

Afrikaans developed out of a Dutch stem into a distinct language as a result of the interaction of imported slaves, indigenous Khoikhoi and European colonists at the Cape of Good Hope founded as a refreshment station on the tip of Africa in 1652. English, which became the official language in 1806 in the Cape Colony, threatened both Dutch, the official language between 1652 and 1795, and Afrikaans. The dispersal of the Dutch or Afrikaner colonists across South Africa, the rise of Afrikaner nationalism triggered by the South African War (1899–1902) and widespread Afrikaner poverty in the early decades of the twentieth century created the conditions for the rapid growth of Afrikaans as public language. It is one of only four languages in the world that in the course of the twentieth century was standardized and used in all walks of public and private life, including post-graduate teaching. The transition of South Africa to an inclusive democracy in 1994 freed Afrikaans from its apartheid shackles but also made it only one of eleven official languages. As a result its future as a public language is far from secure.



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

## The Rise and Possible Demise of Afrikaans as a Public Language

Hermann Giliomee

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## Introduction

Afrikaans developed in South Africa out of a Dutch stem as a result of interaction between European colonists, who arrived there in 1652, slaves imported from Africa and Asia, and indigenous Khoisan people. By the 1930s there were fewer than two million people who spoke Afrikaans as a first language. Yet the language would achieve something exceptional. Heinz Kloss observed in 1977: ‘Unless we consider Arabic an African tongue ... Afrikaans is the only non-European/non-Asiatic language to have attained full university status and to be used in all branches of life and learning ... All other university languages have their main basis in either Europe or Asia.’ He added: ‘There is a strong likelihood that of the *new* university languages outside Europe (new ones as against old ones such as Japanese, Arabic or Chinese) only Hindi, used by some 250 million speakers, Indonesian by 100 million speakers, and Hebrew match the development of Afrikaans.’<sup>1</sup>

Jean Laponce, author of *Languages and Territories*, remarks that Afrikaans, Hindi, Indonesian, and Hebrew, are possibly the only languages that in the course of the twentieth century were standardized and came to be used in all branches of life and learning, including in both undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, and in science and technology.<sup>2</sup> In 1994 the sociologist Lawrence Schlemmer concluded that Afrikaans, though spoken as a first language by only six million people forming 15 percent of the population, was the strongest language in South Africa in the way it was used formally and informally.<sup>3</sup>

This article offers a historical account of how Afrikaans reached the position described by Kloss, Laponce and Schlemmer. It also asks why there is a real risk that it may disappear as a public language over the medium to long term.

## A language for masters and slaves, Muslims and Christian nationalists

Under the Dutch East India Company, which governed the Cape Colony between 1652 and 1795, Dutch was the language of administration and of the Dutch Reformed Church. Britain conquered the Cape in 1795 and after a short interlude again in 1806. More than 90 percent of the Europeans in this new British colony were people called Dutchmen or Afrikaners who spoke no English. The British rulers nevertheless in 1828, made English the language of administration and the courts.

Between the mid-1830s and mid-1840s some 15 000 Dutch or Afrikaner colonists, also called Boers, moved out of the colony and by the 1850s had established republics in the Orange Free State (OFS) and Transvaal whose official language was Dutch. Due to a serious lack of

schools only a thin layer of well-educated Afrikaner colonists in the Cape Colony and in the two Boer republics could speak or write Dutch correctly; the others spoke the vernacular known as Afrikaans.

The origins of Afrikaans as a language are a contested issue. Creolists have argued that Afrikaans is a 'semi-creole' or 'creoloid'. They have put strong emphasis on the possible influence of the indigenous Khoikhoi. According to this theory, they picked up the primitive Dutch and English trade jargons prior to the founding in 1652 of a Dutch settlement. It served as the basis for the development of a pidgin language among the Khoikhoi in the second half of the seventeenth century. What some call 'Khoikhoi Dutch' soon became well entrenched at the Cape. Slaves began arriving in considerable numbers in the final decades of the seventeenth century. Since they came from different places there was a strong need for a lingua franca. The theory argues that the already existing Khoikhoi Dutch greatly influenced the slaves in the development of their own Dutch pidgin.

But the Creolist approach is only one of several. A major synthesis gives due recognition to all the diverse influences but properly emphasizes the importance of Dutch as the main root. Afrikaans was, in its essence, a dialect of Dutch that had over time undergone a limited measure of creolization or deviation from the basic Dutch structure.<sup>4</sup> In line with this work a recent paper depicts the state of the literature as follows: 'No scholar of the development of Afrikaans would deny that the language originated at the Cape because the *Dutch* – not the English or the Portuguese – settled at the Cape in the seventeenth century, but we are speaking Afrikaans today because of the influence of the slaves and Khoikhoi who had to learn this new language.'<sup>5</sup>

In the course of the eighteenth century Dutch was further simplified and a considerable amount of Malayo-Portuguese, spoken among the slaves, was injected. (The common expression '*baie dankie*' – 'thank you' – reflects both the deviation from Dutch and the borrowing of the Malay *banja*.) By the end of the eighteenth century Cape Dutch had largely become what is now Afrikaans. In the Western Cape the main variety of Afrikaans took root as the shared cultural creation, in countless small-scale localities, of Europeans and non-Europeans, whites and blacks, masters and slaves and servants.

Descendants of slaves were the first to use Afrikaans as a print medium. By the 1840s the first Afrikaans book, printed in Arabic script, was used in Muslim schools in Cape Town. By the 1850s it was the established medium of religious instruction in the Cape Muslim community.<sup>6</sup> In 1861 a European used Afrikaans in a book to make a political argument. From the 1860s Dutch newspapers in Cape Town occasionally employed Afrikaans, often in poems, with the specific intention of achieving a humorous effect.

The English-speaking part of the population tended to consider Afrikaans as a public language beneath contempt. The *Cape Argus*, published in Cape Town, called Afrikaans a ‘miserable, bastard jargon’, not worthy of the name of language at all.<sup>7</sup>

But even greater enemies of Afrikaans were those better-educated Afrikaners who were desperate to win acceptance in an English-dominated society infused with class and racial consciousness and snobbery. To them Afrikaans was an embarrassment since a language welded from different tongues by white, brown, and black people sent the wrong signal in a society increasingly obsessed with racial purity. They considered Afrikaans an impoverished dialect, degenerate Dutch, an incomprehensible Creole tongue and a ‘Hotnotstaal’ (Hotnot is a derogatory term derived from the Hottentot people or Khoikhoi in modern parlance) without any future.<sup>8</sup>

Like the Muslims, white Christians first considered using Afrikaans as a print medium when they needed it for religious purposes. Many people did not understand the Bible, available only in High Dutch. In the wake of a great religious revival during the 1860s it was suggested that the Bible be translated into Afrikaans for the very poor, both white and coloured people. The latter was a collective name for people of mixed racial origin descended predominantly from slaves.

In 1874 Arnold Pannevis, a Dutch immigrant, wrote to the British and Foreign Bible Society that the Bible was incomprehensible to many in the colony and suggested that S.J. du Toit, a Dutch Reformed Church minister in Paarl, 30 miles from Cape Town, be asked to translate it into Afrikaans. When Du Toit was approached he convened a meeting of some close associates. They met on 14 August 1875, but quickly moved away from the proposal. Instead they resolved to use Afrikaans for mobilizing Afrikaners against British political, cultural and economic dominance.

