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THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN SOUTH AFRICA

The current political context appears to have left its mark on the manner in which this conference itself was conceived and organised. I am thinking here of the attempts on the part of the organisers to consult various individuals and groups, anticipating that a diversity of interests can be accommodated in the various discussions that will take place in the course of the conference. Such conduct is, no doubt, fully in keeping with the demand of the oppressed of this troubled land for full democracy in the conduct of every aspect of the country's life.

Yet, well-meaning though these attempts may have been, it is essential, at such times, that we exercise a state of vigilance that will enable us to express tactical reservations – if only to ensure that all relevant issues have been brought to the surface, so that we can make pure motives even purer. The fact of the matter is that, viewed from the angle of those towards whom the hand of friendship is being extended, such democratic largesse can become an unintended trap. For example, it should never be forgotten that behind the hand of friendship is the presence of the Academy's solid institutional history: a history that has left its mark on habits of thought in the

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literary culture of this country. Consequently, when such an organisation seeks urgently to respond to certain pressing exigencies of history it will do so from the assumed validity of its organisational base, and such a base would tend to dictate a strategy of benevolent containment and encapsulation in order to maintain, expand, and to exert influence. Under such circumstances, the organisational base itself might even appear to be a negotiable factor, when in fact, it is not. This is because it is usually so firm as to make it almost unthinkable for the organisation to consider the possible strategy of self-sacrifice so that it could be absorbed into a new and necessary, if seemingly threatening, dispensation. This is to suggest that when a centipede curls itself into a protective stance, it remains a centipede.

Now, the subject of central concern to this conference is the evolving place of English in Southern Africa. It makes perfect sense that since the English Academy's central interest is the promotion of the English language, the Academy should devote special time to this matter just at that moment when South Africa finds herself compelled to seek new directions into the future. Indeed, it has become the sign of the times that any organisation that regards itself seriously should engage in the mandatory exercise of re-evaluation at this crucial time in our history.

In keeping with my opening remarks, it is pertinent to note what some renowned thinkers, who are native speakers of English, have observed over the years the development of the English language around the world. Observing the spread of English throughout the world, and how that phenomenon has meant that, with the advance of years from the era of colonialism, the development of English in various parts of the world has taken forms that have gone beyond the control of the native speakers, they have concluded that English is no longer the exclusive property of its native speakers. No less an authority than George Steiner commented back in 1965, that:

> The great energies of the language now enter into play outside England . . . African English, Australian English, the rich speech of West Indian and Anglo-Indian writers, represent a

> complicated polycentric field of linguistic force, in which the language taught and written on this island is no longer the inevitable authority or focus.[1]

In South Africa, our own Professor Guy Butler has remarked in a recent article that 'twenty million blacks will use English for their own interests and ends, without worrying much about the views of less than two million ESSAs (English-Speaking South Africans)'.[2]

There are at least two possible responses of the native speakers of English to this seemingly inevitable process. They may celebrate, in the spirit of international linguistic democracy, the birth of new languages based on the English language; or, they may descend into fits of anxiety, firstly over the purported mutilation of their language with the possible attendant loss of intelligibility, and secondly, over the fear of the loss of influence.

Unfortunately, it is the latter response that has won the day. Beginning from a positive and open-minded acceptance of reality, this latter response has triggered off concerted efforts by metropolitan English speaking policy makers to effectively stem the strong tide of history. This has entailed attempts to weave a web of containment around this spontaneous, world-wide transformation of the English language so that English can continue to serve various kinds of metropolitan interests; interests which may have very little to do with the concerns of those who, out of specific needs arising from their own forms of social interaction, have to fashion a new language for themselves.

Practically, this need to maintain control over English by its native speakers has given birth to a policy of manipulative open-mindedness in which it is held that English belongs to all who use it provided that it is used correctly. It is assumed, of course, that it is the native speakers who will determine the standards of correctness. In other words, you really cannot control what will eventually happen to English in the hands of non-native speakers; but then you can control it. This is the art of giving away the bride while insisting that she still belongs to you.

That this latter tendency predominates should not surprise anyone who attempts to ask some ultimate questions, for this tendency will then be found to be perfectly consistent with the history of English and, later, American imperialism. The much vaunted traditions of English and American democracy have promised an attractive world of 'freedom and opportunity' to all those who would enter that world. Yet, many of those who entered, mainly as colonial subjects, soon discovered that the newly promised freedom was premised ultimately on the subject's unfreedom. The colonial subject had to give up much of what constituted his own sphere of freedom. And so, the very concept of freedom came to be standardised, in the same way that technology and business culture were standardised, according to the specifications of imperial powers.

