Introduction

This volume is the fifth in a group of books which aims to present a detailed overview of the languages and language-related issues in specific territories. The previous volumes, on the USA, the British Isles, Australia and Canada, have successfully attained these aims, and have served as well-referenced introductions to those areas for students trained in linguistics as well as for general readers. It is hoped that, despite the complexities of South African history and language politics, the present volume will prove as useful a reference. It is my brief in this introduction to make comparisons with previous volumes in the series, and to outline the issues that make language a concern of the wider public in South Africa.

1 COMPARISONS WITH THE USA, BRITAIN, AUSTRALIA AND CANADA

English has been dominant in South Africa for two centuries and, with its rival Afrikaans, it has changed the linguistic ecology of southern Africa irrevocably. However, the differences between the position of English in South Africa and, say, Australia are quite significant. English is not numerically dominant in South Africa, and functional multilingualism is more common here than in the other territories represented in this series thus far. Many of the indigenous languages have continued to thrive as first languages, with large numbers of mother-tongue speakers and many second-language speakers. Nine of the indigenous languages have attained official status in addition to Afrikaans and English: Ndebele, North Sotho, South Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu. In this regard the fate of South Africa's local languages may seem very different from the destruction and marginalisation of languages like Huron in Canada, Yahi in the USA and Dyirbal in Australia. Yet South Africa has seen language genocide too: the fate of the Khoesan languages, once widespread in the country, has been even worse than that of the native languages of Australia, the USA and Canada. Some further differences between South Africa and the other territories surveyed in the series are as follows:

- Although the number of speakers of English as an additional language continues to grow, when speakers give up their language under pressure from another language, it is not always towards English that the shifts occur. For example, in some urban areas Tsonga and Venda speakers shift to the dominant African language of the area, like Sotho. Chapter 15 by R. K. Herbert details an ongoing shift from Tsonga to Zulu in some parts of the country.
- Dell Hymes' lament (1981: vi) in his foreword to the American volume in this series that there was not a single chair in the United States devoted to the study of native American languages does not hold true in South Africa, where departments of African languages are relatively large and numerous. (However, many departments of African languages currently face a large decline in enrolment.) Hymes' remark does resonate for Khoesan languages, which are not taught as subjects at South African universities. The number of linguists acquainted with Khoesan structure is accordingly minuscule.
- There is greater pressure on other groups of people in South Africa to learn an indigenous language than is the case in the UK, the USA, Canada or Australia. Speakers of English and Afrikaans in rural areas often do learn an African language 'naturally' from childhood, in some cases even before they learn English or Afrikaans. Gough (1996) records the positive associations that speaking Xhosa has for a white eastern Cape farming community, whose vernacular English, especially among males, is peppered with Xhosa words, phrases and ideophones. However, Kaschula (1989) believes that generally the farming register of whites in the eastern Cape is a limited one that precludes serious bonding with Xhosa employees.
- Some newspapers in African languages are quite successful in having a large circulation, e.g. the Xhosa newspaper *Imvo* and the Zulu newspaper *Ilanga.* Overall, though, the rate of functional literacy in South Africa is not high. Harley et al. (1996) put the number of adults who have not completed primary education at 7.45 million. Equating illiteracy with this level of seven years of formal schooling, and with the total adult population estimated to be 26 million, this constitutes an adult illiteracy rate of 29 per cent.[1]

2 THE FORMAT OF THIS BOOK

Deciding on a format for this book has not been straightforward. Indeed, looking through the previous four volumes in this series, it is clear that there is no overarching formula that will present the complexities of language distribution, description and function in the territories concerned. Ferguson and Heath settled upon a simple formula for their USA collection: 'American English; Languages before English; Languages after English, Language in use'. Such a formula would be highly controversial in the South African context, since it would impose a misleading Anglocentric view of the country. Trudgill's volume

on the British Isles has as its major partitions 'English; Celtic languages; Other languages; and The Sociolinguistic Situation'. The volume on Canada begins with a collection of chapters dealing with the most important current language and language-related matters in a thematic way and then switches focus to its ten provinces and two northern territories. This seems to work well in giving an overview of language in the Canadian context. For South Africa it is doubtful that this success can be repeated, since – with few exceptions – regional descriptions of language in the nine provinces have yet to be done systematically. The nine provinces themselves are only a few years old; and as maps 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 show, the provincial boundaries of South Africa in the three periods – the nineteenth century, the apartheid period and the post-apartheid era – differ quite drastically. The format of the present volume comes closest to the Australian volume which has the following headings: 'Aboriginal and Islander languages; Pidgins and creoles; Transplanted languages other than English; Varieties of Australian English; Public policy and social issues'.