Under the leadership of Stephanus Jacobus du Toit, a Dutch Reformed Church minister, they founded the *Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners* (Society for True Afrikaners), which linked Afrikaans as a language to the nationality of the Afrikaners. It was not enough, Du Toit and his colleagues remarked, to write and read ‘Hottentots’ Afrikaans; the time had come to discover how the ‘civilized part of our people’ speaks Afrikaans and to formulate rules for the language.<sup>9</sup> Du Toit was an early exponent of Christian National Education, which married the promotion of Afrikaans as a language to teaching the Reformed religion and the Afrikaners’ national history. In 1879 Du Toit formed the Afrikaner Bond, the first modern political party in South Africa.

In 1882 J.H. Hofmeyr, a more moderate nationalist than Du Toit, took over the leadership of the Afrikaner Bond. He soon won the right for Dutch to be used in Parliament. In 1883, knowledge of Dutch was made compulsory for a certain class of civil servant, and in the following year it

was permitted in the higher courts. It became a compulsory subject for civil service candidates in 1887. But this was a passive language right. Dutch was permitted and used but only if English-speakers did not protest vociferously.

By the 1890s the efforts of Du Toit and others to promote Afrikaans seemed to have fizzled out. Du Toit had landed up in the pocket of the imperialist Cecil John Rhodes. As a written language Afrikaans was considered to be *morsdood* (as dead as a dodo) in the final years of the century. In Cape Town only the Muslims were reported to be still loyal to Afrikaans. Observers believed that within a generation Afrikaans would no longer be spoken in the cities and only by the poorly educated classes in the rural areas.<sup>10</sup>

The Dutch or Afrikaner colonists in the Cape Colony, forming more than 70 percent of the electorate, were still not prepared to abandon Dutch as the language of their church and newspapers. While the Afrikaner elite in the Cape Colony was proficient in modern Dutch, most were lukewarm about the language. Miems Rothman (writer's nom-de-plume MER), who was born in 1875, said: 'We never really knew the Dutch language; it was never really our language.' It was 'an awkward tool ... a foreign language, for me, my mother and my grandmother.'<sup>11</sup> Most educated Afrikaners used English in the letters and diaries they wrote.

## The significance of the language accord of Union

In the South African War of 1899–1902 Britain crushed the two Boer republics and introduced English as the sole official language in the ex-republics. The government of the Cape Colony severely curtailed Dutch in the aftermath of the war. When the British-controlled colonies moved towards unification under the British flag it was generally assumed that English would be the sole official language of the union.

The renewed growth of Afrikaans in the early twentieth century was part and parcel of the rise of a modern Afrikaner nationalism. It met two major needs. First it bridged intra-Afrikaner class divisions. The war had impoverished most of the Afrikaners in the ex-republics. There was a demand for a simpler medium of instruction than Dutch to be used in the system of mass education for whites that the colonial states (the Cape Colony, Natal, the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal) began making available early in the twentieth century. Newspapers also needed a medium that bridged the class gulf between Afrikaners.

In the second place Afrikaans became the symbol of a modernized Afrikaner identity. The South African or Anglo-Boer War showed the aggressive face of British imperialism, shattering the political faith of the traditional Afrikaner elite in a liberal Empire. Afrikaners began looking for

a symbol of their drive to emancipate themselves from British economic and cultural domination. The disdain expressed after the Anglo-Boer War by so many English-speakers towards Afrikaans and, to a lesser extent, Dutch, fuelled this drive.

The jingoist section in the English press dismissed Afrikaans in strident terms. *The Star* inquired, with reference to calls on English-speakers to become bilingual, which language was meant, the written one (Dutch) or the spoken one (Afrikaans). 'Any man who knows the real Dutch language is painfully aware of what a truly stupid patois this South African *taal* (language) is, and it must be a source of surprise and astonishment to the serious inquirer why such a degenerated branch of an originally sound language is so stubbornly maintained in its provoking ugliness.'<sup>12</sup> The *Cape Times* continued its long tradition of publishing letters from readers that denounced Afrikaans as 'a mongrel', 'kitchen', 'hotchpotch', 'degenerate' and 'decaying' language, fit only for 'peasants and up-country kraals.'<sup>13</sup>

Unexpectedly language became one of the critical questions at the National Convention of 1908–1909 that drew up the constitution for the new Union of South Africa. General J.B.M. Hertzog, a leading Afrikaner nationalist from the OFS, proposed 'equal freedom, rights and privileges' for Dutch and English. Every appointment in the new government had to be made 'with due regard to the equality of the two languages.' He insisted that the constitution had to guarantee the right of every citizen to claim English or Dutch 'as the medium of communication between himself and any officer or servant in the Union.' According to an account of the Convention debates, the English-speakers were so appalled by the proposal that the debate had to be postponed.<sup>14</sup>

The most dramatic moment of the Convention was the intervention by Marthinus Theunis Steyn, ex-President of the OFS. Referring to the Afrikaners and the British as different races, as was the custom at the time, he asked delegates to expunge 'the devil of race hatred' that had plagued the country for so long. The way to do that was to place the two languages on a footing of 'absolute equality in Parliament, in the Courts, in the schools and the public service – everywhere.'

As a result of the speech, Article 137 of the Union Constitution was accepted without a dissenting vote. It decreed:

Both the English and Dutch languages shall be official languages of the Union and shall be treated on a footing of equality and possess and enjoy equal freedom, rights and privileges; all records, journals and proceedings of Parliament shall be kept in both languages, and all Bills, Acts and notices of general public importance or interest issued by the Government of the Union of South Africa shall be in both languages.<sup>15</sup>

Writing in *The State*, Gustav Preller, a leading protagonist of Afrikaans, which had begun to challenge Dutch as public language, described the promise to place the two official languages on a footing of 'most perfect equality' as essential to Afrikaner support for the Union.<sup>16</sup>

But if language equality was the very foundation of the new white union, it also constituted the main fault line in the white community. To most English-speakers English was destined to prevail over both Dutch and Afrikaans, although English-speakers formed slightly less than half the white electorate. Violet Markham, a British journalist, wrote that the Afrikaners found themselves 'hopelessly menaced by the great on-coming compelling wave of Anglo-Saxon civilization.' She predicted that in the long run there could be only one outcome: 'English methods and the English language are bound increasingly to win their way and permeate the whole structure of society.'<sup>17</sup> G. Heaton Nicholls, a pro-segregation politician from Natal, later observed: 'We had gone about talking of a South African nation which would consist of English and Dutch, but at the back of our minds we had supposed that they would talk English. We aimed at Anglicization.'<sup>18</sup>

The one party that was fully committed to the compromise of Union was the ruling South African Party with General Louis Botha as leader and Prime Minister. General Jan Smuts was his closest associate. One third of the delegates at the ruling South African Party's founding congress were English-speakers. It was a catch-all party, which could only avoid a split if the issue of language equality and the relationship with Great Britain as the imperial power could be defused.<sup>19</sup>

Botha and Smuts declared that they took pride in their Afrikaner cultural heritage. Botha, whose command of English was poor, stated that he loved his language. It was his wish to put both languages on an equal footing but he had no taste for enforcing equality in practice. 'The politics of South Africa is one of co-operation and not of compulsion', he said.<sup>20</sup> Botha quickly opened himself up for attack. At the end of 1910 he told a meeting that the language issue would resolve itself naturally, and that 'the fittest language will survive.'<sup>21</sup> Smuts privately expressed the opinion that English should become the sole public language, with Dutch initially permitted.