Indeed, the history of the spread of the English language throughout the world is inseparable from the history of the spread of English and American imperialisms. This fact is important when we consider the place of English in formerly colonised multi-lingual societies. The imposition of English effectively tied those societies to a world imperialist culture which was to impose, almost permanently, severe limitations on those countries' ability to make independent linguistic choices at the moment of independence. We have since heard much about how practically all of those countries ostensibly took the 'pragmatic' decision to choose English as the *lingua franca*. How can we fail to notice that an historically predetermined 'pragmatism' has been transformed, by the metropolitan culture, into an act of choice, on the part of subject cultures, and then praised as the very essence of wisdom? How can we fail to note that the supposed decision makers were, structurally speaking, captive native functionaries of the imperial powers? In reality, the functionaries merely responded to the call of necessity at a given point in time: the necessity of limited choices. After all, when you want to use an electrical gadget in Africa, hadn't you better purchase a plug that meets specifications standardised in the western world?

It is not too difficult to see how English as a language became tainted with imperial interests at that time in the progress of western

imperialism when the need for the standardisation of technology prompted the need for the standardisation of language. In fact, I would hazard a guess that the very concept of an international or world language was an invention of western imperialism. In any case, the language chosen was destined to be English, with French fighting hard for the title. Consequently, the spread of English went parallel with the spread of the culture of international business and technological standardisation. From there, the jump towards the standardisation of international thought becomes easy to make. Today, the link between English and the western corporate world is stronger than ever.

As far as South Africa is concerned even Professor Butler notes how 'major international corporations are pouring money into black schools, frequently with the specific aim of improving English'.[3] Beyond that, the British Council too, continues to be untiring in its effort to keep the world speaking English.[4] In this regard, teaching English as a second or foreign language is not only good business, in terms of the production of teaching materials of all kinds (a service business sector that increases the numbers of possible consumers of British and American commodities throughout the world), but also it is good politics. The Commonwealth, after all, is an alliance of historically captive users of English.

Now, English-speaking South Africans are, inevitably, heirs to the history of the English language. In South Africa, they constitute an English language outpost that is expected to do its historical duty towards the imperial heritage of the language. For example, in the article already alluded to, Professor Butler, while altruistically denying to the English-speaking South Africans an ethnic interest in the English language, since the language really belongs to all, evokes that interest when he asserts that 'White English-speakers must enlarge their constituency; they can only do this by enlarging the influence of their language'.[5] This necessarily follows from how Professor Butler imbues English-speaking South Africans with a patriotic duty to help teach English in South Africa and to teach it well. 'The importance of good models of spoken and written English

cannot be over emphasised,' asserts Professor Butler. Consequently, 'English should be taught effectively as it used to be in the old mission schools, in which there were always devoted English-speaking models'. Indeed, they were devoted! Furthermore, it is 'particularly important that future teachers of English in black schools should be educated and trained in institutions where a significant number of the staff have English as a mother-tongue or are highly proficient speakers of it'.[6] Clearly, we can see here a permissive attitude that goes hand in hand with the prescription of standards. Let us call it a prescriptive open-mindedness.

All of which goes to indicate that the role of English in South Africa is a matter the complexity of which goes far beyond the convenience and correctness of its use, for that very convenience, and that very correctness, are, in essence, problematic. The problem is that recourse to them is fraught with assumptions. Recourse to them begs fundamental historical, cultural, and political questions on the assumption that everyone knows what issues are at stake. But, in fact, we cannot assume the validity of premises that have not themselves been scrutinised carefully. This latter tendency not to be critical about premises is pervasive in South Africa at the moment when all kinds of scenarios of the future are being drawn up in the hope that the oppressed will be dazzled. This problem is so important that we need now to look at the problem of English from a national context.

If we look at the testimony of many white organisations on the question of change in South Africa, we shall immediately discern a pattern of thinking and attitude that seems to typify what the average white person, the traditionally privileged, thinks about the central problems of change. These organisations fall into three general categories.

First, we have organisations whose interest in a future dispensation is determined almost entirely by their economic interests. For example, I am thinking in particular of an organisation such as the Association of Chambers of Commerce of South Africa (ASSOCOM). Recently, ASSOCOM commissioned Professors J.A.

