

An evaluation of attitudes towards conservative and extreme South African English dialects

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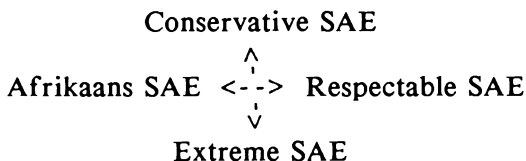
1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The pupil learning language in a multilingual society is aware that each language is characteristic of a particular social group. Does the pupil adopt positive and negative prejudices towards these language varieties based on stereotypes of members of each language group?

Vorster and Proctor (1976) established that black South African students were negatively biased against Afrikaans while reacting more positively towards English.

The assumption that a relationship exists between Afrikaans and the Extreme South African English (SAE) dialect formed the basis for my research. Lanham (1978) proposes that language forms the major division between English and Afrikaans speakers. Religious and political affiliations are largely determined by native language. 'Diversity in the SAE community can be represented thus:

Received Standard



Conservative SAE and Extreme SAE are polar opposites. Afrikaans SAE represents penetration by what is basically Afrikaans phonology in the form of a small number of variables affecting mainly, but not exclusively, speech patterns which are nearest to extreme SAE.' (Lanham, 1978:146).

Each of the dialects is representative of a distinct set of social values and is marked by phonetic variation. Macdonald (1979:55) identifies seven variables which distinguish Extreme SAE from Conservative SAE. Examples of these are:

1. The obstruent r, which occurs word-initially in the /tr,dr/ clusters (*tree* [tri:]). This differs from the trilled (rolled) r which is found both pre-vocally and post-vocally in Afrikaans English, for example, *rare* | [rɛ:r]. The Conservative SAE r is the sonorant r of most British dialects, where *rare* is pronounced [rɛə].
2. The backed, raised version of Conservative SAE [a:] (*cart* [ka:t]) is pronounced almost like *caught* in Extreme SAE. The Conservative SAE diphthong | [ɑ] (as in *kite* | [kɑt]) is in turn flattened to a vowel, almost like [a:] (*cart* [ka:t]) in Extreme SAE. The Conservative SAE | [a] becomes |[ɑ] in Afrikaans English - the second vowel is raised and tense.
3. Where Conservative SAE has a diphthong, | [eə] (*hair* [hɛə]), Extreme SAE has a single, lengthened vowel, |[ɛ:] (*hair* [hɛ:]). This is also true of Afrikaans English - the vowel in *hair* is raised to [hɛ:r].

Based on the research done by Vorster and Proctor, I conducted a study to determine the attitudes of black standard-nine pupils towards the cultural-linguistic stereotypes associated with Conservative and Extreme SAE dialects. The aims of this survey were:

1. to establish whether negative attitudes towards the Extreme dialect were apparent; and
2. to determine the ability of the subjects to distinguish between the SAE dialects used.

2. THE MATCHED-GUISE TECHNIQUE

A means of testing language attitudes was devised by Lambert et al. (1960). This method, the 'matched-guise' technique, requires that one person read the same passage in two different dialects. In other words, the reader assumes a verbal disguise or 'linguistic guise'. The aim of this technique is to control personal linguistic variables such as voice quality and voice dynamics. The test group will then evaluate each guise as a different person and any differences in their responses can then be attributed to differences in attitude towards the two dialects used.

Presumably by hearing similar accents very frequently [one learns] to associate them with their reference groups. In other words, accents with which people are familiar may directly evoke stereotyped responses without the listener first consciously assigning the speaker to a particular reference group. (Milroy and McClenaghan, 1982:25.)

Most language-attitude research is evaluated in terms of the mentalist theory. The attitude is perceived as an intervening cognitive variable between the stimulus provided in the test and the person's response. The affective component within the mentalist theory involves emotions, motivations and attitudes, and may be measured by verbal statements indicating the subject's opinions.