The division of this volume is partly historical and partly thematic. Part 1 comprises eight chapters on the main language groupings in the country: Khoesan, Bantu, Afrikaans, English, Sign Language, German (as a representative of European languages, other than the two official ones) and Indian languages (as representing some of the changes undergone by multilingual Asian communities that came to South Africa). Part 1 thus may be considered the foundations of the modern South African language mosaic, though it cannot claim to be exhaustive.

Part 2 covers the theme of language contact in thirteen chapters. The focus falls on the following:

(a) borrowing, mixing and switching between languages as well as on intercultural communication norms and misconceptions;
(b) language change and shifts from one language to another in some communities, with particular reference to the role of gender;
(c) a closer study of the characteristics of two new varieties of English, which owe their distinctiveness in no small measure to the particularities of colonial and apartheid policies;
(d) the rise of new township codes, based on Afrikaans and/or the Bantu languages of the country.

Part 3 deals with language planning, policy and education, with a special eye on recent developments. In the early and mid-1990s planning and policy were the key areas that occupied the attentions of sociolinguists. Part 3 is thus a fitting way of rounding off this book by testing the heat generated at the linguistic fireplace. It deals further with the rationale for the most multilingual state policy in the world; the problems and obstacles associated with the policy; and the vision required to put the policy into effective practice.

3 TERMINOLOGY

Terminology pertaining to languages and social groups in South Africa – as in some other countries – can be a minefield. In this respect language use clearly reflects and replicates struggles over various kinds of political inequality, chiefly involving gender, class and ethnicity. Readers in South Africa have become accustomed to quotation marks, variant spellings and epithets like 'so-called', 'officially classified', and – now – 'formerly classified' in much academic writing describing specific communities. These labels reflect the desire of many academics not to 'naturalise' a largely arbitrary division among people, made in the interests of apartheid. There is no consensus among contributors to this volume about the appropriateness of the scare-quotes and the lack of capitalisation for the term *coloured* (which were meant to signify opposition to the apartheid labels). For the sake of internal consistency and after much debate we have settled on *coloured*, *white* and *black* with no further punctuation. (Terms pertaining to forms of identification other than colour are given the usual capitalisation: thus Afrikaner, Zulu or Indian.) This solution is by no means perfect, since some political writers prefer to draw a distinction between *Black* (a positive term for people of indigenous African descent) and *black* (a positive term that embraced a sense of unity amongst Blacks, Indians and coloureds against apartheid). Fortunately context usually makes it clear whether the broader or the more usual narrower sense is intended. Synonyms for the term 'black' are numerous and have all run foul of the process of semantic derogation. An early term, used without denigration by the missionaries of the nineteenth century for the Nguni-speaking people, was *Kaffir*, based on the Arabic for 'unbeliever'. The term eventually attained disrepute in popular parlance and is considered highly offensive today. (In one of the library copies at my university of the *Dictionary of South African English*, the pages containing a detailed entry for this item were conspicuously crossed out – presumably by an enraged student.) Other terms like *native* came to be used officially and colloquially in the early twentieth century, but these too eventually became quite offensive. Even today a linguist has to be wary of the connotations of the term 'native speaker', especially 'native speaker of an African language'. The more circumspect 'mother-tongue speaker' is the usual phrase one encounters in South African sociolinguistic writing. Other synonyms were tried out by the apartheid regimes, notably *Bantu* (from *aba-ntu*, the Nguni word for 'people', made up of the plural prefix *aba* plus the root *ntu* for 'person'). Because repressive apartheid policies frequently contained this word (e.g. Bantu Administration Board, Bantu education) and because it sounded grammatically incongruous to hear it used as a singular form (a bantu), the word itself became associated with apartheid, and went the same way as its predecessors. So strong was the stigma attached to the word that linguists were in the uncomfortable position of being just about the only ones using it, since it already denoted a particular

sub-family of the Niger–Congo family, the largest in Africa. For a time the term *Sintu* was promulgated as a more acceptable term for linguists, which would do away with *bantu* altogether. This term (containing an appropriate prefix *si-* for a language, and the root *-ntu* for 'person') never fully caught on; though it is safe to say that *Bantu* is still a term one employs with care. In this text it is used only as a technical term within historical linguistic discussion. However, we can take heart from a call from one academic (N. Maake at a conference in 1998) that it is time people reclaimed the positive aspect of the term *bantu*. (A student of mine, M. Ntleki, has reminded me, too, of the names of prominent political figures like Bantu Stephen (Steve) Biko and Bantu Holomisa.)