Soon after Union the Afrikaner nationalists under leadership of General Hertzog identified the language issue as the key to winning power. Both the SAP and white English-speakers were over-represented in the civil service, in the professions, the managerial levels of the economy and the leadership positions of the trade union movement. Hence they had an interest in preventing Dutch or Afrikaans from being used as a mobilizing device. Almost any effort to extend the use of Dutch in the public sphere encountered heated opposition from English-speaking ranks.

F.V. Englenburgh, editor of the pro-Botha *Volksstem* and Botha's biographer, remarked: 'It should not be forgotten that whereas the fathers of the Constitution accepted the absolute equality of both languages in all good faith, English-speaking South Africa never took the matter seriously. Bilingualism was regarded as nothing more than a polite gesture towards the other section – neither more nor less. The average English-speaking South African was inclined to regard every political recognition of the Dutch language as a menace to the interests of his own race.'<sup>22</sup>

The flashpoint was the civil service, which continued to be dominated by English-speakers in the higher ranks until the Second World War. When the first Union cabinet met in 1910 it resolved that no civil servant employed at the time of Union who was fluent in only one of the official languages would be forced to learn the other official language (In practice this related only to English-speakers). New appointees had to be bilingual to be considered for promotion.<sup>23</sup> Under pressure from the staunchly pro-Empire Unionist Party, Smuts watered down this requirement.

Equally important in this decision was the fact that the Afrikaners were far behind English-speakers in terms of education. The Afrikaner community produced far fewer suitable candidates for the civil service than the English community. In 1915 only 15 percent of Afrikaner children had advanced beyond the seventh school year (Standard 5), and only 4 percent had progressed far enough to become proficient in English. As a result, progress in bringing Afrikaners into the civil service was very slow. Afrikaners made up only a quarter of those newly appointed in the first five years of Union.

Language had become embroiled in the political and status struggles of the two white communities. At the heart of the Afrikaners' nationalist struggle was the attempt to imagine a new political community with an own name and a language enjoying parity of esteem with English in the public sphere. Only then would their sense of being marginalized be overcome. They wanted Dutch to be heard in Parliament, the civil service, schools, colleges and universities, and in the world of business and finance; it had to be the medium of newspapers, novels, and poems, giving expression to what was truly South African. Instead of English-speakers portraying Afrikaners in reports, novels or histories as everything they were not: unrefined, semi-literate, racist, dogmatic, and unprogressive, the Afrikaners had to define and present themselves to the world as the true (white) South Africans. For Afrikaner nationalists this cultural revolution had to culminate in the establishment of Afrikaner political dominance and economic advancement. Ultimately the Union of South Africa had to make way for a republic that was independent of Britain.

## C.J. Langenhoven's argument

Afrikaner nationalists realised that except for their own history only language set themselves apart from the English-speaking community. Yet they displayed little enthusiasm for Dutch, which was almost a foreign language to the great majority of Afrikaners. At the same time there was virtually no literature in Afrikaans and it carried the stigma of a lower class language. The man who did most to win the argument that Afrikaans should replace Dutch as an official language and should be used for all purposes was Cornelis Jacob Langenhoven.

He was an obscure attorney in the rural town of Oudtshoorn when he contributed a remarkable article in 1910 to *The State*. He questioned the value of translating state documents into Dutch, or using it in courts or as a medium in schools. South Africans mastering Dutch would be acquiring 'laboriously and inadequately a language whose literature we shall never read.' Afrikaans, he said, like English, was a simple, 'degraded' language, but had retained the expressiveness of High Dutch and 'a luxuriant wealth of additional phrases and idioms of local growth.' He said:

[Afrikaans] 'is the language of the farm and the home, breathing the spirit of the inexorable expanse of the sunburnt *veld*, charged with the memories of primitive appliances and crude self-help ... It is the medium of social intercourse, the channel of expression for the deepest and most tender feelings of the South African Dutch. It is interwoven with the fibre of their national character, the language they have learnt at their mother's knee, the language of the last farewells of their dying lips.'<sup>24</sup>

He demanded no special rights for Afrikaans and conceded that it had not yet produced a literature, but neither had many other languages at a similar stage. He was quite pragmatic about the issue. If a literature was produced in Afrikaans it would be 'our very own – the growth of our national genius.' If the project failed, the language would quietly disappear 'without heartbreaking suddenness.' But he was increasingly confident that Afrikaans would serve all the needs of Afrikaners.<sup>25</sup>

In 1912 Langenhoven was appointed editor of the local Oudtshoorn paper *Het Westen*, and, when the Dutch newspaper *De Burger* appeared in Cape Town three years later, he became one of its regular and most respected contributors. His wrote his provocative articles in newspapers, journals, and books in a supple and lucid Afrikaans. He reduced the language issue to a concise and lucid question: 'If Dutch is our language we must speak it; if Afrikaans is our language we must write it.'<sup>26</sup>

In a powerful speech in July 1914 to the 'Zuid-Afrikaansche Akademie voor Taal, Kunst en Letterkunde' he demolished the argument of gradualists that the introduction of Afrikaans in schools and universities had

to be postponed until it was a cultivated language. This would leave English in a dominant position for a considerable period. In the meantime Afrikaans children would continue to be taught that Afrikaans as their language was not only ‘uncivilized’ but also incapable of becoming ‘civilized.’

Langenhoven conceded that the literature in Afrikaans was so sparse that avid readers could not find enough to read for more than three months. As a result Afrikaners increasingly read English literature and newspapers and corresponded in English because they could not write Dutch correctly, or thought Dutch artificial. For Langenhoven the only hope was to teach Afrikaans in the schools, and create a situation where educated adults would soon be ashamed if they could not write it. By making the choice for Afrikaans the door would be opened to writers and poets, who stood ready to embark on the first serious production of literature in the Afrikaners’ history. Langenhoven constantly spread the language gospel: ‘Afrikaans is our own, adapted to our own conditions. Having grown up as part and parcel of our national character, it is the only tie that binds us together as a distinct people. It is our only national characteristic.’<sup>27</sup>

He challenged those, in particular ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church, who professed to be embarrassed by it: ‘Embarrassed! Shame on that embarrassment!’ he cried. ‘It is our highest honour, our greatest possession, the one and only white man’s language which was made in South Africa and which had not come ready made from overseas ... [It is] the one bond which joins us as a nation together, the expressed soul of our *volk*.’<sup>28</sup> In calling Afrikaans a ‘white man’s language’ instead of recognising its multiracial origins, Langenhoven erred grievously. He did so in the context of middle-class Afrikaner and English snobbery that depicted Afrikaans as a low-class tongue and the language of ‘Hotnots’, a term of abuse for coloured people.