Lombard and J.A. du Pisanie to provide 'academic help' in drawing up an ASSOCOM memorandum called 'Removal of Discrimination Against Blacks in the Political Economy of the Republic of South Africa'.[7] This memorandum was to be prepared for 'submission to the Cabinet Committee on the political future of Urban Blacks'. The memorandum is important not so much for what it says, but for the package of assumptions that provide an uncompromisingly non-negotiable context for the memorandum's submissions.

Central to the memorandum's position is the following starting point:

> Believing that REFORM should be governed by (a) adherence to sound PRINCIPLES of statehood and (b) EVOLUTIONARY rather than revolutionary changes, it is proposed that the acceptable basic elements of the existing order be identified, recognised, and extended.
>
> It is suggested that these basic elements are to be found in the COMMON LAW of South Africa, with particular reference to the norms governing (a) personal freedom, (b) freedom of property and contract, and (c) personal culpability. A DECLARATION OF RECOGNITION by all negotiating parties of these norms would be a necessary condition for further progress in negotiations. To these three common law norms should be added a formal recognition of (d) the basic rules governing the maintenance of a sound national currency and (e) the principles governing the right to tax.
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> It is further suggested that the PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE COMMON LAW NORMS which currently govern the basic character of the private enterprise economic system of South Africa, be extended to form the basis for the new POLITICAL STRUCTURES within which blacks will participate on equal terms with other citizens of the Republic of South Africa.[8]

Behind the evident posture of reasonableness in this passage are pitfalls that can trap the unwary. The memorandum, for example,

offers a negotiating position while subtly positing, at one and the same time, non-negotiable principles. The sign posts of these non-negotiable factors are there: '*sound* PRINCIPLES of statehood'; '*acceptable* basic elements of the *existing order*'; '*sound* national currency'. Behind such words as 'sound' and 'acceptable' are firm assumptions about what is desirable. They hide the ideological anxieties of their users. Behind such seemingly objective virtues of efficiency are such unstated declarations that 'we must preserve our way of life as we know it'; 'all those who are reasonable and privileged enough to think like us will see the value of our position'; consequently, there is an implied strategy that 'we may have to educate the opposition'. In this latter regard, the last paragraph in the above quotation is more explicit: the 'basic character of the private enterprise economic system of South Africa' must be left intact. The legal philosophy behind that system must be 'extended' so that its specifications can also cover black people. This implies that the concept of 'human nature'[9] may need to be distributed more widely to include black people. Indeed, the memorandum refers to black people as 'the prospective black citizens of the Republic'.[10]

It seems to me that the more appropriate title for the memorandum should be 'The Protection of Capital in a Rapidly Changing South Africa'. In this regard we may not fail to notice the significance of the fact that ASSOCOM is an 'Incorporated Association not for Gain'. It may not be 'for gain', but ASSOCOM is clearly interested in creating a climate that can maintain conditions for maximum gain for its members. Fundamentally, the qualification regarding gain is a kind of deceptive propriety.

The second category of organisations includes those groups which have attempted to produce all kinds of scenarios for the political future of the country. They include, of course, such groups as the Progressive Federal Party, and, yes, today, the Nationalist Party. The latter has produced a set of scenarios that have led to the kind of constitutional tinkering that has resulted in the Tri-cameral Parliament. Of course, nothing illustrates more dramatically than this parliament, the futility of reform politics. Indeed, these acts by

the Nationalist Party should properly be called, 'the modernisation of the methods of maintaining white domination'.[11] That, is the hidden definition of 'reform'.

More significantly, however, is how some highly influential organisations in this second category are to be located in universities where they draw upon the aura of objectivity associated with university research. Perhaps none is better known than Professor Schlemmer's ill-fated Institute of Social Research based at the University of Natal, Durban. There is much intellectual tinkering that takes place in the context of such institutes which derives its authority not necessarily from the ideologically biased findings of research (although the intellectual practitioners involved will proclaim their objectivity), but from the backing of those findings by an intellectual hegemony based on the rituals of research, statistical data and evaluation, the presentation of findings at seminars, and the dramatic press release. The politics of academic research is no more glaring than in such a situation. Always lacking is the sense of genuine conviction in the necessity of a future that accommodates the intuitions of the oppressed, for the oppressed themselves have been reduced into being a mere 'factor of analysis' among other factors. Nevertheless, when the history of South Africa is finally updated, it may be found that the country has never had so many political theories thrown up for discussion.

