’. His mother originally came from Tulbagh, a predominantly Afrikaans rural town in the Western Cape. He visits his maternal grandmother and the rest of his mother’s family in Atlantis, a large West coast town created to house Coloured workers in the previous dispensation. He regards the Afrikaans spoken in Wesbank as being inferior to his own Afrikaans. He has a few Xhosa MT friends, and is keen to learn the language. When he and his Xhosa friends are together, they speak a mixture of Afrikaans and Xhosa. He does not go to church, despite his mother’s efforts. The church his mother attends uses Afrikaans and (very occasionally) English. He admits to struggling in English, and ranks it below Afrikaans and Xhosa.

In John’s family, Afrikaans is the dominant language, but he regards the variety mainly spoken in Wesbank as being inferior to that spoken by his own family. Clearly, he is influenced by the ‘purer’ versions of Afrikaans spoken in the rural areas where so many of his relatives live. Interestingly, John ranks Xhosa higher than English, a language that he clearly resents. He finds English difficult (he is repeating grade 10 because of his problems with learning the language). His wealthier cousins, who are English-speaking, appear to look down on his family, which contributes to his negative attitude towards English. But he has apparently picked up some Xhosa from

his Xhosa peers in Wesbank, and is keen to learn the language because of his relationship with these friends.

The level of integration in Wesbank, particularly among the young as can be seen in John's example, is to some extent creating an "enabling environment" for increasing or 'truncated' multilingualism among the young (Dyers, 2006). In an ideal world, most young people would be highly competent in their first language, reasonably competent in their second language and even show some skill in a third language (Van der Rheede, personal communication, 2006)⁴. However, it is clear that this multilingual competence is limited in most cases to varying degrees of verbal competence. The required competence in the standard language/s is lacking, particularly in the skills of reading and writing. The continued economic, social and spatial marginalisation of the poor in South Africa, who remain far behind the rest of the population in terms of their educational opportunities and subsequent literacy levels, is a factor that contributes strongly to the impoverishment of their education and prospects of securing good employment.

The lack of allegiance to a new common space would definitely influence people's language practices, and potentially lead to a hardening of ethnolinguistic distinctiveness as people responded to perceived threats to their group identities. Edwards' (1995:134) reference to '...a beleaguered collectivity...' reminds one strongly of the current *taalstryd* (language battle) of some of the Afrikaners in South Africa, specifically around the inroads English is making into areas like higher education and business. But the Afrikaans-speaking Wesbank community, who have all been placed here not out of choice, but because of poverty, do not as yet reveal similar tensions around language issues, possibly owing to their numerical supremacy over their Xhosa neighbours. Instead, there is more a sense of not really belonging to Wesbank, which leads to closer identification with other markers of identity.

4. Domains of use for Afrikaans

The importance of Afrikaans for these Wesbank teenagers is further underscored by the results of the domains research carried out with the grade 8 and 9 pupils. The domains of language use are certain institutional contexts in which one language or language variety is more likely to be appropriate than another. Fishman, who did some of the principal research into domains of language use, (1964, 1965

⁴ I am indebted to Christo van der Rheede, the director of the *Stigting Bemagtiging deur Afrikaans* (Foundation for Empowerment through Afrikaans) and former school principal of Wesbank High, for his comments on drafts of this article.

and 1968) was mainly concerned with: who speaks what language to whom and when? Domains are taken to be constellations of factors such as location, topic and participants and include the domains of work, family, school and other educational institutions, circle of friends and wider communication. As situations change, so do the choice of language, variety and register. A key influence in both formal and informal domains is the relationships between the interlocutors.

The table at the end of this article illustrates how the Grade 8 and 9 pupils reported on their language use in different domains. A number of similarities are present in the ways the two groups responded over the two years. Afrikaans remains the dominant language of the school playground, the streets of Wesbank, and with friends. English is rarely used on its own, and very few of these pupils use Afrikaans, Xhosa and English – in fact, these figures fall to zero in most domains with the Grade 9 pupils. But English, together with Afrikaans, plays a dominant role in the classroom, where some teaching is done through English only, especially when these pupils are taught certain subjects together with their Xhosa peers⁵.

