

LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

DAVID MUNROE

Among the countries where language has complicated educational policy, South Africa is probably unique. The white or "European" minority of the population is not only separated from the African, Coloured and Asiatic, it is divided within itself between Afrikaaner and English. This creates unusual problems. Afrikaans is a new language which has developed during the past century, and its use is limited almost exclusively to the Afrikaners (the Boers), while English, of course, is not only an international language but also the principal *lingua franca* of the rest of the African continent. Consequently, even leaving aside the numerous native dialects which cannot be ignored in determining educational policies, political leaders have been faced with the problem of encouraging the wider use of Afrikaans without eliminating the general use of English.

Afrikaans and its Origins

What is Afrikaans and what are its origins? It is the home language of more than half the white population and it has evolved from Dutch, although over the years it has been influenced by the languages of other cultural groups — English, Huguenot, Malay and Bantu. Until 1875 it had only an oral form and was used exclusively in the homes of the Boers, while Dutch remained the official language of Church and Government. It was then, during a period when political feeling between the Boer republics and Great Britain was particularly bitter, that the Rev. S. J. du Toit founded the movement known as the Afrikaner Bond to encourage the speaking and writing of the new language. In those days the movement was strongly anti-British. Subsequently, however, under the leadership of J. H. Hofmeyr, these tactics changed and rivalry developed between Afrikaans and Dutch, which was designated with English, as a second official language when the Union of South Africa was established in 1910.

Meanwhile, in the decade following the end of the Anglo-Boer War, the High Commissioner, Lord Milner, made a determined effort to anglicize the Afrikaners. Establishing a number of secondary schools on the pattern of the Grammar Schools of England, he brought out many schoolmasters from Britain who were successful in implanting the traditions of Victorian education, including separate schools for boys and girls. One of the most successful and distinguished of these schoolmasters was Sir John Adamson who became Director of Education in the Transvaal from 1905-1924. Not unnaturally, there was strong reaction from the Boer leaders. General Smuts, as Minister of Education in the Transvaal, and General Hertzog, who held the same post in the Orange Free State, challenged Milner through a movement which they called

Christian National Education. Schools were established in which Afrikaans was the language of instruction, though Dutch and English were taught as well, and Adamson supported Smuts in 1907 in requiring that mother-tongue instruction be made available. In 1909 a cultural body was formed — Die Suid Afrikaanse Akademie in Taal, Lettere en Kunst—and during the years following a strong nationalist movement swept the Boer community. Newspapers were established; Afrikaans became the language of worship in the Dutch Reformed Church and in 1933 a translation of the Bible was completed; school textbooks were translated and later were prepared by Afrikaans scholars and teachers; and, perhaps most remarkable of all, a body of literature, with a singular vigour and charm, was gradually produced. The new language, which had usurped the place of Dutch, was now firmly established as a rival of English, and it has remained in that position ever since.

While South Africa is a bilingual country, its bilingualism is obviously different from that found elsewhere. Twenty years ago it was estimated that two-thirds of the European residents spoke both languages: now the proportion has been raised to four-fifths. The Orange Free State, where the Afrikaners are in the largest majority, has the largest proportion of bilingual people and Bloemfontein, its capital, shares with Pretoria the distinction of being the most bilingual of the cities. On the other hand, Natal, the English stronghold, is the only province in which less than half the population is bilingual and Durban, its capital, has the lowest rate among the cities. Compared with those of other countries in which more than one official language is used, South Africa's language groups are more widely distributed and more interdependent. One hears both languages almost everywhere, in public conveyances, in stores and offices, in politics and in sports. Stellenbosch, a charming little town in the Paarl Valley of Cape Province, may be considered the cradle of Afrikaans culture and intellectual life. Four of the country's prime ministers are graduates of its university — Smuts, Malan, Strydom and Verwoerd. Each was dedicated to the encouragement of Afrikaans but all accepted the principle of a bilingual nation and, in their opinion, the encouragement of bilingualism was a task for the schools.

Experiments in Bilingualism

Experiments in bilingual education were attempted in South Africa even in colonial days. Grey College, in Bloemfontein, was founded in 1855 when the Orange Free State was a republic and from the outset it has been a bilingual institution. When it opened, the two languages were English and Dutch, but Afrikaans replaced the latter two generations ago. Operated now as a "parallel medium" school, there is an equal proportion of Afrikaans and English boys among the 1,100 students and they are almost evenly divided between the primary and secondary departments. About one-quarter live in the four residence or hostels, where the traditions of the English "house system" are followed closely. Each boy is taught

all subjects in his mother tongue, but outside the classroom the two groups mix freely in the recreation rooms, the playing fields, the dining halls and hostels. The daily assemblies are conducted alternately in each language, both languages are used in school debates and the magazine includes contributions from both groups. The staff members are all bilingual.

