Monolingual Pressures, Multilingual Realities:

Prospects for English in 21ˢᵗ Century South Africa

by

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Introduction

This study considers the historical role of English in South Africa, a former British colony which made the transition from white-minority rule to black-majority rule only in the final decade of the twentieth century. During white-minority rule, most government actions seemed to be motivated by racial prejudice, and language policy was no exception. The languages of the indigenous African majority were largely ignored and excluded from most important spheres of public communication; meanwhile, the languages of the white minority, English and Afrikaans, received considerable government support and were accorded 'official language' status. Today, political power in South Africa reflects the massive numerical superiority of indigenous Africans over ethnic Europeans, and the new leaders have pledged to redress the inequalities of white rule in all areas of public policy. Against this background, what role will English play in twenty-first-century South Africa?

First of all, to explain how a language from a far-flung European land came to play a central role in the society of a southern African country, I shall outline the historical developments that led to the emergence of a white elite which dominated key areas of public life, prior to the handover of power to leaders from the black African community. In parallel with this, I shall trace the history of deep racial prejudice in South Africa, illustrating the extent to which this prejudice influenced government policy, with particular reference to language and education. I shall then seek to ascertain how, if at all, the role and status of English in South Africa have changed in the few years since political power was transferred to the black majority. To this end, I shall attempt to gauge attitudes towards English among national decision-makers (as reflected in government language policy) and among the population at large (as far as such attitudes may be accurately perceived). Finally, on the basis of current trends and attitudes, I shall speculate as to how the role and status of English may change as South Africa enters the new millennium.

White minority rule: English as a beneficiary of linguistic and educational racism

Put simply, the story of white minority rule in South Africa is one of intolerance and racial conflict. The origins of white domination can be traced all the way back to 1652, the year in which a small expeditionary force from the Dutch East India Company (VOC), under the command of Jan van Riebeeck, landed near what later became Cape Town. Prior to their arrival, the Dutch had been intent less on colonizing the area than on establishing a base where their ships could be supplied and serviced. However, as the new arrivals began establishing their own farms, the small settlement developed into a *de facto* Dutch colony. From the outset, racial discrimination became the norm: the Dutch brought in slaves, mostly from present-day Indonesia, Madagascar and Mozambique, and drove the indigenous *Khoisan* from their traditional lands. Throughout the second half of the 17th Century, more Dutch settlers arrived in the area, along with some French Huguenots (who were forbidden by the Dutch East India Company from using their mother-tongue) and Germans. Significantly, some of the settlers began leaving the Cape area, thereby drifting beyond the control of the Dutch East India Company. However, despite arriving in the area long after the Dutch, it

was Britain that went on to become the dominant colonial power, and it remained so until the establishment of the Union of South Africa, a self-governing dominion, in 1910 (with the exception of a brief period in the early nineteenth century when control returned to Holland).

The English language began to gain a foothold in South Africa in the early years of the nineteenth century, following the arrival of settlers from Britain. The first significant group of British settlers, numbering around 5,000, moved into the Eastern Cape around 1820, with subsequent influxes occurring in the mid 19th Century (principally in Natal) and in the late 19th Century (following the discovery of gold and diamonds). The English language received considerable support from the British colonial authorities, who even went as far as to impose it as the official language in the Cape colony, disregarding the linguistic preferences of all other inhabitants. Measures such as this were early indicators both of the racial intolerance that came to characterize the history of South Africa, and of the often bitter rivalry between the English- and Dutch-speaking communities (which, to some extent, prevails even today).

In response to the changes made by the British, especially the promotion of the English language over Dutch and the abolition of slavery, many Afrikaners (i.e. descendents of the original Dutch settlers) began migrating east to escape British control. In the mid 1830s, about 12,000 Afrikaner *Voortrekkers* (literally, foretrekkers) left their farms and travelled hundreds of miles to Natal (modern-day Kwazulu/Natal). During their journey (known as "the Great Trek"), the Voortrekkers encountered indigenous African groups, often with bloody consequences (e.g. in 1838, their forces killed some 3,000 Zulus in a single battle). Fearing further unrest, the British sent a military force to Natal in 1843, forcing the Voortrekkers north into the Transvaal. The Afrikaners managed to evade British control for only a few more decades, but in their quest for independence, they established the so-called 'Boer Republics' (the most durable of which were the Orange Free State and Transvaal). This course of action led them into a full-scale war with the British colonial authorities, which they eventually lost, sustaining thousands of casualties.