Lastly, diverse cultural interests have issued a challenge to the future which involves the need to open up cultural and educational centres to all races. Missing in these admirable acts of goodwill is an accompanying need to alter fundamentally the nature of cultural practice itself. It is almost always assumed that, upon being admitted, the oppressed will certainly like what they find. The opening up of white private schools, for example, is a good illustration of the strategy of containment through absorption. Where there has previously been the absence of freedom, the mere exercise of making facilities available may easily be mistaken for the presence of freedom. That way, a dominant hegemony that has been in existence is left intact as it gains more supporters from among the ranks of the oppressed.

What is common to all these diverse interests? It is the unquestioned, non-negotiable, primacy of western civilisation and its spectrum of values embodied in what has been called free enterprise and the special kind of democracy based on it. There is no doubt that the influence of the West in South Africa is vast, that it rubs off on all segments of South African society, and that it is destined to continue well into the foreseeable future. Its active defence, though, is largely a matter of habit, indicative of an entrenched and largely uncritical manner of thinking about the quality of life on the part of those who have benefited vastly from what has been called 'the South African way of life'.

Unfortunately, for the vast majority of South Africans, western civilisation has not glittered as it has for those who brought it here. For the majority of the oppressed, the experience of western civilisation has largely been the experience of poverty, malnutrition, low wages, mine accidents, police raids, selective justice, and a variety of other similar negations. Consequently, this majority has not been, as it were, hegemonised to any great extent. For example, thanks to apartheid, they are so largely untouched by much of the discourse of western political philosophy that, even at the popular level, buzz words and expressions such as 'human rights', 'free enterprise', 'human dignity', 'self-determination' and other standardised elements of political vocabulary have not been absorbed to the extent that they would figure prominently in the people's subjective experience of political language. On the contrary, the relatively few members of the political majority who have been aware of such vocabulary are those who have experienced it as applying to the privileged whites. Thus 'human dignity' was the dignity of whites; and 'human rights' were the rights of whites.[12] Hence, black people's experience of western civilisation in general has been premised on their exclusion from its perceived advantages, except when, for purely functional or utilitarian reasons, their participation was sought. This kind of functional participation is even more evident today, when it is required in order to legitimise white South Africa's perceptions of 'acceptable' change. So that even at that crucial moment of historical transformation, the oppressed have to experience themselves as tools.

In a well known poem, Agostinho Neto sums up the relationship between most of Africa and western civilisation graphically:

Western Civilisation
Sheets of tin nailed to posts
driven in the ground
make up the house.
Some rags complete
the intimate landscape.
The sun slanting through cracks
welcomes the owner

After twelve hours of slave
labour.
breaking rock
shifting rock
breaking rock
shifting rock
fair weather
wet weather
breaking rock
shifting rock

Old age comes early

a mat on dark nights
is enough when he dies
gratefully
of hunger.[13]

From the foregoing discussion, it should be clear that much of the talk about reform and change, from the point of view of white South Africa in general, is premised not on what the whites of South Africa may have to unlearn, but on what black people, those 'prospective citizens of the Republic', need to be speedily introduced to so that they can become 'responsible' citizens of the future; so that they can

become westerners in black skins. In a nutshell, the entire ideology of reform is based on the 'humanisation' of the oppressed according to the specifications of South African capital, which, itself, is governed according to the specifications of the international corporate world.

The practical aspects of this modern form of colonial 'pacification' imply the implementation of modern principles of business management. In the same way that the scientific attitude in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe influenced the entire spectrum of European thought, today, the dominance of international monopoly capital has bequeathed to the world 'principles of management'. Such an approach to reality has made it habitually difficult for corporate authority, as well as those influenced heavily by that authority, to discern the fundamental causes of human disaffection. 'Management principles', in situations where the desire for freedom is as deep as it is among the oppressed in South Africa, are applied like the analgesic that is habitually administered to kill a headache where rest would have ensured a more permanent cure.[14]

For the present, the challenge before the spectrum of white South African interests subscribing to the ideology of reform, is the 'management' of the irreversible demand by the oppressed for liberation. This 'management' attitude began with the Sullivan Principles at the work place, and was extended to the need for the creation of an African middle class in the context of the larger society. Mirrored in this strategy is the desire to 'manage' African aspirations through the intended effect of substituting the technicalities of civic responsibility (the 'opening up' of white business areas for blacks, the ninety-nine year lease, the creation of Community councils, abolition of apartheid at the work place, employee housing and other worker benefits, etc) for the fundamental desire for freedom.