In terms of differences, there is quite a remarkable shift in reported home language, with more pupils reporting the use of both English and Afrikaans at home. However, what largely appears to occur in the home environment (Dyers, 2006) is that Afrikaans still dominates, but with some code mixing at the intra-sentential level, e.g. ‘*My teacher het vir my gesê om my English homework te doen voor ek Generations kyk oppie TV*’ (My teacher told me to do my English homework before I watch Generations - a popular soap opera- on TV). Both languages are also used increasingly when shopping, on the streets of Wesbank and with friends. This could indicate that at Grade 9 level much more interaction is taking place with people who do not speak Afrikaans only, such as the Xhosa population of Wesbank as well as people from other parts of Africa. But we need to ask if the urban setting is starting to make inroads into Afrikaans, and whether we are in fact seeing some shift to Cape Flats English.

5. Attitudes towards Afrikaans

Apart from the interviews and classroom observations, the grade 8 and 9 pupils also wrote short pieces on the importance of the main languages in their lives. The writing gave us further evidence of their prevailing language attitudes. People’s *language attitudes* define the ways in which they rank the different languages in their

⁵ Wesbank High, where our research took place, is a dual medium (Afrikaans and English) school. This means that pupils are either placed in the English medium classes or in the Afrikaans medium classes, but staff shortages have meant that teachers frequently have to teach both groups in one class. The Xhosa students are normally placed in the English medium classes.

repertoire, how they feel about those languages, and how they behave towards those languages and speakers of those languages (Triandis, 1971:8; Baker, 1992; Fasold, 1995:148).

A number of key distinctions (Dyers 2001) can be made about language attitudes:

- Some attitudes have affective roots while others have more rational roots. Thus there are sentimental attitudes towards a language, rooted in its symbolism for particular groups, and the more instrumental attitudes, where language becomes a means of achieving certain goals, either of an economic or educational nature (du Plessis 1992:96-97).
- Attitudes are different for languages and people. It is possible to have a positive attitude towards a language while holding negative attitudes towards speakers of that language.
- Patterns of language use often contradict language attitudes. The positive regard for English among many South Africans is not matched by proficiency in use, and the relationship between attitudes and behaviour may be less causal than at first presumed;
- There are different reasons why people choose to use a language in a particular domain, and attitudes or preferences may or may not have a role to play here.

Evidence of at least three of these distinctions can be found in the writing of the Wesbank pupils. The Grade 8 pupils agreed that English was important for finding work, but were sentimental, and even passionate about their mother tongue, Afrikaans. They wrote about how nice it was to speak the language, how beautiful it was and how easy it was for them to understand. Their comments thus fell either in the affective (Afrikaans) or rational (English and Afrikaans) categories. The Grade 9 written responses, however, revealed finer shades of individual identity. Although not one of these pupils showed an intimate, integrative connection to English, the majority of the class ranked English higher than Afrikaans (and used the term 'English' instead of the more correct 'Engels' in their Afrikaans sentences). They saw the language as the key to better employment, life outside the township, communication with non-speakers of Afrikaans, and generally to a successful life. The pupils also had more to say about English (either positive or negative) than the other two languages – which is also an indication of there being more things that they could say about its value in their lives. It is fair to say that these pupils' patterns of language use contradicted the positive instrumental attitudes they had towards English. In addition, some held negative

attitudes towards speakers of English (whom they regarded as snobbish), despite their positive attitude towards the language.

The comments on Afrikaans came from a more personal and sentimental perspective and can be categorized as follows:

1. As the language they identified with, were raised in and which is an integral part of their group identity:

Ek kies Afrikaans want ek is groot geword met Afrikaans. My ma, pa en helle familie praat Afrikaans. Dis bilankerik want meestal mense praat Afrikaans in ons skool. I choose Afrikaans because I was raised in it. My mother, father and whole family speak Afrikaans. It is important because most people at our school speak Afrikaans.

Afrikaans moet in Suid-Afrika bly van dit is deel van wie ons is. Afrikaans must stay in South Africa, because it is part of who we are.

Afrikaans van die Kleurling verstaan nie die ander taal nie. Coloured people don't understand any other language.

2. As the language they found the easiest to use:

Want meeste van die mense praat Afrikaans en sekere van die mense wil vir Hulle mooi Hou oor die taal wat Hulle praat. Because most of the people speak Afrikaans and some of the people want to ? keep the language they speak pure.

Ek kies Afrikaans omdat dit my eerste Taal is. I choose Afrikaans because it is my first language.

Die wat nie geleerd is nie praat Afrikaans. Those who are uneducated speak Afrikaans.

3. As a language of power in the Western Cape Province:

Afrikaanse taal baie belangrik vir die mens wat Afrikaans Praat want alles doen 'n mens in afrikaans. The Afrikaans language is very important for the person who speaks Afrikaans, because s/he does everything in Afrikaans.