## White and coloured Afrikaans-speakers

In 1914–15 the National Party was founded under the leadership of General. Hertzog and it soon became the spearhead for the Afrikaans language movement. During the entire twentieth century activists for Afrikaans used the NP as their vehicle. These language activists, however, never squarely confronted a key issue: Did the Afrikaner community form a racial community whose language struggle was subordinate to the entrenchment of white supremacy? Or did Afrikaans-speakers form a language community whose social identity was shaped by the struggle for the acceptance of Afrikaans as a public language co-equal with English? If the latter was the case, the salience of race had to diminish and the creed *Die taal is gans die volk* (the language constitutes the entire people), which activists often cited, had to be made a reality across racial boundaries.

J.H.H. de Waal, author of the first Afrikaans novel and a nationalist Member of Parliament, was one of the few language activists favouring a racially inclusive Afrikaans-speaking community. He saw the political struggle as one between British imperialists, mining magnates, and 'selfish fortune seekers', on the one hand, and, on the other, the 'permanent population' with the coloured people an indispensable part of that. He took a stand against those wanting to set 'the coloured population against their fellow-Afrikaners'. The two groups 'speak the same language, have the same love for South Africa, have mostly the same history and interests and are hoodwinked by the same friends.' Their common enemy was the 'imperialists', who wished to encourage immigration to take the bread out of the 'sorely tried sons of the soil', both white and coloured.<sup>29</sup>

One of the strongest opponents of this attempt to align coloured people to the NP was the man who dominated coloured politics for the first forty years of the century. Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman was a British-trained physician from a prominent Muslim family in Cape Town. In 1905 he became leader of the first major coloured political movement, the African Political Organization (APO). The movement was founded in 1902 to seek equal rights with whites for all people of colour.

Abdurahman called the attempt by Dutch or Afrikaans-speaking whites to cling to their language as springing from 'the narrowness and bitterness' of the fight between the two white groups, which 'moved the Boer so deeply.' He urged his coloured followers, instead, to become fluent in English, 'the most universal of all languages' and to 'drop the habit of expressing themselves in the barbarous Cape Dutch'.<sup>30</sup> Yet the APO, his organization's newspaper, used Afrikaans and Dutch on the back pages because it was the common language of coloured people in Cape Town. The name 'Afrikaner' had not yet acquired a definite racial stamp, and the APO in 1912 accepted a proposal that 'Cape Afrikaners' was a more appropriate term for the community than 'Coloureds'.<sup>31</sup>

Abdurahman was almost certainly the author of a column, 'Straatpraatjes' (Street Talk), which appeared in APO between 1909 and 1922, its model the column 'Parlementse Praatjes' (Parliamentary Talk) in the Dutch paper *De Zuid-Afrikaan*. In spelling and in syntax 'Parlementse Praatjes', largely written by De Waal, used the middle-class version of Afrikaans. By contrast, 'Straatpraatjes' reflected the vernacular spoken Afrikaans of the working class and petty bourgeoisie, both white and coloured, in Cape Town. The column freely used English words, as well as slang and colloquial expressions, in mocking the uncouthness and hypocrisy of white, and particularly Afrikaner, politicians.

For quite some time the NP remained remarkably ambiguous about the vote of the coloured people. In the Cape Province, where over eighty percent of the coloured people lived, coloured males had the vote on a

common roll with white and African males. In the campaign for the 1924 election, Hertzog depicted coloureds as ‘born and educated in the midst of the white civilization, particularly among the Dutch-speaking Afrikaners with whom they shared a language and interests.’ Unlike Africans, coloureds in his view, belonged with whites politically and economically. Socially, however, they had to accept segregation. As he phrased it: ‘The place of the educated Coloured is under his own people ... He must serve his own people.’<sup>32</sup>

The 1924 election the NP secured a bridgehead in the coloured community. *Die Burger* judged that most of the ‘developed’ coloureds voted for the Pact alliance of NP and the Labour Party. Assuming power, the Pact tried to consolidate its coloured support. It increased spending on coloured education by 60 percent, which caused the number of coloured children in school to grow by 30 percent. Formally the Pact’s ‘civilised labour’ policy had to give coloureds as well as whites preference to Africans in public works and on the railways, but invariably whites were favoured over coloureds. The Pact also refused to remove the disparity in pay between whites and coloured people. Despite the increased spending on coloured education, the differential in spending for whites remained the same. It introduced an old-age pension for coloureds, but the maximum for coloureds was only 70 percent that of whites.

The NP entered the 1929 election campaign confident that the patronage it had bestowed would be rewarded. But the NP fared poorly among coloured voters. This was due to an ill-fated attempt to classify coloured people. The government’s plan was to enfranchise white and coloured women and to remove all Africans from the voters’ roll. But before it would do so it wanted to remove all those coloured people who were born from liaisons with Africans.

In the 1929 election the NP for the first time won power on its own. It had mobilized the great majority of Afrikaners, but had not succeeded in attracting any significant coloured support. *Die Burger* estimated that less than 10 percent of the coloureds in the urban seats of the Cape Province voted for the NP. The NP’s efforts to win the coloured vote ended when the parties of Hertzog and Smuts in 1933–34 first entered a coalition and then merged into the United Party. D.F. Malan became leader of the *Gesuiwerde* or Purified National Party, the official opposition.

The middle-of-the-road UP stood poised to draw all the coloured support that Malan’s party could hope to attract. At the same time the proportion of coloured voters had drastically declined as a result of the enfranchisement of white women; in the Cape Province electorate it had dropped from 11 percent to 6 percent. The actual cost to a party that ignored the coloured vote was now much reduced. The NP now sought to outflank the UP by proposing an all-white voters’ roll.

Malan and his followers argued that race relations would improve once electoral competition was restricted to whites. However, racial discrimination and exclusion flourished once the victimized group had been shut out. As long as coloured people were part of the political system in the Cape Province, the definition of the Afrikaner people in the Cape Province tended to be fluid and open-ended. It became rigid once the system had become racially exclusive. The emphasis was now on the historic exclusivity of the Afrikaners, their culture and their language.

## The breakthrough of Afrikaans

During the first four decades of the twentieth century many Afrikaners experienced acute poverty. The causes were complex: the collapse of subsistence farming after the closing of the frontier, the devastation of farms as a result of the scorched earth policies of the British forces in the South African War of 1899–1902, the shortage of schools and the Afrikaners' lack of skills for industrial jobs. The swelling numbers of Afrikaner poor added urgency to demand that the schools switch from Dutch to Afrikaans as medium of instruction. In 1919 the Transvaal Dutch Reformed Church concluded that the fundamental cause of the Afrikaners' poverty lay in their children's struggle to master Dutch and English in school.<sup>33</sup> The Afrikaans poet N.P. van Wyk Louw later said that to make Afrikaans a language of instruction in this period was a *broodsaak*. (A rough translation would be 'a bread-and-butter necessity.') Without Afrikaans, the Afrikaner people were 'powerless, of no consequence, doomed to poverty and disadvantage – doomed, one may say, to be forsaken.' Only Afrikaans as a public language could save many Afrikaners from the fate of becoming a 'people with no language'.<sup>34</sup>

In 1925 D.F. Malan, Minister for the Interior in the Hertzog-led Pact Alliance, introduced a bill that added Afrikaans to Dutch and English as an official language. He noted that in the previous decade more literary works had appeared in Afrikaans than English books originating in South Africa. Afrikaans was already being taught in all primary schools. At Dutch universities theses written in Afrikaans were accepted, and renowned Dutch literary critics reviewed Afrikaans writing. Malan described the elevation of Afrikaans to the status of an official language in the following terms: 'For the first time the Afrikaners felt that they were fully recognized and were fully free and at home in their own country.'<sup>35</sup> Afrikaans almost immediately replaced Dutch as a medium of instruction, and as the language in which laws and official documents were published.