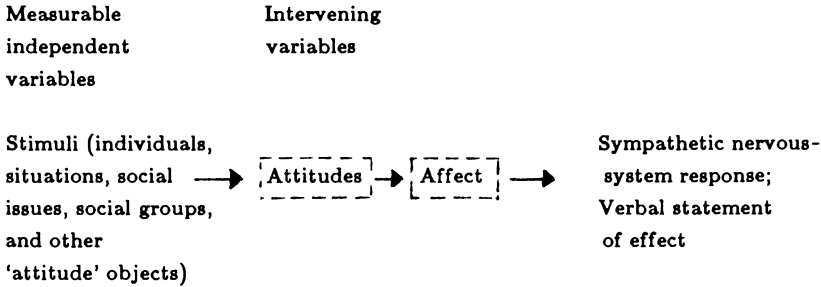


FIGURE 1: A schematic conception of the affective component in attitudes (adapted from *Zimbardo et al., 1977:21*)

Lambert et al. (1975:129) observe that '[the matched-guise technique] has proved instructive and useful as a means of investigating the social tensions in bi-cultural or multi-ethnic settings'. This technique may be used in South Africa to determine the reactions of *'minority' language groups towards the official languages. The results of such surveys should influence language planning and teaching policies. Krashen (1981:19), surveying recent research on aptitude and attitude, observes that 'both language aptitude (as measured by standard tests) and attitude (affective variables) appear to be related to second language achievement, but are not related to each other'.

Although the matched-guise technique serves to limit irrelevant variables, a number of problems are associated with this type of presentation:

1. Speakers may be judged on voice quality and reading performance rather than accent.

* I recognise that the use of 'minority languages' is inappropriate here, but this term is used to represent those linguistic groups of low status that are not officially recognised.

2. There may be some inconsistency between the language variety used and the text selected since the topic should not influence the evaluation.
3. Research assumptions based on cognitive and affective variables cannot easily be verified.
4. The testing procedure is artificial. Speakers are not heard in a natural context and are judged only on vocal variation.

(For further discussion refer to Fasold, 1984:152-155.)

3. THE READERS

One problem in this regard is the tendency of speakers unfamiliar with a particular dialect to caricature the dialect by exaggerating the phonetic markers associated with it. Therefore I selected two readers on the basis of their ability to read in both the Conservative and the Extreme dialects.

The two readers each read a ninety-second extract from the African folk tale 'If the Boerboon flowers fall' (Poland and Voigt, 1979:41-42) in both dialects. A third reader acted as a distractor to reduce the subjects' awareness that a single reader was using two dialects. The voices were arranged on audio cassette in such a way that at no stage did the two guises of a single reader follow one another directly.

4. THE TEST MATERIAL

The extract was selected because it was felt that it would not be culturally alien to the test group. The extract was easy to understand and was unlikely to influence the subjects' perceptions of the reader's competence. The presence of Afrikaans lexical items allows the test to appear natural in both dialects. (See Appendix I).

5. THE TEST POPULATION

Thirty-five black standard-nine pupils were provided with a set of instructions and asked to evaluate the personality of each reader on the tape using voice cues only. The subjects were told that the purpose of the research was to determine the validity of the common habit of surveying the personality of unfamiliar speakers heard over the telephone or radio. No reference was made to dialect variation.

The average age of the subjects was 17,5 years, and the home language most common to the group was Northern Sotho. All subjects received classes in both English and Afrikaans as a second language.

6. THE TEST PROCEDURE

The subjects evaluated each reader during and immediately after hearing his voice on the audio tape. The subjects responded on the questionnaire in Appendix II, rating each reader on eleven traits according to a seven-point scale. These traits were grouped according to the three categories identified by Lambert (1972:339):

1. *competence*: education, intelligence;
2. *personal integrity*: likability, honesty, generosity, reliability, good/bad father;
3. *social attractiveness*: friendliness (sociability), politeness.

Religiousness and physical attractiveness were added as these were felt to be important in judging the personality as a whole.

Each trait was discussed and examples of the personality type provided. The subjects were assured that all responses would be anonymous and confidential.

The subjects were also asked to choose the 'likely occupation of this person'. These occupations were selected for three reasons:

1. They would be familiar to the subjects.
2. They would not have a high political profile.
3. They would vary in status.