Clearly, the 'management' attitude leaves largely uncomprehended and untouched the reality that the call of the oppressed for freedom is premised on the total subversion of the social 'biology' of South African repression.[15] This kind of desire for liberation is based on a complete understanding and recognition by the oppressed, of the

fact that the white ideology of reform is based on the white's 'biological' need to maintain a sense of social and individual well-being that is based on a structure of needs validated by the white's oppression of others. The greatest pathology of such a social system is the blunting of the humanistic vision and the constriction of the intellect resulting in the death of the social conscience of the beneficiaries of the system. Consequently, any reformist prescriptions for the future, emanating from the oppressor, are bound to be an inextricable part of the culture of repression. On the other hand, for the oppressed, the pathology has prevented the realisation of their human potential. As a result, the oppressed, as the direct victims of such a society, have no vested human interest in maintaining it. This is because the structure of social needs nurtured by such a society is incapable of ensuring a new, more humanistic sensibility that can be the only liberating condition for the birth of new men and women in South Africa.

The inherently subversive quest for freedom by the oppressed of South Africa is even more evident today where their erstwhile demand merely to be allowed to participate in the various structures of government has clearly given way to an insatiable desire to create: to create comparable structures on the basis of a new human sensibility. Where much of the activity of political resistance up to the sixties was not premised on a far-reaching, fundamental critique of the nature of government and economic arrangements for the production and distribution of national wealth, later, especially since the end of the sixties and throughout the seventies, and mainly under the impetus of the Black Consciousness Movement, many black organisations, primarily of a professional nature, were established as *alternatives* to the system: students, social workers, lawyers, doctors, journalists, workers, and other professional sections of the black community, established alternative organisations of various kinds in both urban and rural areas. They did this in order to create institutions that were independent of those established by white power; ones which could effectively articulate and project the concerns and interests of the oppressed.

However, there have since been further significant developments. What we are beginning to witness now, is a further shift towards the establishment of alternative structures at *grassroots level* in various communities in the townships as well as in some rural areas. The establishment of these grassroots organisations is, no doubt, a response to the intensification of the struggle and the deepening of experience resulting from it. For example, the call for rendering the townships ungovernable has given way to the need for their governability, only this time on foundations *rooted in the experience of the people themselves*. Unfortunately, whites are not present while these significant changes are taking place. The same is the case with industry. Yet, what is happening in the townships is bound to have a tremendous impact on the way government will be organised, how the education system is going to be altered, and on the way in which relations of production in the corporate world may have to be rearranged. Here, new forms of democratic participation are being created out of the practical experience of township life.

This situation must present South African radical intellectuals with their greatest challenge thus far: the emergence of new forms of democracy, of new ways of social thinking, will require not a condescending and manipulative attitude of management, but a deep understanding; the kind that should lead to a radical codification of social thought which results from new forms of social practice. Specifically, some of the challenges may manifest themselves in the following directions.

Firstly, it would appear that relations of power within the African family, particularly in the townships, appear to have undergone a tremendous transformation. For better or for worse, there is an increasing tendency towards parent/child consultation. To what extent, then, will this development affect the quality of family life, and in what directions? Whatever the case may be, the practice of democracy in the home is bound to have a marked effect on its practice in the immediate neighbourhood, in the first instance, and then, ultimately, in the entire country.

Secondly, one space which will definitely be affected is the working place. Industry may be compelled to take into account the

emergent needs of the evolving African family. What adjustments may need to be made in concepts of production; in the relationship between the factory, the workers in it, and the community those workers come from?

Thirdly, since the aim is not to reproduce old bureaucratic structures of government which over the years have habituated the mentality of repression, emergent grassroots democracy may have to be elevated right up to the level of national government. In this regard, what forms of participatory democracy will emerge, which will express the spirit of the quest for a new morality?

In the fourth place, the remoulding of the educational system toward one that will inculcate these emergent values and speed up, at the same time, the production of skilled and educated Africans at all levels of social and economic activity, is at the root of the new day.

