

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF NON-STANDARD VARIETIES OF XHOSA

Introduction

This paper deals with the problems of the use of non-standard language varieties in the field of education with special reference to isiXhosa. It is conceived against the background that non-standard language that the learner brings to school from the environment is absolutely not accommodated. The language that is used in the classroom situation is standard. The problem that is encountered by the learner is that he is faced with two different situations, that is school with formal standardized language, and the society with an informal non-standardized one. Educators and examiners also do not accept other dialects e.g. Phondo, Hlubi, Bhaca, Bomvana to the degree that they accept standard Xhosa. For this reason this paper investigates the impact of the use of non-standard language on the children's education. But before that it is important for us to look at the definition of the two terms "standard" and "non-standard".

Definition of terms standard and non-standard

Defining standard language Hudson (1980:33) indicates that standard language is a somewhat impressive term that refers to some socio-linguistically accepted features or characteristics. According to Hudson (ibid) standard language will have passed through the following processes:

SELECTION: A particular variety is selected and developed into a standard language. This usually provides a prestigious status to the variety, and is used in institutions such as parliament, school, church and media.

CODIFICATION: The linguistic features of such a variety must be written down in dictionaries, grammatical forms, handbooks, terminology and orthography.

ACCETANCE: The community has to accept the variety as its national language. Once this has happened, the standard language serves as a unifying force of the state (Hudson 1980:33).

Looking at the above characteristics of standard language Ngqika and Gcaleka dialects qualify to be a standard language. They are more prestigious than other Xhosa dialects. Their functions are embraced with reverence, language loyalty, which other dialects do not enjoy. Their grammatical forms are described in textbooks, grammars, dictionaries and manuals of phonetics. It is also linguistic variety taught in schools.

Standard language has a clear advantage in terms of mutual intelligibility, but it also leads to a situation in which the standardized variety exerts pressure of a norm on the groups within the varieties (Montgomery 1986). For instance a child who learns standard language improves his or her chances for success in education, social mobility and employment whilst a child who does not, can be disadvantaged.

Non-standard languages differ from standard in their manner of acquisition and their specialised functional roles. Non-standard languages are learned as first language at home, through intensive everyday contacts. Standard languages can only be acquired formally at school or in adult literacy classes (Masour 1993:85). According to Pride and Holmes (1979:103) non-standard language cannot perform functions that a standard one can perform in a society. It can only be used in that particular local tribe or village.

Xhosa dialects

Xhosa dialects are distinguished from proper Xhosa on the basis that they are unlike the standard Xhosa. These dialects are referred to as non-standard. Xhosa dialects have many features that are different from standard Xhosa in terms of grammatical forms and vocabulary. They display some grammatical forms and some terms of vocabulary which are specific to the region where they are spoken. (Mbadi:?) agrees with this statement as he argues that Mpondomise is a dialect chiefly spoken in the district of Qumbu and Tsolo by the Mpondomise people who came to settle in these districts before 1872. The speech of these people differ from standard Xhosa as far as grammatical terms are concerned. The following examples clearly show these differences.

MPONDONISE VARIANT

(a) Phonetic Difference

One can notice that (sh) which is a voiceless radical pre-palatal cannot be found in Mpondomise although it is there in Xhosa. Mpondomise people use (tjh) instead of (sh) e.g.

Xhosa	Mpondomise
Ihashe	ihat <u>tjhi</u> (horse)
Ixsha	ixet <u>tjha</u> (time)

(b) Morphological Difference

Possessive markers are elided in possessive qualificatives indicating communal ownership in Mpondomise e.g.

Xhosa	Mpondomise
Udade [we] thu	udadethu
Inkomo [y] ak [o] wethu	inomakowethu (Mbadi...?)

THE HLUBI VARIANT

It has been noticed by Nomlomo (1993:23) that Hlubi dialect differs from standard Xhosa by means of using a nasalized velar consonant [ng] in the place of nasalized alveolar consonant [nd]. e.g.

Xhosa	Hlubi
<u>ndi</u>	<u>ngi</u>
<u>ndihamba</u>	<u>ngihamba</u>
<u>ndisila</u>	<u>ngisila</u> (Nomlomo 1993:54)

The amaHlubi use the concord of class 5 (li) in the place of (lu) being used in standard Xhosa for class 11 e.g.

Xhosa	Hlubi
<u>U</u> donga <u>l</u> udilikile	<u>I</u> donga <u>l</u> idilikile
<u>U</u> sana <u>l</u> ulambile	<u>i</u> sana <u>l</u> ilambile

BHACA VARIANT

AmaBhaca (ethnic) occupy the districts of Mount Frere and Mount Aliff. The dialect of the amaBhaca also differs from the standard Xhosa as they use the alveolar plosive [t'] instead of a fricative [z] e.g.