Grey is now a government school, administered by the provincial Department of Education, although it is allowed some special privileges which permit preference in admission to the sons of graduates and the imposition of a tuition fee. Critics complain that many of the boys do not become completely bilingual or that the students form exclusive cliques based on ethnic group or language, and even the Headmaster admits that the instructional program is conducted in two more or less separate schools. Yet there is abundant evidence that boys and staff mix freely on the playgrounds, in the residences and in the social and extra-curricular activities.

A different approach was taken in the Boys' High School at Stellenbosch about forty years ago by Paul Roos, who developed what is called a "dual medium" school. Here lessons were taught in either or both languages by a staff that was fully bilingual. The teachers, in the higher grades at least, changed from one language to another during a single lesson, according to the preference or needs of the student or the subject matter being taught. School administration and assemblies were conducted in each language for a week at a time and the sports program was particularly famous because Roos had been captain of one of the Springbok Rugby teams. The school maintained a reputation, not only for excellence in athletics, but for the spirit of tolerance and understanding that was evident both on and off the playing fields.

After the Boer War, Milner took firm direction of educational policies; the mining industry attracted many new settlers from England to homes in the Transvaal; schools were established, some of them public, while others were private church institutions modelled on Eton. Further expansion occurred after the Union was formed in 1910, when primary and secondary education were assigned to the four provinces and the jurisdiction over higher education was placed under the central government. The merits of the parallel- and dual- medium schools were generally appreciated but the success of Grey or Stellenbosch was not easy to repeat. When Jan Hofmeyr was persuaded by his friend, General Smuts, to become principal of the Boys' High School in Pretoria in 1908, he found that the Roos formula would not work because many of the teachers were new arrivals from England who could not speak Afrikaans. Consequently he introduced the system of having certain subjects taught in one language while others were taught in the second. This plan was copied by General Hertzog, as Minister of Education in the Orange Free State, who required that three of the principal subjects should be taught in Dutch and three in English. Gradually two principles became recognized: that each child should

begin his education in his mother tongue and he must learn to speak both languages.

Efforts to Build a Bilingual Nation

Between the two World Wars statesmen and schoolmasters were genuinely concerned with the need to build a united bilingual nation. A department of education in each of the four provinces exercised a strong control over elementary and secondary education and the training of elementary teachers. Most of the schools were parallel- or dual-medium, adapted to meet the needs of the community or the competence of the staff. There was at first a serious shortage of Afrikaans teachers but this was gradually corrected; it was found difficult to apply the bilingual formula in high schools as the subjects became more numerous; and the budgets for education became increasingly inadequate during the nineteen thirties. Nevertheless, the services were expanded and standards of instruction were raised. Universities expanded also, especially the professional faculties of technology, law and medicine. There were eight in all and in each province they became responsible for the training of high school teachers. Four of these — Capetown, Rhodes, Natal and Witwatersrand — followed very largely the English traditions; while the others — Stellenbosch, Potchefstroom, Pretoria and the Orange Free State — were inspired by the Afrikaner movement. All were officially bilingual and included professors and students of both language groups. However, Stellenbosch remained the centre of Afrikaner culture and Potchefstroom was dominated by the most conservative elements in the Dutch Reformed Church.

The war years brought conflict and confusion. Nationalist sentiment was strong in some areas and there was increased friction between certain elements in the two language groups. Among the English, there were some who had never believed that the Afrikaans language should be taken seriously and they referred to it disdainfully as "Kitchen Kaffir." Among the Afrikaners, there were teachers who prefaced their English lessons with the warning: "We will now study the language of our enemies." In 1943, Smuts and his followers made an effort in the Transvaal to check this deterioration by making dual-medium schools mandatory but five years later, when the Nationalist government came to power, this policy was reversed.

The Language Ordinance adopted in the Transvaal in 1951 made single-medium schools compulsory and this policy was gradually adopted in the other provinces. Consequently both languages are now taught in all schools, private as well as public, but the language of instruction is the mother tongue and the second language is taught as a classroom subject. Since the adoption of this policy some excellent schools have been built. In the town of Britz, for example, which is an agricultural centre in a rich area north of Johannesburg that was opened up through irrigation by the Hertebeestepoort Dam, a new Afrikaans medium high school

was built on a spacious site of 36 acres. The staff is entirely Afrikaans speaking and, while English is taught effectively as a second language, there is no direct contact with the English-speaking community or culture.