Also central to the need for a new education is the recognition that apartheid culture has been a cultural disease that has deformed whites themselves. As it has been suggested above, the disease has ingrained in them the habit of experiencing their well-being in terms of their oppression of others. For this reason, it cannot be taken for granted that whatever white South Africans have to offer is inherently valuable. Their blue prints for the future may be tied up with social 'biological' needs that can only be met under the old negation. Everything is going to be subjected to the most rigorous scrutiny. In this regard, the re-education of whites should constitute a crucial area of education, for indeed, the educators themselves need to be educated. For example, white children by and large are not participants in the making of the future right now. Tragically, where they participate they come in as soldiers to smother the dreams of their peers. Whatever vision of society determines their actions, it is dead to the future. The social virus of apartheid can be seen to reproduce itself even at that very moment that fundamental change is called for. The white polity, even as it watches with culpable indifference, the physical killing of black children, is busy killing the souls of its own children. Of what use can these children be to the future?

In the fifth place, in concert with new needs, it may be essential to work out new technological priorities.

Finally, what kind of means need to be devised to facilitate the rapid yet creative improvement of life in the rural areas?

This has been a rather lengthy digression from the question of language. But, in fact, the issue of language should become clearer from the broad social perspective that has just been drawn. From this perspective, one can go on to evaluate the state of any aspect of society. But since our interest, at the moment, is in the English language in South Africa, we shall necessarily proceed to focus on it specifically.

Basically, I think that we cannot afford to be uncritically complacent about the role and future of English in South Africa, for there are many reasons why it cannot be considered an innocent language. The problems of society will also be the problems of the predominant language of that society, since it is the carrier of a range of social perceptions, attitudes, and goals. Through it, the speakers absorb entrenched attitudes. In this regard, the guilt of English then must be recognised and appreciated before its continued use can be advocated.

For example, Professor Butler, in his very persuasive essay, makes several statements which reflect traditional views on the validity of the English language in multi-lingual societies, particularly those in Africa. Here is a list of statements made by Professor Butler. They indicate the depth of the problem as I see it:

1. The English language is of vital concern to all South Africans. (p.164)
2. The English pose no political threat to anyone. Their language, however, is wanted and needed by all. (p.165)
3. Blacks have not forgotten the quality of those old mission institutions; and they are more determined than ever to have command of English. (p.168)
4. English, unlike the other languages in South Africa, is not 'an own affair' of the ESSAs. It is everybody's affair, because it is indispensable in a way that our other languages are not. (p.169)
5. In expressing his support for a unitary system of education in which English may have to be the sole medium of instruction, Professor Butler makes a remarkable statement: 'Thought, like money, has no colour'. (p.169)
6. White English speakers must enlarge their constituency; they can only do this by enlarging the influence of their language. (p.172)
7. The 'democratic tradition, and . . . the English language, these are deep in ESSA birthright and tradition, and are open to all South Africans'. (p.172)

I shall not discuss these points in turn because I think the context in which they could be examined has already been spelt out earlier in this discussion. The inherent limitations of these statements will now be obvious. But I shall briefly sum up my response. We could begin with the remarkable statement that 'Thought, like money, has no colour'.

The remarkable thing about this statement is that it is true. But even more remarkable, for our purposes, is that it is incomplete. It should also be added that 'thought, like money, is linked to economic and social class'. For example, it has been shown that the corporate world in the United States, controlling vast sums of money, also effectively controls thought in that country: a fact which renders problematic the much vaunted concept of freedom of speech there. Thought, in the public domain in the United States, is canned thought, often selectively siphoned off from solid research and thrown at an impressionable public by sides contending for social, political, and economic dominance.[16] It is this canned thought that is then exported to the rest of the world through advertising, through corporate business English, through scientific gadgetry and its accompanying technical English, and through the political wisdom of the Voice of America. How could Professor Butler miss this phenomenon?

Of course, one does not want to give the impression that the world community uncritically accepts this kind of American onslaught on the international mind. But in countries where there are constituencies linguistically and culturally tied to American ideals, we should not be blamed when we insist on a rigorously critical kind of vigilance. It is at this point that we return to Professor Butler's call to ESSAs to show their patriotic duty in helping to 'spread their constituency' through the teaching of English. How can they spread their constituency without, at the same time, spreading their social vision through their language? Central to this vision, for example, is their 'democratic tradition'. Does this tradition include the kind of grassroots democracy that is flowering in the townships of South Africa at the moment? The implicit ideology sustaining Professor Butler's social and political vision definitely excludes this new phenomenon. Indeed, the link between thought and money is often fraught with intrigue!