Xhosa	Bhaca
um <u>f</u> azi	umfati (a woman)
im <u>b</u> uzi	imbuti (a goat)

Other difference can be seen in the vocabulary whereby Bhaca uses its vocabulary apart from that of the standard Xhosa e.g.

Xhosa	Bhaca
Utywala	ijiki (African beer)
Ukubaleka	ukugijima (to run)

Not all dialects of Xhosa have been indicated above, but one can see that the above dialects are representative of the differences between them and the standard Xhosa.

A learner who has been brought up in the above mentioned districts may forget to switch from his mother tongue language to the standard one and write as he speaks.

For example a learner may say:

NgoMgqibelo bekubalekwa emabaleni apho abantwana besikolo bagijime ngolona hlobo.

(On Saturday there was a race where school children ran as fast as they can).

This learner can be penalised because he uses ukugijima instead of ukubaleka.

The process of standardization has given standard dialect a status of being high dialect, while non-standard is regarded as low speech. Commenting on standardization Devitt (1989) argues that a linguistic standardization is an actual historical process, a movement toward that uniformity which can never be completely realised. If standardization is the movement toward uniformity, but complete uniformity is always impossible, the standardization will always entail variation. This argument leads us to the problems associated with standardization.

Problems associated with standardization

Corson (1994:273) uses the word “standard” in two broadly but related senses. He sees standard language as a model of “correctness” and “excellence”. By this he means that all people should use language in the same “correct” way whilst non-standard varieties are regarded as incorrect.

Eastman (1992:14) has a problem in trying to find out what the correct form is. According to him what is “correct” for one person, is not going to be correct for someone else. He feels that there should be a great tolerance about what is acceptable and what is appropriate from the perspective of language use.

The notion of correctness has created problems for speakers who do not always use standard variety. Van Wyk (1992:27) regards these speakers as people who lack education. They are associated with low economic educational achievement. Van Wyk (ibid) mentions that players and spectators on the playground use non-standard varieties for lower functions such as interaction by peer groups and families at home. The use of

these non-standard tends to hinder the process of Xhosa pupils in the classroom situation. In school non-standard language is neglected, and is often stigmatised in the classroom.

Educators tend to advocate language that is quite remote from the everyday life of the learners. When learners are at school, they are expected to write and imitate the standard speech of their educators, and when they are outside the school life, it is almost certain that they would use non-standard varieties. The use of non-standard language varieties causes problem in the classroom situation. A child who is well attuned to the standard language may for example use non-standard language and be penalised. This child's language at the same time may provoke negative attitudes in the educator, perhaps the child speaks the so-called low prestige dialect like isiMpondo, isiXesibe or isiHlubi in the case of Xhosa. According to Stubbs (1979:44) these attitudes may be transmitted to the child, even if the educator expresses no overt disapproval of the language. Because schools do not provide any room for non-standard varieties, Appel and Muysken (1987) argues that the school becomes to non-standard speakers, a place where their language nor their culture exists, a place where their social identity is questioned and undermined.

They go on mentioning that speakers of the non-standard variants may begin to develop a low self-esteem, negative sentiments about schooling and a limited cultural horizon. Sometimes most of the learners leave the school, because they could not stand pressure of the standard language that is exerted on them

Edwards (1979:99) states that it is important for us to realise that educators like all other members of society hold perceptions concerning the different language varieties. They are immune from the characteristics of prestige made about certain language variants, i.e. standard language. Many educators maintain the myth that there is only one "best" Xhosa for all purposes, and that this is the language proper for the classroom, yet they themselves use many varieties of language throughout the day, depending on the context or purpose of communication. An interesting development according to Calteaux (1996:50) is the indication that mixed languages are in the process of ousting the use of the standard languages in formal domain. He argues that younger generations

see no need to adhere to their standard languages and prefer to use English instead. Pattanayak (1990:42) on the other hand mentions that the presence of language diversity in the learner's environment leads to regular inter-linkages and intermixture at various levels between different groups. Such inter-linkages according to him do not only bring different languages in contact but also produce a qualitative change in the learner's pattern of communication even at school.

However, because of the increasing use of non-standard language varieties and the diminishing role of traditional standard languages, it is no longer a usual practice to hear learners communicating in their pure mother tongue. They mix various languages for better communication. For example a Xhosa learner may say:

1. Namhlanje ndiza kuya elayibrari ndifuna ukukoleka i-infomeyishini yelanguweyigi tsheyinji
(Today I am going to the library, I want to collect information about language change)
2. Uze undifowunele undixelele ukuba irizolushini ithini.
(Please do call me and tell me what is the resolution).