In the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer war, the Afrikaners once again came under British control. As before, the colonial authorities displayed no inclination towards

tolerance: not only did they make English the compulsory language of schooling, but they also proscribed any use of Dutch, except during Dutch classes, with offenders facing public humiliation (Ridge 1996: 33). In 1910, the British parliament passed the Act of Union that brought British and Afrikaner colonies together to create a united and independent South Africa. However, this did not spell an end to discrimination and intolerance. Indeed, discriminatory practices became even further entrenched, as a series of bills were passed to ensure white domination.

At the 1909 union convention, which paved the way for the foundation of the Union of South Africa, language issues were very much to the fore. However, in this respect, the assembled parties were mainly concerned with reconciling the conflicting linguistic interests of the British and the Afrikaners, rather than addressing any of the issues pertaining to the majority black population. The language clause in the 1910 Union Constitution designated English and Dutch as the only official languages. In 1925, Dutch was replaced as an official language by Afrikaans (as the South African variety of Dutch had become known). No mention whatsoever was made of African languages.

Soon after the new self-governing Union of South Africa came into existence, a shift in political power did occur, though it was not a shift from the white minority to the black majority, but from the English-speaking community (descendents of the British settlers) to the Afrikaans-speaking community. The Afrikaners recovered quickly from their defeat in the Anglo-Boer war (during which more than 26,000 people—including many women and children—are estimated to have died in British concentration camps) and went on to become the dominant political force in South Africa. During the 1920s and the 1930s, Afrikaner cultural organizations, such as the *Broederbond* (a secret ultra-nationalistic Afrikaner brotherhood) acted as vehicles for the reassertion of the Afrikaner cultural identity. By the 1940s, the National Party (NP) had gained widespread appeal among Afrikaners by emphasizing racial segregation (*apartheid*) and Afrikaner nationalism. The National Party fought the 1948 election pledging to bring apartheid into all areas of social and economic life in South Africa.

Soon after the NP victory in the 1948 election, the FAK (*Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereninge*, i.e. Federation of Afrikaner Cultural Organizations)

put forward a policy of Christian National Education, which dictated that education for all ethnic Africans should reflect the outlook of the Boer (Afrikaner) nation. Professor van Rooy, Chairman of the FAK (and also of the *Broederbond*) at the time, articulated characteristic hardline views in a document issued under the auspices of the Institute for Christian National Education: "we want no mixing of languages, no mixing of cultures, no mixing of religions, and no mixing of races". Article 15 of the policy document outlined the basis for the education of African children: "Native education should be based on the principles of trusteeship, non-equality, and segregation; its aim should be to inculcate the white man's view of life, especially that of the Boer nation, which is the senior trustee". Such ideas were taken a step further in 1949, when the government appointed a commission (the Eiselen Commission on Native Education) to investigate the issue of education for the indigenous African population. In essence, Eiselen (1951) recommended that different races should receive different forms of education. With regard to language education, the commission recommended that instruction in indigenous African languages be extended to primary education, and proposed the widespread study of Afrikaans in black schools, irrespective of the educational interests of the children concerned (Hartshorne 1995: 310).

The recommendations of the Eiselen Commission became law in the infamous Bantu Education Act of 1953. In essence, the education reforms meant that blacks were to be taught only the basic skills required to do manual labour and to follow the instructions of whites. According to Bunting (1989), the extension of African mother-tongue education made it more difficult for ethnic Africans to study subjects like mathematics (which were inadequately translated into the vernacular) and led to a decline in standards in the two official languages, English and Afrikaans. In short, Bantu education (i.e. education for the indigenous African population) led to an all-round decline in educational standards for black Africans—which was undoubtedly what the initiators of the policy were hoping to achieve. Indeed, Verwoerd, generally regarded as one of the key architects of apartheid, admitted as much in a speech to the South African senate in 1954: "there is no place for him [the Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour.... For this reason, it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European community" (Cited in Bunting 1989).