The occupations had been assessed by African language speakers and rated according to a scale of social acceptability before being included in the questionnaire.

At the end of the test the subjects were asked to complete an identical questionnaire:

1. to indicate how an ideal friend would score on the first ten traits; and
2. to rate the occupations from one to five in terms of desirability.

The final questionnaire served as a way of checking that the traits and occupations I considered to be of high value were in fact what the subjects themselves rated highly.

The questionnaire format was based on the semantic differential scale (Osgood, Succi and Tennebaum, 1957). The following procedure is used in scoring semantic differential scales. (Fasold, 1984: 150-151). The seven-point scale is numbered once the responses have been collected. The subjects' responses for each point on the scale are added separately. This initial tabulation is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

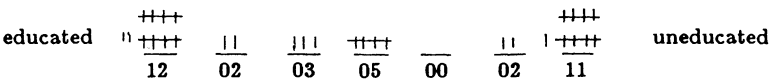


FIGURE 2: Initial tabulation for semantic differential scale for education.

The seven-point scale in Figure 2 assigns a 7 to the positive end of the scale, educated, and a 1 to the negative end. The responses are then multiplied by the number allocated to each rating. The results are totalled. In the example provided, the calculation would be:

$$\begin{array}{cccccccc}
 (7 \times 12) & + & (6 \times 2) & + & (5 \times 3) & + & (4 \times 5) & + & (3 \times 0) & + & (2 \times 2) & + & (1 \times 11) \\
 84 & + & 12 & + & 15 & + & 20 & + & 0 & + & 4 & + & 11 \\
 & & & & & & & & & & & & = 146
 \end{array}$$

This value is divided by the total number of subjects, in this case, 35. The result, 4,1 indicates the mean evaluation for this speaker on the education scale.

7. RESULTS AND EVALUATION

A comparison of the subjects' responses to the Conservative and Extreme guises of each speaker shows a remarkably consistent bias in favour of the Conservative South African English dialect, and supports my hypothesis to some degree. Figures 3 and 4 below show the mean evaluation per trait for each reader.

READER 1

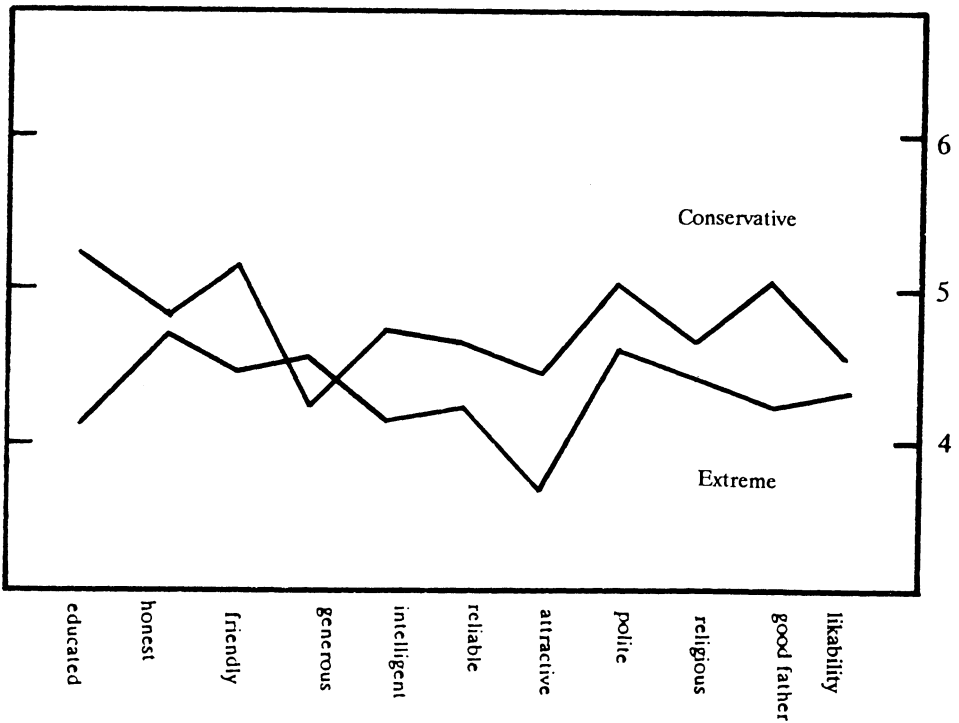


FIGURE 3: A straight-line graph showing the mean evaluation per trait for reader 1 on a 7-point scale.