From the 1920s, the white schools in a growing measure became single-medium schools. Between 1932 and 1958 single medium Afrikaans schools increased from 28 percent of white schools to 62 percent.<sup>36</sup> The better-educated Afrikaners in large numbers became teachers. Many of them were

inspiring educators and powerful agents in promoting an Afrikaner nationalist version of history and a love of Afrikaans as part of the NP battle to gain political ascendancy over the Anglophile SAP. By the early 1930s Afrikaans began making its mark as a language of advanced research and in 1934 a successful Bible translation appeared. In 1935 N.P. van Wyk Louw, soon to become the leading Afrikaans man of letters, summed up the achievements of Afrikaans in the first twenty-five years of Union: 'A small amount of literature had been produced; a whole people had developed a sense of personal worth; and the mother-tongue education they received was more valuable than any other form of education.' The new challenge now was to articulate universal values in Afrikaans.<sup>37</sup>

In 1933-34 the Afrikaners split politically with roughly one half joining the new United Party (UP) of Generals Smuts and Hertzog and the other half following D.F. Malan, who founded the Reconstituted National Party. Under UP rule (1934-48) the language clause of the constitution was not rigidly applied, and the fact that so many senior civil servants could not speak Afrikaans was a major source of grievance among nationalists. Malan's party represented a much more radical nationalist movement. Its followers were predominantly working class and farmers, but after the highly disputed entry of South Africa into the Second World War most of the Afrikaner intelligentsia swung to the NP.

After the NP unexpectedly won power in 1948 it rigidly applied the language accord of 1909 and required civil servants to be bilingual before they could be promoted. But there was no purge of English-speaking civil servants, as is often claimed.<sup>38</sup> The predominance of English-speakers in the higher ranks of the civil service continued for a decade, and it was only by 1960 – fifty years after Union – that people in these ranks reflected the composition of the white population.<sup>39</sup> New recruits were predominantly Afrikaans-speakers.

By the end of the 1950s there was general satisfaction in nationalist ranks with the position of Afrikaans. Van Wyk Louw called the language the 'socialism of the poor Afrikaner.' Once the state enforced Afrikaans as an official language, the 'small man' knew that his language would help him to get work.<sup>40</sup> In his view the language movement had triumphed; it had secured more rights than other 'small' languages, like Irish or Welsh, and had built up a respected literature. To Afrikaners, Afrikaans provided a sense of personal worth, as well as jobs and other economic advantages. But Louw warned against complacency; the language could still perish unless it served as vehicle for the real and vital needs of large groups of people.<sup>41</sup>

Afrikaans (and the legitimacy of white rule) would have been greatly strengthened at this point if the NP government had embraced the coloured community who numbered 1,5 million in 1960 against 1,8 million Afrikaners. But it did the very opposite by removing all coloureds from the

voters' roll, banning all sex across racial lines and segregating coloureds residentially. Without consulting them the government introduced a pronounced shift in the policy towards the medium of instruction in coloured schools. In 1936 some 42,000 coloured children were taught in Afrikaans, 16,500 in English and 20,000 in both languages more or less equally. By the 1970s almost all were taught in Afrikaans only; very little instruction was in English and virtually none in both languages.<sup>42</sup>

White Afrikaans schools and universities played a vital role in the rise of Afrikaans and the Afrikaner nationalist movement. During the 1950s the government introduced a policy of compulsory mother-tongue education. At the university level, where there was no compulsion to attend a mother-tongue institution, Afrikaans universities drew almost all the Afrikaner students, and also were better able to attract students from the 'other' white group than their English counterparts were in attracting Afrikaans students.<sup>43</sup>

In the early 1930s Afrikaans began making its mark as a language of advanced research in the Arts and Humanities; by the 1970s it had been extended to the natural sciences and medicine. In the 1980s it was the language 32nd most frequently used in the articles indexed by *Chemical Abstracts* (more than Hindi, Armenian and Arabic). It was 25th in *Index Medicus*.<sup>44</sup>

With the state pursuing a firm policy of bilingualism, a large proportion of Afrikaners found secure jobs in the civil service. By 1968 there were twice as many Afrikaners in the civil service than in 1948. More than a third of the Afrikaner labour force was employed in the public sector, and Afrikaners now dominated the top positions. By 1974 Afrikaners accounted for 80 percent of the senior staff in government departments.<sup>45</sup>

## The tide turns: 1976–1990

There were dangers in the developments sketched above. Afrikaans and the Afrikaner policy of apartheid and the Afrikaner-controlled state had become locked in a tight and suffocating embrace. Afrikaans had become the language of the oppressor – the medium used when white policemen arrested black pass offenders or when white civil servants ordered blacks or coloured people out of their houses in racially mixed slum areas. In 1976 Jakes Gerwel, a black professor of Afrikaans at a coloured university, cited a statement by the novelist Alan Paton that 'only a fool or a philologist' would discuss Afrikaans without thinking immediately of Afrikaner nationalism and its close association with apartheid. He added: 'Afrikaans has become the defining characteristic [of the state] which the greatest part of the population knows, particularly by its image of arrogance and cruelty.'<sup>46</sup>

Afrikaners always had grave fears that Afrikaans, the very symbol of their roots in Africa, would not survive. By the early 1970s a census revealed that the proportion of people who spoke Afrikaans as their mother

tongue would steadily decline. It was still 18 percent of the population in 1970, but was projected to decline to 15 percent by 2000. English as the language of commerce and industry was steadily becoming dominant among blacks in the polyglot Witwatersrand (Johannesburg, Pretoria and other major towns in the vicinity). A 1972 survey of young Sowetans found that 98 percent of them did not wish to be taught in Afrikaans. Half of those polled considered Afrikaners 'the most cruel and least sympathetic people in South Africa'.<sup>47</sup> In the so-called homelands, where close to half the blacks lived, Afrikaans was also on the retreat. One after the other the African 'homelands' created by the apartheid policy, chose English and a Bantu language as the official languages, leaving Afrikaans out in the cold.