By 1959, the Department of Bantu Education (which was headed by Verwoerd himself) succeeded in implementing Eiselen's recommendation that indigenous mother-tongues be used as the media for primary school education. However, the Department chose to disregard another of his recommendations, namely that only one official language be made compulsory at the secondary school level. Instead, it was decided that half of secondary school subjects should be taught through the medium of English and the other half through the medium of Afrikaans. The compulsory study of Afrikaans was seen by black students as an attempt by the government both to limit their progress in society by restricting access to educational and employment opportunities, and to maintain ideological control by denying them access to the wider intellectual debate taking place in English (Wade 1997). The promotion of Afrikaans was also undoubtedly motivated by a fear among the Afrikaner leadership that English may become too dominant. Over the following two decades, Afrikaans-medium instruction became the focus of much opposition to apartheid education policy. At the same time, English—which was identified with opposition to Bantu Education—was becoming a definite beneficiary of this opposition to Afrikaans (and this was to have important implications later, in the post-apartheid era). In 1976, black resentment boiled over into a wave of student protests, known popularly as "the Soweto Uprising" (which, in turn, ultimately helped bring about a change of government policy—the 1979 Bantu Education Amendment Act introduced English as a medium of instruction in all black schools).

As a fundamental tenet of apartheid, the government sought to impose rigid ethnic categories on South Africa's population. To this end, it attached to each black African a tribal or ethnic "identity", within a single racial classification, and established geographical areas for different ethnic/linguistic groups. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Africans were assigned to separate residential areas according to perceived ethnic identity, and in an attempt to institutionalize segregation, portions of these areas were designated as self-governing "homelands". Finally, in the 1970s and the 1980s, four such homelands—Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, and Ciskei—were granted nominal "independence" (although they were not recognized as separate nations by any country other than South Africa); as such, they were the only areas where indigenous African languages were accorded "official status".

Elsewhere in South Africa, the government pursued a policy of official 'bilingualism', which, despite its progressive-sounding name, effectively meant the marginalization of all languages except Afrikaans and English. Indeed, throughout the whole period from the foundation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 to the accession to power of President Nelson Mandela in 1994, indigenous African languages were all but neglected by the government. As Chick and Wade (1996) point out, South Africa's official bilingual (English/Afrikaans) policy helped maintain the hegemony of the white minority, since a high level of proficiency in both languages was required for access to a university education and for entry into professions such as teaching, public service and the law. Consequently, those without an excellent command of either of the two ex-colonial languages were all but denied the possibility of acquiring a decent education, making a comfortable living, or participating in the national political debate.

After decades of guerilla war and international political and economic sanctions, the National Party government, under the leadership of F.W. DeKlerk, finally declared an end to the egregious policy of apartheid in 1991. Then, three years later, free elections, open to members of all racial groups, were held on the basis of one-man, one vote. A new political order under the leadership of Nelson Mandela of the predominantly black African National Congress (ANC) was swept to power, vowing to create equal opportunities and equal conditions for all South Africans.

Attitudes towards English since the end of white-minority rule

As I explained in the previous section, linguistic discrimination was standard practice in white-ruled South Africa, regardless of which group—the Dutch East India Company, the British colonial authorities, or the Afrikaner-dominated National Party—happened to wield power at the time. In 1994, when control of the country was finally transferred to the black African majority, the English language occupied a position of privilege out of all proportion with the number of L1-English-speakers in the country. And although white Europeans no longer hold the reins of power, this is still the case—English remains, even today, the

language of highest prestige in South Africa, and it is the language which most black parents want their children to learn. Indeed, if anything, the appeal of English has increased since the end of the apartheid era.

Given the linguistic injustices of the apartheid era, it is perhaps only natural that South Africa's new rulers should wish to ensure that local African languages receive the support that was denied them by successive white governments. Indeed, such a commitment is stressed in Clause 6(2) of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which reads: "recognizing the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages". At the heart of South Africa's post-apartheid language policy, then, is a pledge to respect the linguistic rights of all South Africans, irrespective of their ethnicity. A new official policy of 'multilingualism' has been introduced to ensure that all South Africans have the right to use the language of their choice, and that no-one is discriminated against on the grounds of language. In line with this policy, nine indigenous African languages have been elevated to the status enjoyed by English and Afrikaans alone under apartheid. The eleven official languages of South Africa are presented in Table 1 (below):

Table 1

Official languages	Number of first-language speakers	% of South African population
IsiZulu,	9,200,000	22.9%
IsiXhosa	7,196,118	17.9%
Afrikaans	5,811,547	14.4%
Sepedi (also known as Northern Sotho)	3,695,846	9.2%
English	3,457,000	8.6%
Setswana	3,301,774	8.2%
Sesotho (also known as Southern Sotho)	3,104,197	7.7%
Xitsonga	1,756,105	4.4%
Siswati	1,013,193	2.5%
Tshivenda	876,409	2.2%
IsiNdebele	586,961	1.5%

Source: *Statistics South Africa* (July 1999).