READER 2

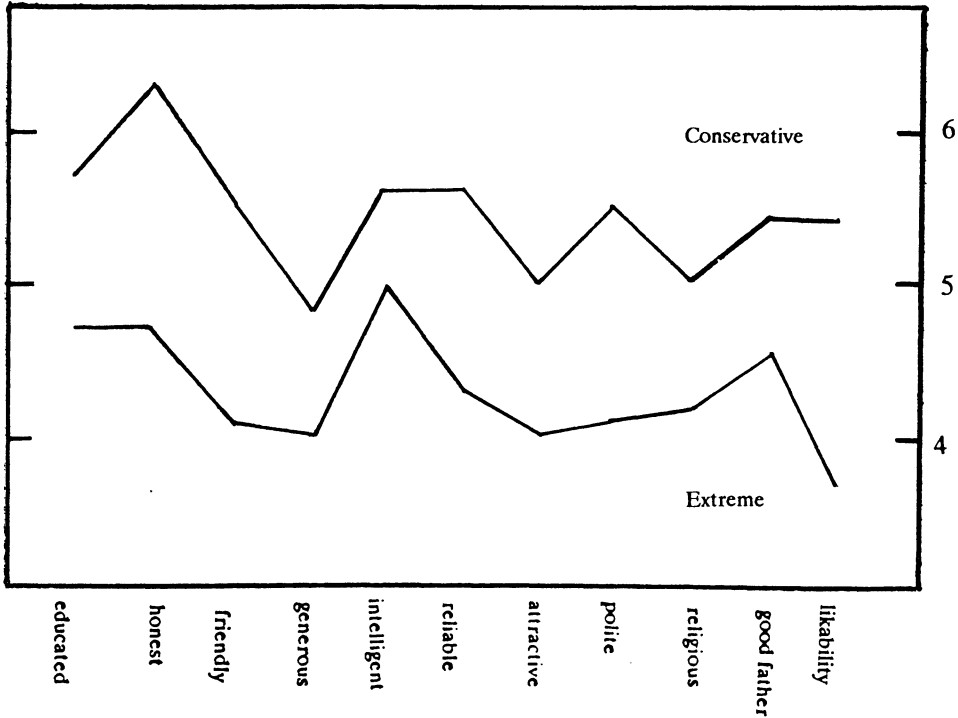


FIGURE 4: A straight-line graph showing the mean evaluation per trait for reader 2 on a 7-point scale.

The results do answer my secondary question in that the subjects were able to discriminate between the Conservative and Extreme dialects. However, this does not imply that the subjects were able to consciously identify either dialect.

The responses to occupation showed no meaningful discrimination between the dialects. The table below shows how the subjects rated the occupations in terms of desirability in the final questionnaire. (See par. 6) These are presented in descending order.

OCCUPATION	MEAN EVALUATION
doctor	4,8
teacher	4,0
shop assistant	2,1
factory foreman	2,0
factory worker	1,8

Figure 5: Subjects' rating of occupational status on a 5-point scale.

There was a discrepancy between the status accorded by subjects to the occupations in the final questionnaire and in their responses to the readers. For example, while only two of the 35 subjects suggested that the occupation of reader I might be *doctor* for the Conservative guise, six subjects marked *doctor* as the possible occupation for this reader in the Extreme guise. As a result, the mean evaluation of the occupations shows no significant correlation. These results are given below:

SPEAKER 1	Conservative SAE	3,1
	Extreme SAE	3,0
SPEAKER 2	Conservative SAE	3,8
	Extreme SAE	2,6

A factor influencing the outcome of this survey is that speakers were often evaluated positively in all other traits, but considered selfish, unreliable and not religious. There are two possible reasons for this:

1. Misinterpretation of these traits. The questionnaire was not translated into the mother-tongues of the subjects, and required an understanding of abstract personality features.
2. Notions of what values are acceptable differ amongst cultures. For example, toughness may be highly valued in one society, but judged negatively in another. 'Consequently, if a characteristic like toughness is associated with a particular form of speech (such as dialect), people who use that form

of speech will be highly valued where toughness is respected, and rated negatively where it is not.' (Hudson, 1980:197)

The above explanation is supported by the relations frequently established between 'good father', 'doctor', 'teacher' and the negative traits 'unfriendly', 'unreliable' and 'selfish'. The relationship between these characteristics may be associated with a culture-specific perception of the authority figure.

8. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research should be conducted to determine the attitudes of black subjects towards Black SAE as opposed to Conservative SAE. The readers used for this survey should be mother-tongue speakers of one of the black languages in the area. This would determine whether the subjects' response to the stereotype of the white English speaker differs from the stereotypes associated with the African-language speaker who uses English.

Black readers could also be used to determine whether the ethnic group differences between the white readers and the subjects influenced the results. This would be difficult, however, as it would require speakers of a black language who are familiar with both the Conservative and Extreme dialects of English.

Since I was not able to account for all the possible variables influencing the subject's responses, the personality traits used in further research should be selected in collaboration with a sociologist and the list of occupations possibly deleted (see par. 7).

APPENDIX I

Mbiba the grey rat crept out of a crack in the wall. His shadow darted beside him over the stones - stopped and hovered as he glanced around. He scuttled over the patch of bare earth between the watertank and the cattle-kraal and hid in a thorn bush growing at the gate. He looked mourn-

fully into the hunting bag he carried, counting the contents - a few hard seeds, a piece of bleached bone and half an eggshell with a little yolk still smeared inside. It had not been a successful morning and the children would be hungry.

He sat awhile, blinking in the dusty shade, his grey fur standing all awry. He could see goats wandering among the spekboom and the jagged shadows of the bushes trembled in the hot wind. He humped his bag on his back and sidled into the cattle-kraal, searching among the dung and churned-up earth. He found nothing so he went home - past the pepper trees, under the idle old wagon and into a hole in the wall of an abandoned cottage, used as a haybarn. A passage scratched out between the lime blocks led to a disused 'bak-oond' where he lived. It was big and warm and light filtered through a chink in the stonework.

He found his wife sweeping and the children were tumbled in a corner, well out of reach of her broom. 'Food at last!' she cried. 'Children, come and see what your father has brought.'

'My dear,' began the dishevelled Mbiba, smiling apologetically, 'I...I haven't been successful at all.'

His wife emptied his bag on the floor. 'Is that all? That won't feed us!' she squeaked in anguish and the six small rats gazed at their father in consternation.

'There was nothing else,' sighed Mbiba, picking up the bag and twisting it in his paws. 'It's the drought.'

APPENDIX II

Details of the informant:

1. School _____
2. Standard _____
3. Male _____ Female _____
4. Age _____
5. Home language _____

Instructions:

You will hear five people reading the same passage on the tape. Try to determine what each person is like according to the personality characteristics listed. There is a seven-point scale between two opposing points, for example:

rich _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ poor

Mark the space that you feel is most appropriate to your perception of the reader.

Voice number: _____

What do you think of this person?

- | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------------|
| 1. educated | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | uneducated |
| 2. honest | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | dishonest |
| 3. unfriendly | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | friendly |
| 4. selfish | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | generous |
| 5. unintelligent | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | intelligent |
| 6. reliable | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | unreliable |
| 7. attractive | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | unattractive |
| 8. polite | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | impolite |
| 9. religious | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | not religious |
| 10. bad father | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | good father |

11. Would you like this person?

Very much _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Not at all

12. In your opinion, what would the likely occupation of this person be? Choose one of the following:

- | | |
|-------|-----------------|
| _____ | doctor |
| _____ | factory worker |
| _____ | shop assistant |
| _____ | factory foreman |
| _____ | teacher |

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