Our unholy grail does not end here. For a while in the 1970s apartheid ideologues stressed the plurality of cultures and advocated the term 'plural development' for their discriminatory homeland policy. Some wags began referring to black people as 'plurals', and there was the linguistic joke enquiring whether Kaizer Matanzima, who was the first person to be installed as a homeland leader, should be described as 'the first person plural'. The *Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles* contains some wonderful citations for 'plural':

> 1978 *Drum* (magazine) June 2 Just imagine overseas readers of South African newspapers rolling on the floor in fits of laughter when read something like 'The Dube hostel is built to accommodate 10 000 single male Plurals' . . .
>
> 1978 *Sunday Times* July 16: . . . Every Government Department has received a letter from the Secretary for Plural Relations which says: 'The Honourable the Minister of Plural Relations and Development has indicated that the word "plural" must please under no circumstances be used as a noun to mean "Bantu".'

At about the same time, proponents of Black Consciousness were proposing new terms like *Azanian* for the people of South Africa (from the root *-zan*, found in words like *Tanzania* and *Zanzibar*) and *Azania* for the country. The Azanian People's Organisation remains part of the political landscape of what is still 'South Africa'.

The term *African* is a positive one that has many connotations and denotations. In one sense it is used as a slightly more favourable term than *black* (in the narrow sense). However, it can sometimes clash with the other sense pertaining to people from the entire continent of Africa. It is also sometimes contested as being too exclusive: one letter to the editor of the Cape Argus in 1998 complained that it was racist to limit the term to black people: African, it argued, should mean any person born in Africa, not just a black person. In this parlance *black African* would not be tautologous.

Related to the contested polysemy of *African* are the meanings of the terms *Afrikaans* and *Afrikaner*, respectively 'language of Africa' and 'person of Africa'. Nowadays it is becoming quite common to hear claims that Afrikaans

is an African language and an indigenous one at that. At stake here are questions of continued access to resources and support in educational institutions. In one sense of 'indigenous', Afrikaans may well qualify, since its speakers believe it to be a unique creation within Africa, which is not spoken outside southern Africa. How different Afrikaans is from Dutch and whether it is really a separate structural entity, rather than a modification of Dutch, is not a straightforward issue (see Roberge, chap. 4, this volume). In another sense of 'indigenous' and 'African', with all the connotations of not having had access to resources previously and not being developed for use in higher education, Afrikaans clearly falls on the other side. Finally, *African*, meaning 'belonging to Africa', should not be confused with the technical linguistic sense of a composite of the four families of Africa: Hamito-Semitic, Khoesan, Niger–Congo, Nilo-Saharan.

The terminological problems do not end with the synonyms for 'black'. The colonial terms 'Hottentot' and 'Bushman' are also (mostly) in disrepute, anthropologists and linguists for a time preferring 'Khoi' and 'San' respectively. Khoi was differentiated into 'Khoi' (for the language) and 'Khoikhoi' for the people. However, since Khoikhoi etymologically means 'men of men' and San is a word that the San themselves did not use (and may well be derogatory) there is much reason to tread warily. (One positive etymology is the root *sa-*, 'to inhabit, dwell, be located', suggesting their primordial status.) Archaeologists are gradually reverting to the term 'Bushman' in recognition that 'San' might be no better in its connotations, and on the explicit preferences of one group, the Ju/wasi (Parkington 1994: 209). Furthermore, Traill (chap. 2, this volume) argues for the spellings *Khoe* and *Khoekhoe*, accepting Nienaber's arguments that this is the best representation of the phonetics, and is the form preferred in Nama orthography. 'Khoesan' is a convenient term of reference for the composite group of Khoekhoe and San, though it might misleadingly imply a historical and cultural unity. See Traill's important note 1 on a further linguistic distinction between 'Khoe' and 'Khoekhoe'.