To judge from its pronouncements to date, the new, post-apartheid government has been unequivocal in its desire to redress the linguistic injustices of the years of white rule. Soon after coming to power, the government set about tackling the issue. It established, through an Act of Parliament, the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB), a thirteen-member panel with responsibility for all language-related matters. A central plank of the government's attempts to create a discrimination-free linguistic environment is its Language-in-Education Policy, which was set out in the National Education Policy Act of 1996. In drawing up legislation, the government has been careful to involve a diverse range of bodies—provincial education departments, representatives from the teaching profession, professional organizations and NGOs—in the policy-formulation process. The Language-in-Education Policy outlines standards for the use of language in South African education; determines the number and level of languages to be offered; and provides guidelines on policy implementation, compliance with the language provisions in the Constitution, and the development of vernacular languages as media for mother-tongue education.

The South African approach to language policy, as outlined in numerous directives, is heavily influenced by research into language acquisition and education, particularly by advocates of multilingualism, such as Kenji Hakuta, Jim Cummins and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas. In essence, South African language policy is based on the "additive bilingualism" model (Skutnabb-Kangas 1988; August & Hakuta 1997), which emphasizes the maintenance of people's home language(s) while guaranteeing them access to additional language(s). Although the conditions are very different from those which prevail in South Africa, this same model is practiced in Sweden, where the state provides immigrant children with "home language instructors", while they acquire Swedish through immersion in mainstream society.

Given the fervour with which South Africa's post-apartheid rulers have addressed their task of creating equitable linguistic conditions, one might conclude that the status of English is bound to decline. Indeed, as the census statistics in Table 1 illustrate, first-language English-speakers, at just under 3.5 million, comprise a relatively small proportion of the South African population. However, to gauge the importance of English purely in terms of the number of first-language speakers would be to ignore the extent to which use of the language has spread among

South Africans of all ethnic backgrounds. In this connection, it is interesting to note that in the 1996 Census more than 94% of South Africa's ethnic Indian population (just under 1 million people) specified English as their mother tongue, as did 16.4% of those listed as "Coloured" (i.e. mixed-race), as well as more than 100,000 black Africans.

It would be impossible, of course, for any government to dictate the language preferences of its citizens, and the South African government recognizes this fact as much as any other. It has, therefore, vowed to safeguard linguistic rights, particularly in the key area of education. At the heart of the government's Language-in-Education Policy is a pledge to respect the right of parents to choose the medium of their children's education. However, according to Van Tonder (1999), implementation of the new policy is being hindered by the fact that too many black Africans regard English as a language of empowerment and therefore favour the use of English, rather than their own 'home languages', as the medium of education for their children. As Van Tonder puts it, they "marginalize" their own languages. This tendency among black Africans to regard English (or, indeed, other ex-colonial European languages like French) as superior to their own indigenous vernaculars is prevalent throughout sub-Saharan Africa, according to Adegbija (1994). In Adegbija's view, such attitudes developed because European languages were identified as the languages of the conquerors of Africa. The very aggressive language policies pursued by colonial authorities (such as those described in the previous section) served to reinforce these perceptions.

If the South African government is to succeed in implementing its Language-in-Education policy, it must wage a battle for people's hearts and minds: economically-disadvantaged black South African parents have to be convinced that their children's educational interests will not be jeopardized if they receive a non-English-medium education. Of course, there has been a massive amount of research into the link between linguistic and cognitive development, and most academics have come to the conclusion that bilingual education is actually a boon, rather than a hindrance, to academic success (August & Hakuta 1997; Krashen 1996). But this message is proving difficult to sell to parents desperate to safeguard the future livelihoods of their children. And this is perhaps not so surprising: even in the United States, many immigrants from Latin

America insist that their children be taught in English, rather than their mother tongue, Spanish. Indeed, many have gone further, actively lending support to anti-bilingual initiatives, such as Proposition 227, which seeks to eliminate most home-language education programmes in the state of California (Crawford 1998).

There is ample evidence, in the form of official policy declarations (e.g. Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology 1996; Bengu 1997; Department of Education 1997; PANSALB 1999), of the South African government's commitment to the creation of a society where multilingualism and language equality are the norm. However, there are still those who doubt whether South Africa's leaders possess the requisite political will to see through the changes needed to create such a society. Neville Alexander (1999), one of South Africa's best known linguists and head of the government's Language Plan Task Group (LANGTAG), is one such person.

