

Linguists in the Market Place

L.W. Lanham, and K.P. Prinsloo eds. *Language and Communication Studies in South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1978. 259 pp. Boards R8.75.

'Communication studies' is, at least in part a development from the realization that our educational system is failing to produce linguistically competent school-leavers and that many of the students who enter university and who are, presumably, able to communicate more effectively than those who do not enter university, are in effect and to varying degrees illiterate and linguistically inept. 'Communication Studies' is also an acceptance of the fact that literary-orientated courses for those not studying the humanities serve no purpose whatsoever; that they need far more basic and remedial tuition in order to fit them for a career in law, commerce, engineering, or medicine; that in our benevolent insistence on teaching the classics of our literature to those whose needs are more elementary and who have no interest in these classics, we have erred, failing seriously to provide what is really needed, because of our refusal to accept the implications of a poor and deteriorating educational system.

Language and Communication Studies in South Africa deals, as the title indicates, with more than communication, however. South Africa, it seems, is a country with a multitude of problems. Not content with 'multiracialism' or 'multinationalism', we also have 'multilingualism'. This book aims to describe the 'present

state' of language and communication studies in the country, with reference to all South African language groups, and to suggest directions for future research.

The variety of articles in this collection is a creditable attempt to provide professional linguists and others with 'an adequate perspective of the language wealth of South Africa' (p. 7). As this is essentially a survey, it is useful to find ample bibliographical material appended to many of the chapters.

The themes of such a book are as multifarious as the multilingual society it describes. It has three parts. In the first the background is presented: the history of the languages of Southern Africa; language contact and bilingualism; and the work of research institutions. In Part II, the main languages of South Africa are discussed. Here an anomaly intrudes, for although the editors point out that 'South Africa' in the title excludes South West Africa (q.v. p. 9), Mr Traill says, in his chapter on 'research on the non-Bantu African languages': 'The survey will be almost wholly concerned with the recent and current work in South West Africa and Botswana' (p. 117).

Part III deals with language in education, with chapters on Afrikaans, English and Bantu languages in education and speech pathology and audiology in South Africa.

The diversity of contributions will be obvious from this survey of the contents. One of the most important insights to be derived from this book is the need for more research in the field of applied linguistics. In the words of Professor Kroes (who is referring here to Afrikaans, but may equally have been writing about any of our languages):

... teachers of Afrikaans share the conviction that a tremendous task lies ahead of us, and that we have only started scratching the surface. One could conclude, however, that the present trend is a growing awareness amongst teachers of Afrikaans of the need for research, the importance of the insights which may be gained from Linguistics and related disciplines, and the need for greater co-ordination and team work in which linguists and methodologists, practising teachers and educational technologists make their respective contributions in what should be an interdisciplinary effort.

(p. 185)

The realization of this ideal is hampered by two

problems: firstly, the 'fact that so few linguists in South Africa are prepared to enter the field of Applied Linguistics, or to do research which may be applied immediately to the teaching of the two official languages' (Kroes, p. 181); and, secondly, the fact that teachers of languages are expected to teach 'Language' without having been obliged to undertake any study of linguistics. This is a serious omission in our teacher training programmes and an issue which, it would appear, most universities and education departments are avoiding. Professor Kroes points out that 'there is consensus among leading linguists and language teaching methodologists that teacher training has suffered in the past from the lack of a linguistics component in the training programme' (p. 184). With reference to English in education, Mr Douglas Young points out that,

Linguistics is not yet recognized as a teaching subject in teacher training courses, with the result that the newly-qualified teacher of English, who has spent three years reading English literature, has little commitment to, nor perhaps strong interest in, the teaching of English language.

(p. 187)

It is clear that there is an imbalance in our courses that needs careful and urgent attention. In view of my remarks about 'Communication Studies' (see above), it seems that a review of our approach to language and linguistics is overdue. It may even be necessary to consider the separation of literature from language study in our schools:

There is strong evidence from linguistic research that communicative incompetence is the result of inadequate structured practice, at school level, in using language in all its varieties. English literature cannot claim to be a manifestation of the totality of language variety. There would seem to be a strong case for separating the teaching of English literature from that of language. Better still, the term English appearing in school and university curricula should be qualified into its functional components, such as Language, Literature, Spoken Language and so on, thus providing the basis for more clearly defined learning objectives.

(Young, pp. 212-13)

A further problem is the State's refusal to accord education the status and finance it ought to have. A typical example of official short-sightedness is cited by Professor Kroes, who is referring to courses for

adults devised by two inspectors of education:

...the courses had to be produced single-handed by individuals, in a short space of time. Not enough money was made available to secure the services of good graphic artists. The courses were not the result of team work. In short, the pioneers responsible for the courses can only be admired for what they were able to produce under these very difficult circumstances, but they were doomed from the start ...

(p. 177)

The lack of adequate planning and research is seen for example, in an attempt in one province 'to introduce a strong transformational grammar component at secondary level without adequate preparation of the teachers or the provision of suitable textbooks' (171).

The picture of the present state of language studies in South Africa is a rather sombre one, but we should not despair about the survival of English:

Surely the issue at stake is not whether it [English] will survive and for whom, but what will be the level of linguistic and communicative competence of its users, and, perhaps more important, will a rapidly expanding, underprivileged community of Blacks continue to produce enough teachers to teach them this world-access language?

(p. 188)

If we feel confident that our language will survive, then it is incumbent on those of us involved in education to ensure that a high standard is attained.

It is both unfortunate and ironic that a book dealing with communication and language should contain a number of errors and infelicities. There are the seemingly inevitable printing errors:

as lightly for a slightly (p. 74)

Britian (p. 149)

Con SAE for Cons SAE (p. 149)

Errors of concord are rather frequent:

... and the population's attitude towards, as well as proficiency in these languages, are being studied.

(p. 53)

O'Neil's claims about the disappearance of inflections in contact situations between Germanic dialects with different in-

flection systems is supported by It concerns

(p. 75)

Much of the literature on theory and technique remind one

(p. 221)

The persistent 'hopefully' seems to have acquired a dubious respectability on pp. 188, 193 and 216.

On p. 96, there is an example of faulty idiom:

This resulted in not only an important re-evaluation of the Dokean approach to Bantu linguistics in terms of general linguistics, but also to ...

Fewer should replace less in:

One important consequence was that the number of tones distinguished by earlier Bantu philologists such as Endemann, who isolated no less than five tones in the Sotho languages ...

(p. 102)

Finally, consistency in the choice of a plural for 'syllabus' is desirable within chapters (cf. pp. 171 and 180) and consistency in the use of 'which' or 'who' should have been sought in this sentence:

This may be true of other groups which are socially mobile ... and who place

(p. 239)

These errors are, however, minor blemishes on a product that has successfully conveyed a sense of the variety of issues in language studies in this country. As the authors have suggested, our use of language is closely connected with the quality of the civilization we hope to develop in South Africa. If, as Bernstein believes, 'educational failure is very often linguistic failure' (quoted p. 107), then we have a responsibility to ensure and inculcate a greater sensitivity to language and its functions.

K.J. Saycell

University of South Africa