In the first half of the 1970s the survival fears prompted some Afrikaners to engage in a disastrous overreach of power. Among right-wing civil servants and politicians the idea began to take root that Afrikaans could only hold its own against English if the language clause of the 1909 Constitution was applied to black schools as well. In 1975 a conference of white Afrikaans cultural organisations accepted a motion calling on the government to promote Afrikaans in all possible ways to achieve its 'rightful position' in schools for blacks and Asians. Andries Treurnicht, leader of the NP's right-wing and deputy minister of Bantu Administration and Development, held the view that the government had the right to decide the medium of instruction in black schools because white taxpayers subsidized the schools.<sup>48</sup>

It was in this context that the Department of Bantu Administration and Development resolved to enforce the 50-50 rule for Afrikaans and English as languages of instruction in black schools, which had been on the books for quite some time. Inspectors in Soweto and other schools in the southern Transvaal area instructed black schools that mathematics and arithmetic had to be taught in Afrikaans alone, despite the fact that most teachers and pupils probably had only a weak command of Afrikaans. Teacher organisations and black parents on school boards in the townships protested strongly, but the government ignored these protests and also the dire warnings by the official opposition that a volatile situation was building up in Soweto.

On 16 June 1976 thousands of Soweto schoolchildren marched in protest against the language decree. Some were carrying placards bearing slogans 'Down with Afrikaans', 'We are not Boers', and 'If we must do Afrikaans [Prime Minister] Vorster must do Zulu.' When the uprising finally subsided 16 months later, between six hundred and seven hundred black people had been killed.

It was not only political blunders and unfavourable demographic trends that weakened Afrikaans. It also became the victim of its own successes. By the mid-1970s the Afrikaner state had achieved many of its

objectives: a republic, a stable state, a well-protected white labor force and the enforcement of the equality of Afrikaans and English in the state administration, the white educational system and the state radio and television. Polls found that fears over the future of the Afrikaans language now ranked in importance only eighth or ninth out of ten indicators, well below the pursuit or defence of material interests.<sup>49</sup> For middle-class Afrikaners survival increasingly meant the maintenance of their lifestyle under a government they could trust. Their leaders were not prepared to make Afrikaans a major issue in the all-party negotiations for a transition to democracy that started in the early 1990s. Since many of the representatives of the liberation organisations could not speak Afrikaans, the entire negotiations were conducted in English, with no translation facilities being made available.

## **Language diversity in a post-apartheid society, 1990–2000**

When South Africa made the transition to a democracy in 1994 South Africa had a population of 41 million. Some 5.8 million people spoke Afrikaans at home, forming 14.4 percent of the population. It was the home language of 58.5 percent of whites and 82 percent of coloured people. After Zulu (22,9%) and Xhosa (17,9%) Afrikaans was the third biggest speech community. In two provinces Afrikaans was dominant, in the Western Cape (59%) and the Northern Cape (69%). Most Afrikaans-speakers lived in the Western Cape (40%), followed by Gauteng (21 %).<sup>50</sup>

English was the undisputed lingua franca of the literate part of the population, but only some 3,5 million people spoke English at home, of whom 40 percent were white people and most of the rest were coloured and Indian people. Speakers of English as a home language formed 8,6 percent of the total population, the fifth biggest speech community. In the case of both Afrikaans and English over 40 percent of the population understood the language as a second language.

White, coloured and black people who speak Afrikaans as a home language form the largest segment of the consumer market (32 percent against 28 percent for those whose home language is English).<sup>51</sup> Collectively Afrikaans-speakers pay the most personal income tax and they form the largest language group who pay their television and radio licenses.

Nevertheless Afrikaans as the main symbolic expression of Afrikaner nationalism was vulnerable the moment South Africa moved toward an inclusive democracy. The shrinking of the proportion of whites that necessitated the transition also profoundly affected Afrikaans. By 2002 only 14 percent of the population spoke Afrikaans as a first language and of those who spoke it as a first language only 43 percent were white.

Moreover there was no reason why the new government should follow a different language policy than its counterparts on the African continent. The general pattern in Africa was that the elite after liberation insisted on the colonial language as part of the drive to present a modernized African identity and secure the best jobs for it and its children.<sup>52</sup> A new political elite has emerged in South Africa, sometimes referred to as 'Afro-Saxons'.<sup>53</sup> Personified by President Thabo Mbeki, it almost represents a distinct ethnic group. It has divested itself of any ethnic distinctiveness, has embraced British-American culture, speaks a kind of English replete with 'progressive' sociological terms, and vigorously promotes the interests of the black middle class under the umbrella of 'transformation' and 'empowerment'. It has entrenched itself in the leadership positions of the ruling African National Congress. It prefers to see Afrikaans as a white language and dismisses the claim that it is indigenous.

When more than 60 percent of coloured people voted for the NP in the 1994 election, it was thought that strong coloured support for Afrikaans would make it difficult for the ANC to discriminate against Afrikaans. However, it was predominantly coloured people with low educational qualifications (below the tenth year at school, or Std. 8) who supported the NP. Coloured people with post-Matric qualifications overwhelmingly voted for the ANC, which only in the Western Cape makes any special effort to promote Afrikaans.

## **The undermining of Afrikaans as a public language**

That the contending parties in South Africa could agree on a constitution was hailed as a miracle, but the truth is mundane. In the negotiations for an interim constitution (1992-1993) what was labelled 'sufficient consensus' among the parties was needed for a decision to be taken. In effect this was achieved by a sleight of hand. The two main parties (the African National Congress and the National Party) had their demands noted and deferred the resolution of any conflicts between these demands to the post-apartheid regime.

There was no clarity about what was meant by negotiations or agreement. The NP had in mind a mutually beneficial and stable settlement, one that the main parties would change only by mutual agreement. The ANC, by contrast, fought a classic Gramscian 'war of position' in which each concession it extracted from the government became the bridgehead for the next assault in what it called the 'national democratic revolution'.<sup>54</sup> In 1995 Thabo Mbeki, Deputy President of South Africa, would tell an ANC conference that the negotiations for an interim constitution were 'contrived elements of a transition' necessary to end white domination. At no time did the ANC consider them 'as elements of permanence'.<sup>55</sup>

On the issue of official languages the 1993 interim constitution expanded the number from two official languages (English and Afrikaans) to 11, but added that rights attached to languages and their status may not be curtailed. The latter clause was omitted in the final constitution. The national and provincial governments may use any official language (but at least two) and are obliged to take into account 'usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances, and the balance of the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province.' Municipalities are required only to 'take into account' the language and preferences of their residents.<sup>56</sup> The final constitution also radically curtails the right people had under the transitional constitution of 1993 to use the language of their choice in court. Now a person only has the right to be tried in a language he or she understands.<sup>57</sup>

The weakness of the constitutional protection for language diversity soon became abundantly clear. The government has paid little attention to the Pan South African Language Board, set up by the Constitution to promote all official languages. In response to complaints, overwhelmingly laid by Afrikaners, it has frequently found that the language policies and practices of the government and state corporations violate the constitution. But their findings were simply ignored. In May 1997 the Board wrote an open letter to President Nelson Mandela deploring the move towards monolingualism at all levels of government. It posed the question: 'If the very government violates the Constitution how can citizens be expected to honour it? If we allow one aspect of the Constitution to be eroded aren't we opening a floodgate for the disregard of other aspects of our Constitution?'<sup>58</sup>

While the Constitutional Court has not yet sat on the issue of language rights, the general impression is that it will be indifferent or hostile to the idea of minority cultural rights and much more interested in the right of the majority to have access to all educational institutions in their language of choice, and in cost-effectiveness. Politicians, civil servants and judges in the lower tier of the judicial system who deal with the practical implications have so far given far greater weight to cost-effectiveness. This means that English is favoured or exclusively used.