As an example of government equivocation over the language-in-education issue, Alexander points to the "Report of the President's Education Initiative Research Project", published in 1999 under the auspices of the influential Joint Education Trust. Although the report's authors, Nick Taylor and Penny Vinjevold, acknowledge the government's commitment to the principle of additive bilingualism, they maintain that language-in-education policy must, first and foremost, reflect the wishes of the people. In this regard, they point out that the overwhelming majority of parents and schools, particularly in the urban areas, are opting for a "straight-for-English approach". Research appears to confirm this grass-roots enthusiasm for English: according to one survey on the question of language use in schools, 53% of respondents, all speakers of an indigenous vernacular, expressed a preference for English as the language of instruction in primary schools, while 90% wanted English in some format in secondary schools (Cited by Andrew Foley in International Education – EJ, 1997).

As Taylor and Vinjevold see it, this trend has developed because parents regard English as a means of gaining access to mainstream national and global society. They note other serious obstacles to the implementation of a mother-tongue education policy, notably: the heterogeneous nature of many urban schools, caused by rapid demographic shifts; the fact that many children do not have an

obvious mother tongue; and the mismatch in the language competences of teachers and their pupils. Taylor & Vinjevold advocate a greater emphasis on teacher-training programmes, with the development of linguistic competence as a central component. Given the strong desire among parents for English-medium instruction, the report recommends that English language education be made a central feature of all pre- and in-service teacher training courses (Taylor & Vinjevold 1999).

Alexander (1999) is highly critical of the recommendations made in the Report of the President's Education Initiative, believing them to constitute an obstacle to the government's avowed goal of creating an equitable, multilingual society. In Alexander's view, adherence to the principle of additive bilingualism has particularly important political implications in the South African context because of the country's past experiences of mother-tongue education. As mentioned earlier, the apartheid authorities once introduced, through the 1953 Bantu Education Act, a poorly-resourced form of "mother-tongue instruction" as part of its scheme to ensure that education for blacks remained inferior to that for whites. This may explain why, even today, many black parents are reluctant to have their children educated through the medium of their own first language. According to Alexander, this distrust of L1-medium education poses problems not only for the successful implementation of a multilingual language-in-education policy, but also for the modernization of the African languages at the macro-linguistic level of planning.

Leaving aside the particularly tainted reputation that blights mother-tongue education in South Africa, the experiences of other countries seem to suggest that it is difficult for government to sell the idea of home-language-medium education in any society where another language is perceived as offering better educational/occupational prospects. Herein lies an archetypal Catch-22 situation— home language (mother-tongue) education programmes will garner little support from parents until they are seen to be facilitating rather than hindering their children's educational progress, but such programmes may never be given the chance to flourish because parents demand that their children be educated, from the outset, through the language of highest prestige in their society. Even in Sweden, a model for bilingual education advocates everywhere, many immigrants have been lukewarm in their enthusiasm for the home-language instruction

opportunities provided by the state. For instance, in 1994, out of 102,000 secondary school pupils entitled to free home language classes, only 59,000 were enrolled (Statistiska Meddelanden 1994).

On this basis, it would appear that the South African government faces an uphill battle to convince black parents that mother-tongue education is in their children's best interests. In this connection, it is perhaps worth bearing in mind that in South Africa the advocates of mother-tongue education are mainly highly-educated people (academics, government officials, etc.) who have already had the benefit of mastering English. Meanwhile, there has been no grass roots agitation among ordinary black people in support of mother-tongue education. Ironically, the most notable expression of black discontent over the issue of language-in-education came in the form of the mass demonstrations in favour of English-medium education (and against Afrikaans) in the 1960s and 1970s. In this regard, it is worth remembering that during apartheid many blacks came to regard English as the language of resistance. Indeed, English was the language of preference within anti-apartheid organizations (as it was perceived as less divisive than any of the indigenous African languages), as well the medium of education for many of today's political leaders.

Even though the government has consistently declared its commitment to the principle of multilingualism, it has presided over a strengthening of the position of English in South African society during the past six years. While the use of Afrikaans has declined markedly in certain key domains, such as government institutions, the mass media, and the armed forces, English has reached a seemingly unassailable position. Meanwhile, as educational opportunities have improved, more non-whites now have access to tertiary-level education, which is usually pursued through the medium of English. Although, as Webb (1998) points out, only about 25% of South Africans currently possess a reasonably effective proficiency in English, the language does seem to have the support of an emerging urban, black middle-class. This large and ever-increasing number of L2-English speakers, all of whom have a vested interest in maintaining the advantages that English confers, is a compelling reason for believing that English will remain the language of highest prestige in South African society for many years to come.