Considering the underlined words in the above sentences it can be noticed that they are borrowed words. The lexicon of these borrowed words is not the same as that of the original one. There are some extensions of the foreign words to suit Xhosa speech. Xhosa speech sounds are used to formulate these words. This is not surprising because Xhosa speakers migrated from rural areas to urban areas in search of jobs. So they have to learn more languages in order to communicate with other cultures. Their language cannot be expected to be "pure". They have to resort to other languages so as to be able to communicate.

The present researcher sees this language shift from Xhosa language to other languages as a skill that needs to be appreciated by the educators, because it involves an art of using words from different languages and that a clear message is passed to another speaker.

An argument in this paper is that, the value of the standard language can never be brought down by the use of non-standard varieties. We should recognise the contribution of the borrowed words in the growth of our language and not regard them as non-standard.

Contributing factors to the use of non-standard language varieties in the classroom

It has been mentioned above that use of non-standard varieties in class is one of the factors which inhibits learning. The issue of factors that contribute towards use of non-standard Xhosa in class, as well as crises that non-standard varieties may cause in children's education, will be dealt with below.

1. Multilingualism

South Africa comprises a number of diverse multilingual communities. Monolingualism is rare in these communities. It is confined mostly to underdeveloped areas with homogeneous communities (Lanham and Prinsloo 1978:29). Due to language contact in these multilingual communities, mixing languages occurs on a large scale. Mixing takes place not only between languages belonging to the same group, such as various Xhosa dialects, but between different language families, for example African languages such as Sotho, Zulu, Tswana and also English and Afrikaans. This sudden move from one language to another is particularly found among second and third generation immigrants, who often lose attachment to their ancestral language, faced with the pressure to communicate in the language of the host country (Crystal 1991:220).

A case in point is Xhosa in South Africa. Xhosa speakers migrate from rural areas to urban areas to work as well as to settle there. Urban areas into which Xhosa speakers migrate comprise multilingual and multicultural communities. Languages encountered are other African languages, English and Afrikaans. The phonology of these languages is not the same as that of the Xhosa language. There are also extensive lexical and semantic dissimilarities between these languages and Xhosa.

A learner who has been exposed to these languages may use them more than the Xhosa language which is taught at school. He would not normally have the opportunity to use his first language properly because of the daily usage of the above mentioned languages. For instance it is not unusual to hear conversation taking place in two or more different languages.

One observes that learners use their linguistic abilities to manipulate their conversations according to the context or domain within which they are interacting (Kieswetter 1995:96). This fact has serious implications on the learning of African languages because when learners practise such type of conversations in class, they are penalized and as a result they get low marks. This is shown by the fact that most of the Xhosa learners do not get good pass marks in their external examinations, but only average because of incompetence in the standard language.

2. Availability of Xhosa Books

Most African schools in the South Africa experience a problem of insufficiency of Xhosa books especially novels, suitable for different levels of reading ability. Children hardly ever read for pleasure. All they read is the book that is prescribed as their class reader, and this is not always pleasurable reading. Teachers tend to concentrate on English and Afrikaans when purchasing library books. Even with the news papers it is rare to get Xhosa news papers like *Imvo ZabaNtsundu*, *Ikhwezi*, *Indaba*, etc. The availability of English books to learners may be one great cause of lexical borrowing and code-mixing noticed in children's vocabulary, especially oral presentation. One notices that English and Afrikaans are regarded as languages used to get a job (Lanham et al 1978:215). As such these languages are important in the future economic life of the pupils, who are therefore motivated to read them. English is seen as a language of intellectuals and achievers. A high value is attached to English, and larger switches are made in English whereby the operational language changes, i.e. phonological, morphological and syntactic systems change to English (Kieswetter 1995:72). This causes some problems for the Xhosa teacher as English enters the child's vocabulary at an early stage. Learners feel that they can no longer express themselves freely in Xhosa, and therefore prefer the use of English over the traditional African language.

3. High value attached to English language

English is a medium of instruction all the African schools in South Africa. Learners are exposed to spoken English at school most of the time. The use of English has influenced the conversational patterns of African learners. Parents see no need for correcting children when mixing Xhosa language with English. Instead higher value is attached to English than to Xhosa. One observes that in many homes English is spoken in preference to the mother tongue in order that children may improve spoken English and be good in other subjects which are taught in English (Kieswetter 1995:75).

Zotwana(1987:161) traces the superior regard for English far back as he states that although Xhosa was taught in Black schools, mainly in the Cape, it did not have any official status. English became the language of education commerce and politics. Presently Xhosa has been given a status which is equal to that of English and Afrikaans it is generally envisaged that the language for communication at national level will be English (Mtuzze 1992:47). It is apparent that children can be encouraged to speak English so as to be competent in communication. Therefore learners and parents see no need to stick to Xhosa language.