There is ongoing debate about the use of prefixes for denoting African languages, and contributors to this volume have made their differing preferences clearly known to me. For reasons set out by Herbert (1992: 6–7) and Bailey (1995: 34–5) language names in this book will generally be used without prefixes (*Zulu* rather than *isiZulu*). (One exception is the spelling *Iscamtho* favoured by Ntshangase in this volume, for a variety that has not otherwise been committed to writing.) See further Herbert and Bailey (chap. 3 in this volume, note 3).

Finally, although it has been customary for two decades to refer to 'South African Black English', 'South African Coloured English' and 'South African Indian English', but just 'South African English' for the L1 variety of whites, I follow de Klerk's (1996) lead in opting for 'South African English' as a general cover term, which can be prefaced by any ethnic or other descriptive label as

necessary. Unfortunately the acronyms no longer roll off the tip of the tongue (e.g. ISAE versus the older SAIE). The use of ethnic descriptors should not be taken as unqualified acceptance of old apartheid labels – though few linguists would dispute that the sociolects described here are very much still in existence. However, we should be equally alert to the possibility of new non-ethnic forms of English that might be developing, as seems to be happening with young urban people at some schools, colleges and universities.

In concluding this section on disputes and changes in terminology, I am struck by the aptness of Edwards' (1998: 1) remarks in the previous volume on the Canadian situation: 'In some settings, disputes over language and culture are largely symbolic; deeper problems between groups lie elsewhere, usually in political or economic domains, and language, or religion, or tradition act mainly as team jerseys.'

4 EDITORIAL NOTE

This book had its first incarnation as *Language and Social History: Studies in South African Sociolinguistics,* published in Cape Town by David Philip in 1995. The present volume is a revised and updated version of that book. For reasons of space and to accommodate some new research, six chapters of the previous volume had to make way for five new ones. (The remaining chapters have been revised and updated to varying degrees, some quite considerably.) The editor wishes to stress that the six chapters from the previous volume not included here are well worth study and are equally valid today. For reasons of space, certain new topics could not be accommodated in the present volume. For example, the status of Afrikaans in post-apartheid South Africa is a topic of immense interest generally, and of pressing concern to some sectors of the South African population. (On this issue the reader is referred to van Rensburg 1999. In this volume the status of Afrikaans has been discussed as part of the unfolding new language dispensation.)

NOTE

1 The authors defined an adult as someone over fifteen.

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Part 1

The main language groupings

1 South Africa: a sociolinguistic overview

R. Mesthrie

1 LANGUAGE PROFILE

South Africa has been the meeting ground of speakers of languages belonging to several major families, the chief ones being Khoesan, Niger–Congo, Indo-European and Sign Language.[1] (It is surely time to include Sign languages in our genealogies of language, and to devote as much space to them as to any other language family in our sociolinguistic surveys.) The Khoe (formerly called 'Hottentot') and San (a.k.a. 'Bushman') languages, thought to be historically unrelated (and in fact divisible into three families) are now, with very few exceptions, close to extinction. The Bantu languages (belonging to the wider Niger–Congo family) are the numerically predominant languages of the country, comprising essentially the following:

- the Nguni cluster (Zulu, Xhosa, Swati, Ndebele);
- the Sotho cluster (North Sotho, South Sotho, Tswana);
- Tsonga;
- Venda.

(See map 15.1 for the main distribution patterns of these languages.) The term 'cluster' denotes a set of varieties that are closely related along linguistic lines (though in terms of socio-political status the varieties may be quite independent). In addition to these official languages a number of Bantu languages are spoken in smaller numbers by migrant mineworkers from neighbouring countries, and by more recent immigrants. Such languages include Chopi, Kalanga, Shona, Chewa, etc. Still other special cases exist: Phuthi, for example, is a minority language of the eastern Cape, more widely represented in the neighbouring country, Lesotho (Donnelly 1999); Makhuwa and Yao are languages spoken in Durban by the descendants of ex-slaves from Mozambique dating back to the 1870s (Mesthrie 1996).

The Indo-European family in South Africa has members of the Germanic branch (English and Afrikaans, and, to a lesser extent, German), the Indic branch (Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati and Konkani among others) and the Romance branch (chiefly Portuguese, spoken to varying degrees by immigrants from Angola,