

# Between Languages: Athol Fugard and/in Afrikaans

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## Summary

A study of dramatic language in a playwright's oeuvre should, according to Vimala Herman (1995), not only focus on the interactive and interactional uses of dialogue, but should also include a discussion of the wider cultural *context* in which these plays are situated. In this article I use the above viewpoint as an approach to study dramatic language in Fugard's oeuvre. A short analysis is firstly given of how the "mechanics" of everyday conversation is demonstrated in a particular scene in Fugard's *Boesman and Lena* (1978). The main focus of the article is, however, a discussion of a broader issue, namely the sociopolitical context of Fugard's use of *Afrikaans* in a large section of his English plays; his own relationship with Afrikaans, and the ironic reversal of how Afrikaans and English audiences perceive his plays today.

## Opsomming

Volgens Vimala Herman (1995) behoort enige studie van dramatiese taalgebruik in 'n dramaturg se oeuvre nie net te fokus op die wisselwerking en interaktiewe gebruike van dialoog nie. So 'n studie behoort ook die wyer *konteks* van kultuur waarin hierdie dramas geplaas is, te betrek. Eerstens word 'n kort bespreking gegee van hoe die "meganika" van alledaagse gesprekvoering gedemonstreer word in 'n bepaalde toneel in Fugard se *Boesman and Lena* (1978). Die grootste gedeelte van die artikel handel egter oor 'n breër saak, naamlik die sosio-politiese konteks van Fugard se gebruik van *Afrikaans* in 'n groot gedeelte van sy Engelse dramas, sy eie verhouding met Afrikaans, en die ironiese ommekeer wat plaasgevind het in hoe Afrikaanse en Engelse gehore sy dramas vandag ervaar.

## 1 Introduction

The study of (dramatic) language in any playwright's work usually entails a variety of issues – and quite often also complex issues. It is clear from Vimala Herman's seminal study on this topic (*Dramatic Discourse*) that one should not only keep the specifics of dramatic dialogue within the play itself in mind; one also needs to approach a study of dramatic language more

broadly, i.e. also take the larger context(s) in which dramatic language is placed (e.g. the linguistic and socio-political contexts) into consideration.

According to Herman (1995: 6) there is no direct resemblance between conversations in real life and dramatic discourse: dramatic speech and discourse do not faithfully mirror “some real life correlate”. The likeness which is found is rather based on the mimicry of the “mechanics” of real-life discourse in drama. Playwrights thus “exploit the underlying speech conventions, principles and ‘rules’ of use operative in speech exchange in the many sorts, conditions and contexts of society which members use in their interactions in day-to-day exchanges”. She regards “ordinary speech” or “speech in everyday contexts” as a “resource that dramatists will use to construct dialogue in plays”.

A fundamental premise in Herman’s work is her contention that all “dialogue is interactive and interactional” and that “the linguistic units of analysis appropriate to dialogue as interactional speech are *utterances*” (p. 13). However, utterances should never be seen in isolation, but, according to her, as “[being] always embedded in situations within cultures, and [being] open to various social and not grammatical meanings alone” (p. 18). Utterances are thus generally placed in specific contexts and form complex units, namely *speech events*. According to Herman, context includes “extra-linguistic co-ordinates like the immediate spatio-temporal setting of speech, the roles and status of the participants, etc.”, but she also adds another, broader definition of context: “Context can also refer to the cognitive context, the set of beliefs, assumptions, presuppositions, frames, which participants activate or draw on to interpret interactions .... The wider context of culture and the norms for behavior required by society, or a particular subculture, exert their influence on linguistic behavior in particular settings, or with specific social others” (p. 14).

It is against the above background that I will approach my study of dramatic language in Fugard’s oeuvre. I start with a short analysis of Fugard’s use of the “mechanics” of everyday conversation in a simulated dramatic conversation in *Boesman and Lena*, where the interplay between various languages (English, Afrikaans and Xhosa) is foregrounded. Then I discuss a much broader issue, namely the larger (socio-political) context of Fugard’s use of dramatic language as demonstrated by the use of Afrikaans in a large selection of his English plays. Various aspects will be addressed in this section: (1) Fugard’s own view of Afrikaans (e.g. his own comments about Afrikaans and the portrayal of Afrikaners/Afrikaans in his plays); (2) the relationship between Afrikaans and English in South Africa (historically, socio-politically), especially in the period in which Fugard produces his work; and (3) the ironical reversal of how South African Afrikaans and English audiences receive Fugard’s work.

This article is only an exploratory discussion of the above issues. It will become clear from the discussion below that much more could be said about

each of these topics, and that all aspects mentioned could be studied in more detail and depth than is possible in a study such as this.

## 2 The “Mechanics” of Dramatic Language Illustrated: Pretended Communication in *Boesman and Lena*

*Boesman and Lena* is the play in Fugard’s existing oeuvre that contains the most Afrikaans words, phrases and sentences (altogether more than 200 Afrikaans words). Not only Afrikaans is used in this English play, but also some Xhosa (with Outa’s arrival). The interplay between these different languages in the same play leads to some interesting “communicative situations” with the characters. The play includes a long scene that commences with the appearance of Outa in Boesman and Lena’s midst one evening and culminates in his death later the same evening (Fugard 1978: 256-284). This scene gives an example of how the *mechanics* of communication are simulated, even though the speakers are unable to speak or even understand one another’s language.