I do not mean to suggest a mechanical one-to-one relationship between language and society, but I do want to suggest that before we declare English to be our unquestionable national language, we must be critically open-minded about several possible eventualities.

Firstly, South African English must be open to the possibility of its becoming a new language. This may happen not only at the level of vocabulary (notice how the word 'necklace' has acquired a new and terrible meaning), but also with regard to grammatical adjustments that may result from the proximity of English to indigenous African languages.[17]

Secondly, the teaching of English will have to be freed from the functional instruction of corporate English. A dangerous off-shoot of this corporate approach to the teaching of language is to be discerned in the SABC(TV) programmes of language instruction. The programmes are designed to teach whites selected African languages. Below is a typical teaching segment.

The aim of the lesson was to teach the question, 'where are you going?' in SePedi. Three whites each meet an African whom they ask in SePedi: 'where are you going?' The first African is a messenger who replies that he is going to the post office. The second one is a

domestic servant who replies that she is going to the store, and the third one, a worker dressed in overalls, replies that he is going to some similar place of work. The point about these lessons is that seldom do the segments carry situations in which blacks and whites meet as equals. The situations are often ones which involve employer (white)/employee (black) relations. Remarkable about the segments is the functional context of language use. Clearly, the lessons are not designed to promote meaningful communication between humans; rather, they are designed to enable whites to make better use of their black workers. Thus, the psychological approach to language learning is flawed from the word go. No doubt, though, the SABC is convinced that it is 'bridging cultural gaps'.

There is yet another revealing aspect to the situation just described: it is that structurally speaking, the colonial relationship that existed between European and African cultures in South Africa is duplicated in the relationship that is being perpetuated between English and Afrikaans on the one hand, and African languages on the other hand. Where African cultures in the colonial context held, for imperial cultures, only an exotic anthropological interest, now, in the South African context, African languages hold a mainly functional, manipulative interest. They are a means towards a more efficient use of African labour.

The above example of language teaching by the SABC typifies the context of learning that characterises the traditional teaching of English to Africans. What may need to be emphasised is that if the recognition that English belongs to all who use it is more than academic, then in multi-cultural societies, English will have to be taught in such a way that the learners are made to recognise themselves through the learning context employed, not as second class learners of a foreign culture, or as units of labour that have to be tuned to work better, but as self-respecting citizens of the world. The idea of teaching English through the exposure of second language learners to English culture, should be abandoned. If English belongs to all, then it will naturally assume the cultural colour of its respective users.

Thirdly, in promoting English in a multi-lingual society, there is a danger that it may become increasingly difficult for us to make a distinction between English and education. At a certain juncture, education appears to have become synonymous with the acquisition of English. That being the case, a fracture between the acquisition of knowledge and the acquisition of English must be brought about. This is in the obvious recognition that the sphere of human knowledge is much wider than any one language can carry. Corporate English appropriates knowledge by equating it with the mere acquisition of language. That English may be spoken universally, does not imply that it carries the sum total of the world's wisdom. The sooner the oppressed of South Africa know that, the sooner will they appreciate the immense freedom of choice before them.

Fourthly, it may be said that there are aspects of English that are not tied to any manipulative interest: literature and the world of learning in general, for example. That may be so. But these considerations are seldom at the centre of the need to spread the hegemony of English today. Promoting a foreign language in another culture seldom reaches, for the vast majority of the members of that target culture, beyond the merely functional. That is to say, English is an international language, but it is international only in its functionally communicative aspects. For the rest of the time, indigenous languages fulfil the range of needs that English similarly fulfils for its native speakers. From this point of view, the functional acquisition of English, in a capitalist society such as ours can further reinforce the instrumentalisation of people as units of labour. So it is conceivable that the acquisition of English, precisely because the language has been reduced to being a mere working tool, can actually add to the alienation of the work force. Indeed, in the same way that grassroots organisations are meant to protect people from the oppressive impersonality of the state, indigenous languages can be a refuge from the manipulative impersonality associated with corporate English language acquisition.

At the centre of the problem, in fact, is the educative function itself. The humanisation of the educative function is a dire need,

since South African society still has to produce a viable home-grown humanistic ethical tradition. From the word 'go', modern education in South Africa was tied to material accumulation. The pattern of rampant capital accumulation, set in the era of Cecil Rhodes, meant that the ability to found economic growth on the sound basis of a home-grown ethical culture was severely limited. That ethical culture, particularly for the ESSAs, especially in their moral stance towards the oppressed, became, instead, no more than humanitarian politics. And it is there, possibly, that we have the origins of that protective benevolence towards the oppressed, associated with that community. It is that persistent attitude that still wants to rescue the oppressed from ignorance through the vehicle of the English language.

