

CORRESPONDENCE

From Mr R.M.E. Gilfillan

I have noted that distinctions are frequently made in journals such as your own between standard British English and other local forms of English. It is widely argued that the local/regional/national variety should be accepted as a form of English which is as valid as the standard British model. Ellis and Tomlinson state that 'there is no absolute need to use standard English as the model in ESL countries and a change to standard Kenyan English or standard Ghanaian English would not involve lowering of standards but a change to a different but equally valid standard.'¹

As one engaged in the task of teaching English as a second language to Blacks in South Africa, I would be interested in your readers' response to the following question: what standards should be applied in deciding what is acceptable English in our national written examinations? I acknowledge that the primary aim of L2 teaching should be the achievement of communicative competence; this being the case, should an examiner accept such forms of English as the following: 'I am having a pain'? This question is enough to give anyone a headache, I fear!

The examinations set by educational institutions frequently reveal attitudes which are intrinsically conservative and authoritarian in that they are prescriptive in their evaluation of language. The question is, however, what is the alternative? Were the concept of communication as the goal of L2 learning to be accepted, should certain local variations such as the following be overlooked: 'I was very much happy'; and what if spectators

at athletics meetings are encouraged to 'cheer up' the athletes on the final lap instead of cheering them on? Do such things as concord and gender errors obstruct communication? Most deviations from British standard English, in South Africa, occur in oral English, particularly in pronunciation: pro'blem (proh-blem) instead of pro'blem (prob-lem). Should differing standards be applied in the evaluation of 'local' *oral* English and British standard *written* English (the former is usually more deviant from standard British English than the latter)?²

I would be interested in your readers' views on this matter: should educational institutions continue to insist on the British standard model in the assessment of written examinations or should they be prepared to accept 'South African English'? If the latter is the preferred option,

- a) which varieties should be regarded as standard South African English? Professor Lanham's list varies from 'Respectable South African English' to 'Extreme South African English'.³ Teachers of English need to address the difficult area of so-called Black English.
- b) How is it going to be possible to equip examiners and sub-examiners with the norms governing the various forms of South African English when it comes to the marking of scripts?

REFERENCES

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3. Lanham L.W. 'English in South Africa' in *English As A World Language*, Bailey and others (eds). Ann Arbor, 1982, pp. 102-104.

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