Conclusion: English in the 21st Century

Given its role in the liberation struggle and its firmly-entrenched position in South African public life, there was never really any question that English would survive in the immediate post-apartheid era. Rather, as the ANC prepared to assume power after its 1994 general election victory, the question was one of whether English would lose any of the status and importance it had enjoyed under white-minority rule. Six years on, neither South Africa's leaders nor the black population at large seem keen to effect any downgrading of the English language. However, despite reassurances from the government that there would be no linguistic retribution against Afrikaans (e.g. Office of the President 1997), the role of that language in South African society has undoubtedly declined. While language attitude surveys, such as those conducted among South African Defence Force personnel (De Klerk & Barkhuizen 1998a), have found that most blacks believe Afrikaans should no longer occupy a privileged position in society, attitudes towards the English language remain overwhelmingly positive.

Meanwhile, in a country with a recent history of inter-ethnic violence (such as the Zulu-Xhosa clashes in the run-up to the 1994 elections), English enjoys the advantage of not being one of the vernacular languages. Now, with white L1-English-speakers no longer holding the reins of power in South Africa, the use of English can hardly be perceived as tool for maintaining the hegemony of the political elite. In fact, English is now regarded by some as a means of promoting national cohesion, because it is an ethnically "neutral" language. English already serves as a "neutral" link-language in India (Kachru 1983), and there is also an African example, in the form of Zambia (Schmied 1991).

Aside from the fact that most blacks seem to favour the use of English, there are several other strong reasons for believing that the language will continue to play a major role in South African society. Foremost among these, perhaps, is the status that English enjoys as the main language of international communication, spoken by hundreds of millions and taught in schools in virtually every country in the world. As long as the current geopolitical situation (with the United States as the world's sole superpower) prevails, the appeal of English as a target

language is likely to remain extremely strong. As in other developing countries, English proficiency is widely perceived as a tool for personal advancement. English is also regarded as a means of ensuring effective access to the rapidly-changing world of commerce and high technology, where its power as an information-gathering medium is more pronounced than ever. In recognition of this, South Africa has embraced the Internet with particular enthusiasm: according to one of the country's main web-based enterprises, South Africa is currently the 16th most "connected" country on the Internet (South Africa Online 1999).

Another strength of English lies in the fact that it has already become the accepted medium of communication in much of the private and public sector in South Africa, especially since the *de facto* relegation of Afrikaans. Given this reality and the widespread appeal of English among ordinary black people, proponents of the status quo argue that any money spent on increasing the role of additional languages in public domains would constitute a waste of precious financial resources. Indeed, the greatest impediment to the implementation of a truly equitable multilingual language policy, at least in the short- to medium-term, is a financial one—South Africa simply lacks the financial resources to overhaul comprehensively the current system. While a huge capital outlay would be required for translation, training, and the development of new educational resources (especially if extended to all of South Africa's 11 official languages), South Africa needs to address a plethora of arguably more pressing problems, not least of which are: a spiralling crime rate (according to CNN, a murder or attempted murder occurs every 12 minutes); 30% unemployment; and one of the fastest growing HIV/AIDS epidemics in the world.

On the basis of all the above, it appears that the role of English will continue growing stronger, rather than weaker, as South Africa enters the 21st Century. Given the legacy of apartheid and the unresolved questions of language and ethnic identity, language issues will continue to arouse strong emotions. However, not even the most ardent proponents of multilingualism seem to be suggesting that English should retire to a minor role in South African society. In the key battleground of education, the argument today is between those (like Neville Alexander) who would be content for English to serve as a strong L2 for most South Africans, though studied in school as a subject <u>after</u> literacy has been achieved in the home language, and those like Nick Taylor and Penny Vinjevold, who believe that parental

demands for English-medium education must be respected. Given the severe financial constraints within which South African governments will have to work, at least for the foreseeable future, a uniform, English-medium education system may prove more cost-effective and easy to administer than a more fragmented mother-tongue-based approach, which relatively few blacks currently seem to want. Of course, the implementation of universal English-medium education would present its own tough challenges, not least in terms of teacher-training. At the moment, it would be fair to say that English is a long way from fulfilling the role of a *lingua franca* in South African society. However, if a "straight for English" approach to education were to be adopted, with English-medium instruction becoming the norm in black communities during the course of the 21st Century, the English language could develop into a true second language for South Africans of all ethnic backgrounds.

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