We have come a long way from my introductory comments. They were not intended to be a direct criticism of the Academy as such. Rather, they were designed to be an analogical approach to my central thesis that an uncritical open-mindedness, in this case expressed as the promotion of the English language, can be a dangerous form of encapsulation. Beyond that I am certain that I have not exhausted this topic. The aim of this paper was to seize the opportunity to present and formulate the problems from the perspective that I have adopted. I can only hope that I have been sufficiently provocative to provide something for the participants of this conference to discuss and debate in the discussion sessions to follow.

NOTES

1. Article in the *Listener*, 21 October, 1965. (Quoted in *The Critical Evaluation of African Literature*, Edgar Wright [ed.], [London: Heinemann, 1973], p.3.)
2. Guy Butler, 'English in the New South Africa', *The English Academy Review 3*, Johannesburg (1986), pp.163–76.
3. Guy Butler, p.166.
4. Recently, the British Council began marketing, on behalf of the BBC, a package of audio-visual instructional materials called *Television English*. This package offers, among other things, 'interesting collections of carefully selected excerpts from

BBC TV programmes about a wide range of topics including: British life and customs, traditional crafts, medicine and health, new inventions, British institutions, history, people at work, fashion and clothing, leisure activities, food and drink, British countryside, music and art, buildings, British humour'.

Furthermore, the package is meant for 'intermediate to advanced learners of English around the world who

* are interested in seeing and learning about aspects of British life, culture, technology, humour, history, etc.
* would like to watch BBC television programmes in English and learn how to follow them.
* want to study the English the British use when talking to each other using current words and idioms'.

5. Guy Butler, p.172.
6. Guy Butler, p.173.
7. See J.A. Lombard and J.A. du Pisanie, 'Removal of Discrimination Against Blacks in the Political Economy of the Republic of South Africa', a memorandum for ASSOCOM, No.3, 1985.
8. Lombard and Du Pisanie, p.i.
9. Lombard and Du Pisanie declare that the 'market economy is the product of human nature and the politico-economic system patronising the market economy is based on a more realistic and consequently superior understanding of human nature'. (p.17)
10. Lombard and Du Pisanie, p.15.
11. See Heribert Adam, *Modernising Racial Domination*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971).
12. See note 9, above on the need for the extension of the economic-legal attribution of 'human nature' to black people.
13. Agostinho Neto, in *Accents*, M. Chapman and T. Voss (eds.), (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1986), p.186.
14. For an extensive and most revealing analysis of this manipulative social attitude of modern corporate America see, Joel Kovel, *The Age of Desire*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).
15. See Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, (U.K.: Pelican Books, 1972). Note Marcuse's use of the term 'biology': 'I use the terms "biological" and "biology" not in the sense of the scientific discipline but in order to designate the process and the dimension in which inclinations, behaviour patterns, and aspirations become vital needs which, if not satisfied, would cause dysfunction of the organism. Conversely, socially induced needs and aspirations may result in a more pleasurable organic behaviour. If biological needs are defined as those which must be satisfied and for which no adequate substitute can be provided, certain cultural needs can "sink down" into the biology of man. We could then speak, for example, of the biological need of freedom, or of some aesthetic needs as having taken root in the organic structure of man, in his "nature", or rather "second nature"'. (p.20)
16. See Noam Chomsky, 'Thought Control in the USA: The Case of the Middle East' in *Index on Censorship*, Vol.15, No.7, July/August 1986.

17. Herbert Marcuse, pp.41–3, Marcuse shows how the struggle for liberation also takes place in the field of language itself. See also Mothobi Motloatse (ed.), *Forced Landing*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980). Motloatse is very forthright:

> We will have to *donder* conventional literature: old-fashioned critic and reader alike. We are going to pee, spit and shit on literary convention before we are through; we are going to kick and pull and push and drag literature into the form we prefer. We are going to experiment and probe and not give a damn what the critics have to say. Because we are in search of our true selves – undergoing self-discovery as a people.
>
> We are not going to be told how to re-live our feelings, pains and aspirations by anybody who speaks from the platform of his own rickety culture.