The main problem is that presently no school in South Africa has so far used an African language as a medium of instruction in secondary school and higher education. Learners are receiving their education in a foreign language. This prominence which is given to English by the state could be confusing to school going children. There is no encouragement to Xhosa as a medium of instruction. The resources are not available to train teachers to develop grammars and orthographies, produce and translate into Xhosa language. The idea here is that of developing the Xhosa language and bringing it in par with languages like English and Afrikaans so that it can be recognised by parents and learners.

Language Planning

Since this study recommends that both standard and non-standard language varieties should be used to support effective learning and teaching at school, language planning need to be considered. Planners of Xhosa need to pay particular attention to the changes

that naturally occur in language. They need to know that language cannot be studied with reference to its formal properties only, but it must also be studied in its relationship to the lives, thoughts and culture of the people who speak it (Kaschulla et al 1993:15). This implies that there is a need for the non-standard varieties to be accommodated in our education system, as recognition of such varieties will improve the socio-cultural relations between the school and society. The development of a language occurs only if sufficient conditions are created by planners for its uninhibited use by its speakers. Therefore Xhosa language planners must plan language in such a way that it can cope with the modern technological era which learners are part of. Planners should participate in a process in the formulation of a new language policy for the new South Africa. The curriculum needs to cater for learners from different language backgrounds. The power of language has to be acknowledged and used constructively to provide pupils from different linguistic backgrounds with access to an education which not only broadens their horizons but also affirms their cultural roots (Oliver-Shaw 1994:46). One task the language planners should do is to devise an orthography for non-standard language and to coin new words.

Recommendations

Given the view that there are problems facing learning and teaching of Xhosa in the Western Cape schools, the paper recommends that

- ◆ The vocabulary of Xhosa should be improved by writers by means of new dictionaries which give new words used in modern technology. There are no new Xhosa dictionaries incorporating the new words that emerged because of the new technology. Because of that learners resort to the use of other languages and sometimes mix Xhosa with these languages.
- ◆ Multilingual education need to be implemented in schools. This can be done by the Department of Education by means of organising a language awareness programme appropriate to equip educators with the knowledge of multilingual practices in schools.

- ◆ Educators should be equipped to meet most of the language needs of their pupils. It is necessary for the educators to recognise the potential equality of all languages. The educator should be pleased to experience many language varieties rather than becoming irritated. Language contact can expand the vocabulary of the languages concerned.
- ◆ An educator should recognise multilingualism as an asset in pursuing language teaching by means of thinking ways of creatively exploiting the different languages available in a given classroom. The educator Can see how other languages are as systematic and clear as his/her own. Linguistic and cultural differences should not be seen as deviations from the standard norm, but could be seen as an asset to gain knowledge.
- ◆ Educators need to understand that linguistic diversity has serious social functions and is not a devaluing of a given language. Therefore language diversity should be seen as a linguistic resource which educators can use to pursue multilingual speakers' education.
- ◆ Both standard and non-standard Varieties should be accepted at school in pursuing language teaching to avoid practise of stigmatising non-standard varieties which are different from the norms of the standard language.
- ◆ The curriculum need to be designed in such a way that it caters for learners different backgrounds so that a learner can get a chance to participate in language discussions even if he or she is not fluent in the standard language.
- ◆ Modern economic system requires a language variety that can be used for communication among people with different mother tongues. In the interest of our children, we must move away from traditional attachment to the standard norms and look forward towards better education and social change. One needs to consider that

our learners have different life experiences which need to be catered for at school. To ignore learners' differences is to deny their experiences both linguistically and socially.

The ultimate aim here is to make people to be more tolerant of linguistic diversity. An essential point is that we need to recognise the fact that linguistic varieties are in use and that structures constitute a dynamic situation, not a static one. A result of the dynamic nature of speech communities is that change within varieties is always going on. It is important to note that change is socially motivated, that is, even if it is done at an unconscious level, speakers are changing the way they speak to align themselves to the way some other group speaks.

Conclusion

The most useful service which linguists can perform today is to clear away the “verbal deprivation” and provide a more adequate notion of the relations between standard and non-standard varieties. Children are effective narrators, reasoners and debaters and they tend to lose their argument if their language is scrutinised.

It is clear in the above argument that non-standard use of language is not accepted in the field of education. Those who make use of the non-standard varieties are disadvantaged academically. It is the duty of the language planners therefore to change the attitude of educators towards the use of non-standard variants. If language planners are concerned with the ways of solving language problems, they should look forward to the revision of the orthography. As language changes there is need to make the existing spelling system accommodate new sounds found in borrowed words.

It is also noticed that in South Africa many languages have emerged as means of communication between different communities. Many of these languages have never been written down and they have never been described, and there are no grammars for them. This calls for linguists to work on and describe the meanings of the words, how sentences are formed and also develop dictionaries and basic orthographies for these languages.

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