
Words Words Words

ACCORDING TO THE REPORT of the 1961 conference of teachers of English as a second language, English should be taught at secondary school level in such a way that students will "be stimulated" to find literature so rewarding that they will continue reading after they have left school." The recent special issue of the *Times Literary Supplement* called "A Language in Common" quotes this meagre aim against the majestic pronouncement by Lord Macaulay in his 1835 Minute on Indian Education. Macaulay saw English as the key to "the poetry of Milton, the metaphysics of Locke, the physics of Newton"; after correct and scientific instruction in the language, he said, education really begins. "There stretch poetry and metaphysics and physics, the only valid reasons why a knowledge of English phonemes should ever be painfully acquired", says the *Times Literary Supplement*. The smaller objective of the Makerere report seemed to be before the writer of the South African article in this issue. It was a kind of "What are you reading?" talk, superficial and gossipy ("a literary 'little magazine', *The Classic*—named after the shebeen where it was planned—is about to be launched under the editorship of Nat Nakasa, one of the young journalist-writers in Johannesburg"). Its unsupported generalisations are surprising ("few Africans have read novels about their own country that are widely known and read overseas" . . . "the real readers among Africans are the 'political' people"). The anonymous writer's ignorance of our literature in African languages and Afrikaans is matched by his or her unawareness of the factors governing the choice of English or Afrikaans among Africans. Afrikaans is a less useful lingua franca than English because the latter is used when Nguni meets Sotho, when South African meets Rhodesian or South West African, not only because English is a world language. Instead of learning that Errol Flynn's memoirs sold well in an African bookshop, one might have been given some glimpse of the deep, gradual struggle taking place among our score of languages, and of the hope that English will survive, and will lead our descendants to the "poetry, metaphysics and physics" of the great world.

One reason for the certain rise of English among Africans in the Republic is the attempt of the Bantu Educationists to deny it to the million-and-a-half African school children in their net. The Afrikaans language was hardened into a mighty and treasured weapon by the mental sufferings and bitterness of

Afrikaners when the British tried to suppress the "taal". The determination of Africans to speak and read English is being intensified with every attempt by the Bantuists to promote Afrikaans and African languages at the expense of English. English is suffering heavy losses, just as the "I must not speak Dutch" days deprived many Afrikaners of their language. The next generation won it back again and turned their backs on English. In future years, Africans may react in the same way towards Afrikaans. The Afrikaner Nationalists will thus have worked for the glory of English and the decline of Afrikaans, when their motive was undeniably the reverse. There is added irony in the fact that the proportion of English-speakers to Afrikaans-speakers in the white community has declined dramatically with the latest census analysis. And the English are doing almost nothing about it, let alone trying to help the Africans in their fight for English.

SOUTH AFRICA HOUSE advertisements in the British Press are straying further and further into the realms of fantasy. Even that Disney-like pedlar of dreams Mr. de Wet Nel must be surprised and uplifted to learn that in South Africa today: "the greatest degree of individual liberty possible in such a unique situation is jealously guarded", that the Government "understands and respects" South Africa's African leaders when they "insist in the most uncompromising terms on doing things in their own way", and that "discrimination among or against individuals of colour" is not the case here.

The writer's facts are as dreamlike and unorthodox as his opinions. "Their (European) forbears settled a part of Africa that belonged to no one", he writes with a magnificent disregard for the large and flourishing communities of Khoikhoi (Hottentots), and Namaquas, who had peopled the Western Cape for long ages before the white men came, or the BaTwa (Bushmen), already fleeing from the stronger Khoikhoi, and the Bantu-speaking tribes whose pioneers had crossed the Limpopo centuries earlier. The descendants of all these pre-European South African people still live in the Western Cape, a subject race, mixed today with European and Asian stock, and the attitude of the Europeans to them was revealed once again in the pathetic Elandskloof incident this September. This little community was dispersed from their mission station their families had inhabited at least since 1861, because the Dutch Reformed Church wanted to sell Elandskloof and the white farmers wanted their labour ("if they are willing to apply and to submit themselves to the domestic rules of each individual farm", said the Citrusdal Boerevereniging, echoing the terms of three hundred years of bondage).

Readers of the London Sunday newspapers where these articles appear are also told that "Other Bantu peoples are rapidly following the Xhosa to autonomy." It is a toss up whether *rapidly* or *autonomy* is the bigger lie. ●

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