Hyde Park High School in Johannesburg is not exactly a counterpart to Britz but it is a large comprehensive school that is well situated with spacious grounds and playing fields. It serves a new suburban community which is predominantly English-speaking. The most serious problem, however, is to secure English-speaking teachers and it is a formidable one. Most of the teachers who came from Great Britain between the World Wars have now retired and for the past twenty years the teaching profession has become less and less attractive in the English-speaking community. Young people are more likely to go directly into business or industry or one of the other professions because the teacher is essentially a civil servant, appointed and employed by the provincial government, and paid on a salary scale that is standard throughout the four provinces. These conditions have attracted many Afrikaners, particularly from rural areas, and although many of these candidates are of excellent calibre, their knowledge and use of English is limited. In 1960, it was estimated that whereas 33% of the children in South African public schools came from English-speaking homes, less than 18% of the teachers had English as their mother tongue. The full effect of this shortage is felt in schools like Hyde Park, where the principal reported in 1960 that only three of his staff of twenty-six returned for duty in the following year and several of the new heads of departments had no teaching experience whatever. Undoubtedly the policy of single-medium schools as applied over the past decade has raised the standards of Afrikaans while the standard of English has declined.

Religion and Language

English-speaking parents, not unnaturally, have turned again to the private schools. These have always had an appeal for the English community in South Africa and several were established even in the 19th century by church authorities to perpetuate the "public school tradition" of England. Most remain under the control of one of the churches, usually the Church of England, although several Roman Catholic institutions have been founded in recent years. Nearly all are residential, although most accept day pupils and, as in Britain, the first of these schools were for boys, although a number of girls' schools have been established during the past thirty years. All would willingly accept pupils from Afrikaans families if they were permitted to do so, but even if the language ordinance were altered it is unlikely that many Afrikaners would apply, because for them the "old school tie" has little appeal and the free public single-medium school offers a satisfactory education. Thus, once again, the language groups are divided.

A further division now arises from the revival of Christian National Education in a form very different from the original

policies of Smuts and Hertzog. The present concept is largely inspired by the fundamentalist doctrines of the most conservative elements in the Dutch Reformed Church and it emanates from the University of Potchefstroom in the Transvaal. It requires that children be separated not only on the basis of language, but of religion as well, and that instruction in every subject must conform to religious tenets which are obscurantist in the extreme. The leaders in this movement include not only the predikants and professors but politicians, even to the level of cabinet ministers and there have been demands that the whole public system of education should be made to conform. Up to the present, the liberal elements among both Afrikaners and English have held these efforts in check, but they remain a constant reminder of the dangers to intellectual freedom which may result from a strong emotional connection between the forces of language, ethnic groups, religion and politics.

Overview

"For better or for worse, the old Africa is gone, and the white races must face the new situation which they themselves have created." In these words Smuts warned his countrymen of the need for unity, a unity based as much on the acceptance of bilingualism as on other factors. To him it was evident that the problems of bilingualism are complicated and that because of the new mass media and rapid communication they are probably more perplexing now than they were when these words were spoken. These remain among the most serious problems under study by the National Educational Advisory Council, an official government body, and the 1961 Education Panel, an independent private organization, both of which are charged with a general review of educational policy in South Africa. Whatever may be their findings, it is clear from the South African experience that a new language can be evolved to serve an ethnic community that is determined to survive, that dual- and parallel-medium schools can operate only when the cultural climate is favorable and the staff is proficient in both languages and that single-medium institutions may impose handicaps on minority groups, unless a balanced supply of competent teachers is assured. Moreover it is clear that the teaching of two languages will not alone encourage the spirit of unity in a bilingual country. That must depend on sound educational policy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A. K. Bok, *The Development of Education in the Transvaal*, Pretoria: Government Printer, 1957.
- A. E. H. Bleksley (ed.), *Education for South Africa: the first report of the 1961 Education Panel*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1963.
- E. G. Malherbe, *The Bilingual School*, London: Longmans, 1946.
- Leo Marquart, *The Peoples and Policies of South Africa*, London: Oxford University Press.
- David Munroe, *Report to the Council of Education*, Johannesburg: Council of Education, Witwatersrand, 1954.