From the start the government followed a language policy that did not even please its own mass following. Close to three-quarters of the entire population prefers government to address it in its own first language. Less than a quarter fully understands government announcements in English. Only thirteen percent of black parents want English as sole medium of instruction for their children, yet English is predominantly used, often as soon as the third school year.<sup>59</sup>

Soon after 1994 the new government appointed large numbers of black civil servants who could not speak Afrikaans. In 1998 the Employment Equity Act was passed, which makes the principle of 'demographic

representivity' compulsory in both the public sector and in private companies employing more than 50 people. According to this the regional demographic profile and the national one (76,7% black, 8.9% coloured, 2.6% Indian, and 10.9% white) must be reflected at all levels of the labour force, including the executive level. The law does not take the language preference of consumers into account. Since English is the only language that is spoken by virtually all the literate people, it will increasingly become the sole language of communication in the civil service and in all companies above the level of small business.

The government has not been immune to criticism of its language policy. In 2002 it tabled a new language bill, which makes provision for interpreter and translation services on an extensive scale and commits government to increasingly make official documents available in all 11 official languages. It is not yet clear what trade-off will take place between language and transformation legislation.

On state television the share of Afrikaans in the evening broadcasts has been drastically cut from 50 percent of one channel in the evening to the present 5 percent of all air time. Yet the evening Afrikaans television news, broadcast at the same time as the English news and one in English by a free to air channel, attracts twice as many viewers as the other two. In a desperate effort to build up the main English radio transmission and television channel as South Africa's 'main news and information channel' the management of the public broadcaster has deliberately neglected the marketing of Afrikaans radio and television and even contemplates turning *Radio sonder Grense*, the Afrikaans radio station, into a predominantly music station.<sup>60</sup>

The question of which language would be used as medium of instruction in public schools and in universities was dealt with in the negotiations for an interim constitution by incorporating both the NP's demand for mother-tongue education and the ANC's one for opening up all schools to all races. The constitution-makers made no attempt to spell out how potential conflicts were to be resolved. This gave a future government the liberty to emphasize what it called the right of black children to have access to all schools and to be taught in the language they prefer, which was invariably English. It relegated to a low priority mother-tongue instruction as a value enshrined in the constitution.

Piet Marais, who was the last NP Minister for National Education but not part of its negotiating team, warned De Klerk at a late stage of the negotiations that 'education was not the priority among our negotiators, which it should be'. He added that in informal talks he had with ANC negotiators he had gained the clear impression that they 'displayed an intolerance towards Afrikaans and to the demand that the Afrikaans universities could continue to imbue their mission with a cultural content'. He urged De Klerk to compile a list of bottom lines and undertakings that the

NP had given to its voters and indicate which the party had met. But at that stage all the main issues had already been settled.<sup>61</sup> The issue of the medium of education nearly caused a breakdown in the negotiations for a final constitution (1995–1996). Cyril Ramaphosa, chairperson of the Constitutional Assembly, pointed out that the NP negotiators had left him in the dark over the importance their party attached to education.<sup>62</sup>

Soon government policy eroded the position of Afrikaans as medium of instruction, raising serious doubts about the ability of an Afrikaans speech community to reproduce itself. Between the 1920s and 1980s single-language Afrikaans state schools and universities were the main institutions for socializing the youth into the Afrikaner community with a particular set of cultural values. (Until 1994 there was no private Afrikaans school.)

Alleging that Afrikaans was used as a language to retain ‘apartheid-style racial exclusivity’, the government soon put pressure on schools to introduce parallel courses in English to cater for blacks. It was a demand difficult to resist because many Afrikaans schools had surplus capacity and had much better facilities than coloured or black schools.

As a result the language character of Afrikaans schools changed substantially. By the beginning of the 1990s there were 1800 schools which were white and Afrikaans; by 2002 only 300 single-medium Afrikaans schools remained, of which almost all were racially inclusive. A major crisis is building up with respect to the training of teachers that can offer Afrikaans-medium instruction in the different school subjects. At present only a quarter of the teachers that will be necessary in five years’ time are being trained.

At university level Kader Asmal, Minister for National Education, and also his predecessor have taken the view that dual-medium or parallel-medium instruction is the only option available for the five Historically Afrikaner Universities (HAUs), which consists of the University of Stellenbosch, University of the Free State, University of Pretoria, and Rand Afrikaans University in Johannesburg, and Potchefstroom University. In 2002 Asmal told a delegation of Afrikaans cultural organisations that student needs were decisive, not the university’s character or the language interests of the Afrikaner community. Asmal has rejected language tests as part of fulfilling entrance requirements. He remarked that such tests may be justifiable in the case of foreign students but for South African students they ‘constitute an unjust imposition and an additional burden of demand.’ In 2002 the government decided that no university may teach only in Afrikaans.<sup>63</sup>

Partly to expand its student numbers and increase revenue from state subsidies, which are tied to students numbers, three historically Afrikaans universities (Pretoria, Rand Afrikaans and Free State) introduced parallel-medium courses: Potchefstroom and Stellenbosch have remained predominantly Afrikaans universities despite government pressure. The University

of Stellenbosch seems to have an irrefutable case to remain an Afrikaans-medium university since it is located in a province where Afrikaans is spoken as a home language by 60 percent of the population and in a metropolitan complex where there are two English medium universities. Yet even here the US Council decided not to make the institution an explicitly Afrikaans institution; it chose to make Afrikaans the 'default language' of instruction. At the latest count 30 percent of undergraduate teaching at Stellenbosch is done in English, which is also the medium of most post-graduate teaching.

In 2000 more than half the students at the HAUs were not white, almost all following courses through the medium of English. The Afrikaans language lobby, with the Group of 63 forming the most prominent organisation, has frequently expressed its concern about the growing use of English in HAUs. It points out that elsewhere in the world dual-medium education led inexorably to the displacement of local languages if they had to co-exist with a universal language that dominated the public sphere.<sup>64</sup> It seems as one HAU (Randse Afrikaanse University) will soon become effectively an English-medium institution and that Afrikaans will steadily lose ground at Pretoria, which offers it on demand as a medium of instruction.

The growing strength of English as a universal language has led to a steady decline of Afrikaans as an academic language. Even before the transition to a democracy in 1994 scientific publication in Afrikaans had declined precipitously. The Afrikaans share of Masters and Doctoral theses written at South African universities in the natural sciences dropped from 35,8% during 1960-73 to 9 percent in 1996. In the case of dissertations in the humanities and social sciences the Afrikaans component between 1975 and 1996 declined from 62 percent to 48 percent.<sup>65</sup> The Afrikaans share of articles in selected academic journals in 1996/7 is on average 20 percent.