Afrikaans kan tweede kom want die meerderheid van die mense in die Westelike Provinsie praat dit. Afrikaans comes second to English and is spoken by the majority of the people in our province.

(Afrikaans) want dit is baie belangrik vir my om gou 'n werk te kan kry en baie van die mense kan Afrikaans praat. Afrikaans, because it is very important for me to find work quickly, and many people can speak it.

We note that these comments refer mainly to the role of Afrikaans as an index of their group and ethnic identity, and, to a lesser degree, to its continuing power in the Western Cape. But the contradiction between positive attitudes and actual language proficiency was also present in their written responses to Afrikaans, which revealed sharp contrasts in terms of the pupils' standards of literacy or command of standard Afrikaans. While at least a third could communicate effectively in fairly clear, coherent Afrikaans, many struggled with spelling and punctuation. They wrote exactly as they spoke, in their colloquial variant of Afrikaans, often with barely legible handwriting. Here are two examples taken from their comments on English:

Engels is ook 'n belangrike taal van mens soos die Xhosa en die Kleurling verstaan Engels baie goed.

(Standard Afrikaans): Engels is ook 'n belangrike taal want mense soos die Xhosas en Kleurlinge verstaan dit baie goed.

English is also an important language because people like the Xhosas and Coloureds understand it very well.

Ek dink English is vir ons die belangrikse want as jy eendag vir iets wil leer Dan moet jy English en ook Afrikaans ken want as jy nie english kan prat nie Dan moet jy Xhosa kan praat...

(Standard Afrikaans): Ek dink Engels is vir ons die belangrikste, want as jy eendag verder wil leer, moet jy Engels en Afrikaans goed ken. As jy nie Engels kan praat nie, moet jy Xhosa kan praat...

I think English is the most important for us, because if you want to study further one day, you must be good at English and Afrikaans. If you can't speak English, you should speak Xhosa...

The pupils' poor literacy skills even in their mother tongue can be ascribed not only to a history of poor education, but also to the disabling influence of the environment of Wesbank, where 14.4% of the population has had no education, and the majority (45%) only received education up to primary school level (Moola 2002:13).

6. Conclusions

Taking all the data into account, we could say that Afrikaans is still a dominant part of these pupils' individual and collective identity, despite the importance of English in domains of power, and its dominance outside the township. However, we note that the instrumental value of English continues to increase as they progress

through high school, although many admit to struggling with this language. Thus English has considerable power as an index of spatial-social mobility to the world outside the township, but as long as poverty and inequality continue to trap these young people in the townships, simply learning to master English will not be enough to improve their lives, and Afrikaans, or more accurately, *Kaaps*, will continue to be used as the main township language. At the same time, the pupils' inability to perform well in both languages at school also contributes to their overall academic impoverishment. This could be ascribed to poor literacy levels and the 'peripheral normativity' (Blommaert, *et. al* 2005) of their environment. More research is needed on how to counteract the effects of a disabling environment on the language and learning skills of both primary and high school pupils.

What generalizations can we draw from the above research? Firstly, even in the presence of a powerful language of wider communication, people can continue to identify powerfully with their home languages, especially when it enhances their personal and group identities or is a marker of their ethnolinguistic distinctiveness. Secondly, even when a particular variety has a perceived low status, it remains a powerful index of micro-networks, in-group identity and the possible exclusion of those who do not speak this variety. And finally, the choice of language or language variety in intimate domains explains in part why home languages continue to remain vital despite the use of more high status languages in other domains.

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Table

Domains of use over two years (2004-5); Grade 8 and 9 pupils

Domains of use N= 70 (2004) N = 37 (2005)	Afrikaans only	English only	English and Afrikaans	English, Xhosa and Afrikaans
	Gr 8 Gr9	Gr8 Gr9	Gr8 Gr9	Gr8 Gr9
Home	80% 16%	0 0	14% 84%	3% 0
Church/Mosque	37% 41%	9% 5%	20% 54%	9% 0
School (in class)	100%* 5%	0 0	69%** 95%	
School (Playground)	80% 70%	0 0	17% 24%	3% 5%
Shopping (Bellville area)	80% 38%	6% 5%	6% 57%	3% 0
Streets of Wesbank	80% 68%	0 0	17% 32%	3% 0
With friends	88% 62%	0 0	9% 38%	3% 0

* with classmates

** with teachers

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