Despite being under threat both in schools and universities, Afrikaans remains the dominant literary language in South Africa, judged solely by locally produced books. The following figure gives the literary production profile in the late 1990s.<sup>66</sup>

Language	Poetry	Drama	Fiction	Total
Afrikaans	283	53	2464	2800
English	302	127	545	974
Multilingual	34	20	109	163
African languages	342	283	635	1260

## Responses from the Afrikaans community

A superficial glance would suggest that Afrikaans has little to fear for its future as a public language. But in the same vein as Chairman Mao's response to the request to assess the effects of the French Revolution, one must insist that it is much too early to tell.

The massive electoral strength of the ANC government and the groundswell of English in both the civil service and corporate sectors have induced a strong sense that it is futile to resist the increasing marginalisation of Afrikaans and perhaps even its eclipse as public language. Among sixty percent of Afrikaners the feeling is that their language interests will be weakened and even become extinct.<sup>67</sup>

The new political elite is suspicious of attempts to press the claims and rights of Afrikaans. It tends to denounce these as a clinging to the apartheid era's privileges when the Afrikaners were a ruling minority.<sup>68</sup> It also expresses the view that Afrikaans simply will have to prove itself in the marketplace and that it is not the duty of government to protect any language.

Nevertheless, the post-apartheid order offers new growth opportunities for Afrikaans. Afrikaans newspapers, magazines and books are almost all published by the publishing house Naspers. The company has adapted better than the other publishing houses and is certainly in a better financial position than its competitors due to its commanding share of pay television in South Africa and the rest of Africa. Naspers is the main corporate sponsor of the Afrikaans cultural festivals that have sprung up in the mid-1990s and that have attracted large crowds.

Business, including Afrikaans business, has taken its cue from Government and with very few exceptions only take the financial equation into account. In polls Afrikaners do not spontaneously object to the fact that by far the majority of commercial advertisements are in English. Attempts at consumer boycotts by Afrikaans-speakers have been still-born.

Much of the seemingly vibrant Afrikaans language and culture is the result of the previous investment in an era in which almost all Afrikaans-speaking children almost unthinkingly went to Afrikaans-medium schools. That leads to a sense of complacency, in which most speakers of Afrikaans simply enjoy speaking or reading Afrikaans but find it unnecessary to support cultural organisations or political parties that argue that Afrikaans is under threat. With the exception of the Solidarity, a trade union of white professionals, and the Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging, which offers competitive rates at its holiday resorts, all have suffered dramatic loss of membership.

Against this background Ton Vosloo, chairman of the board of the publishing house Naspers, sounded a serious warning:

It is not to spread panic when one says that Afrikaner people are in a crisis with red lights flashing along their survival path. The examples of marginalisation are numerous; the places where space to exist had been conquered, negotiated or established on our own initiative are increasingly being questioned. This includes even the self-evident right to be served by the authorities in a language that is officially recognized.<sup>69</sup>

Yet none of the Afrikaans newspapers, all published by Naspers, have taken a particularly strong line against the scaling down of Afrikaans. Its target market in publishing has changed considerably. There are now more coloured and black people who speak Afrikaans as a home language than whites, and Afrikaans publications have done fairly well in attracting the former without losing the latter. More coloured people and blacks read *Die Burger*, the leading Afrikaans daily, than whites, and one-third of the readership of *Rapport*, the mass Sunday paper, comprises 'non-whites'.

The editorial line in the Naspers papers tends to be that Afrikaners have gained very little through protests against the scaling down of Afrikaans and that it may be better for them to make their peace with the reduced status of Afrikaans. It is pointed out that with minor exceptions, black people do not speak up against the predominant position of English and the marginalization of their languages. Coloured Afrikaans speakers also do not appear to be unduly concerned. Whereas 83 percent of Afrikaners are unhappy about the way government treats their language, only 32 percent of coloureds and only 23 percent of Africans express a similar sentiment.<sup>70</sup>

*Die Burger*, which is widely read in the Western Cape where 60 percent of the people are coloured, takes the line that the larger the Afrikaans speech community, the less the danger that Afrikaans would become a kitchen language.<sup>71</sup> In an effort to attract coloured Afrikaans-speakers it no longer uses the term Afrikaner except in a strictly limited sense, preferring instead the new term 'Afrikaanses' to embrace all speakers of Afrikaans.

However, the urbanized, better-educated coloured Afrikaans people are 'migrating' to English, sending their children to English-medium schools where they are able to, and talking English at home. Some forty percent of coloured people still live in acute poverty whose the daily struggle for survival rules out their participation in a language struggle. In these circumstances some black Afrikaans academics are hostile or indifferent towards efforts to promote Afrikaans. For them worries about Afrikaans are mainly a white concern and represent 'white politi-

cal, economic and social interests.' 'It is for them a core element in their cultural achievement, their sense of uniqueness, their political control, their loss of political control, the earlier triumph and the present setback of their nationalism.'<sup>72</sup>

But the two leading black intellectual intellectuals who address the issue of Afrikaans sound a different note. In a report to government, Jakes Gerwel, a previous Rector of the University of the Western Cape, an originally 'coloured' Afrikaans university that switched to English during the 1980s, recommended that two universities be assigned a special responsibility to promote Afrikaans. Yet he views much of the present Afrikaans language struggle with considerable suspicion.

Neville Alexander, like Gerwel, is wary of the possibility that a struggle for Afrikaans could give birth to a revived Afrikaner nationalist struggle leading to ethnic warfare and the collapse of democracy. However, he is willing to support protests against the marginalization of Afrikaans provided they take the form of a campaign to advance all the non-dominant languages. He also recognises the constructive role Afrikaans can play. He urges Afrikaners to use their experience in developing their language to assist the other non-dominant languages to achieve full public status, up to the point of medium of tuition in universities. A strong protagonist of mother-tongue education, he believes that this should be the base from which children acquire several other South African languages.<sup>73</sup>

## Conclusion

In many ways Afrikaans is a victim of its own successes. Afrikaans developed as the symbol of an Afrikaner identity deeply wounded by the South African War (1899–1902) and the cultural arrogance of a much wealthier English-speaking community. Afrikaners used the language to establish a national literature and a national school of history. Afrikaans was used to mobilize Afrikaner support for the effort to establish Afrikaner enterprises. While there still were no Afrikaner companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange as late as 1948, one third of the JSE is presently controlled by Afrikaners. Afrikaans mother-tongue education was instrumental in the rehabilitation of the large proportion of Afrikaners who were considered poor whites. Poverty had virtually disappeared in Afrikaner ranks. Afrikaans was the very symbol of the successes of the Afrikaner nationalist movement of the twentieth century.

The defeat of apartheid in the 1990s deprived Afrikaans of the protection of the state and undermined the cohesiveness the Afrikaner community on the language issue. To a decreasing extent Afrikaans remains a key to career and job prospects. Whereas Afrikaans was previously a dominant

concern of people in control of universities or the NP as a party it is now only one of several priorities that has to be juggled. This juggling act has to be performed under the sustained pressure of government to promote a racial transformation of society with English as the vehicle. The future of Afrikaans depends vitally on the degree of loyalty its speakers have to the language in which they were brought up.

## Endnotes

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