The interplay between various South African languages (English, Afrikaans and Xhosa) characterises this scene, and defines the relationship between Lena and Outa. When Outa appears on the scene, Lena tries to communicate with him almost immediately – in stark contrast with Boesman’s attitude and actions upon seeing their visitor for the first time. Lena tries speaking English and Afrikaans with the old black man, but is frustrated in her efforts to communicate with him when she realises that he is a Xhosa-speaker. Outa’s inability to speak either English or Afrikaans and Lena’s inability to talk to him in Xhosa thwart any form of real communication between the two characters:

*(Lena takes a few steps towards the old man ... As Lena approaches him he murmurs a greeting in Xhosa.)*

*(Boesman watches this, and Lena’s other attempts to communicate with the old man, with cruel amusement...)*

Lena: Don’t you speak English and Afrikaans? “*Môre, baas!*”

(p. 257)

...

LENA: What’s the matter? You sick? Where’s it hurt?

*(Nothing.)*

*(The old man murmurs in Xhosa.)*

Stop that baboon language! *Waar kry jy seer?*

*(Another unintelligible response.)*

*(Lena turns away in violent disgust.)* Ag, go to hell! *Onnooslike kaffer. My bleddy bek af praat vir niks!*

(pp. 258-259)

The use of racist forms of address by Lena in this scene (“baas”, “kaffer”, “baboon”) is of course highly ironic within the socio-political context of this play (South Africa in the late 1960s). Lena is in fact mimicking the way a racist white person would address a black or coloured person in that period. Lena’s use of these racist terms could be a way of showing the frustration resulting from her failure to get reaction from Outa. It could also be that she simply believes that this is a form of address Outa would recognise and respond to. Lena is so desperate to communicate with Outa (as another human being) that she tries again and succeeds in introducing herself to him:

LENA: ...  
Hey, look at me?  
*(He looks at her.)*  
My name is Lena.  
*(She pats herself on the chest. Nothing happens. She tries again, but this time, she pats him.)*  
Outa ... You ... *(patting herself)* ... Lena ... me.  
OLD MAN: Lena.

Lena is moved by their achievement of basic communication and offers him one of their precious bottles of water:

LENA *(offering the bottle)*. Water. Water! Manzi!  
*(She helps him get it to his lips. He drinks. In between mouthfuls he murmurs away in Xhosa. Lena picks up the odd phrase and echoes it ... “Bhomboloza Outa, Bhomboloza” ... “Mlomo, ewe mlomo” ... “Yes, Outa, dala” ... as if she understood him.*  
*The whole of the monologue follows this pattern: the old man murmuring intermittently – the occasional phrase or even sentence quite clear – and Lena surrendering herself more and more to the illusion of conversation.)*  
(pp. 260-262)

That Lena pretends to understand what Outa is saying and continues for some time with the charade that they are communicating is a poignant revelation of her desperate need for human contact and communication. When Outa continues to speak in Xhosa, Lena maintains the illusion that they are really talking to each other by pretending that they are interacting with each other.<sup>1</sup> Even though this is a pseudo-conversation between the

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1. Vandenbroucke:

Outa is Lena’s sounding board and his words in a language she cannot comprehend are a kind of Rorschach test: she projects onto them as she pleases and hears what she wants. Lena reveals those parts of herself and her past that she longs to disclose to a fellow human’s sympathetic if uncomprehending ears, but sometimes she deludes both herself and Outa.

two of them, Lena seems to find comfort in this pretence and continues for quite some time to “talk” to Outa in this manner.

Although Outa sometimes murmurs a few words in Xhosa during this lengthy scene, Lena is clearly dominant in this so-called “dialogue”; she talks almost uninterruptedly for the duration of this scene. However, she does keep up the pretence of a real conversation between them by making a show of adhering to the “formal” or “conventional” characteristics of everyday conversation. By acknowledging Outa’s role as a speaker and a listener in this “conversation” and by affording him an opportunity to “reply” to her remarks, she creates the illusion that they are “taking turns” during their “conversation”:

*(The old man starts murmuring again. This time it is accompanied by much head-shaking. Lena interprets this as a rejection of what she has just said.)*

No, *Outa*, I did ! *Haai*, it’s true! Why should I lie?

*(Her tone and manner becoming progressively more angry.)*

It’s true! What do you know? Don’t argue! Bloody old ...

*(The old man makes a move to stand up. Lena, changing tone and attitude, forces him to stay seated.)*

Okay! Okay! Okay, *Outa* !! I’ll tell you the truth. But mustn’t say I *lieg*. Sit still.

(p. 263)

In his discussion of *Boesman and Lena*, Albert Wertheim (2000: 57) says that the use of Afrikaans (and Xhosa) in this play effectively characterises and situates the characters, and also demonstrates their “racial South African coordinates”. He writes:

Fugard also manipulates language to characterize his two characters, for as in no other play he had ever written before or has written since is the language peppered with Afrikaans. It is true their Anglo-Afrikaans patois is a way of reminding us that Boesman and Lena’s language would be Afrikaans. But Morrie and Zach, Hester and Johnnie would also certainly have conversed in Afrikaans, as would the characters in *Playland* or *Valley song*. Except for an occasional word, the language of those plays does not present any difficulties for the non-Afrikaans-speaking audience member or reader. But in *Boesman*

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Their duologue is actually a stream of consciousness monologue during which Lena utters some of Fugard’s most eloquent prose.

(1986: 83-84)

He also states in a footnote (p. 105) that, in the French translation of this play, the Xhosa was translated into French, but that Fugard later acknowledged that this had been a mistake and that the old man’s murmurings should have stayed incomprehensible to the audience – as they are to Lena and Boesman.

and *Lena*, the probably Xhosa-speaking Outa appears not at all to understand the characters' language, and a white English-speaking audience will not catch all of Boesman and *Lena's* heavily Afrikaans-laden speech. The racially mixed situation of the characters is thus cleverly and dramatically reinforced by the language they speak.

(Wertheim 2000: 57)

### 3 The Interplay of Afrikaans and English in Fugard's Plays

#### 3.1 Athol Fugard: A "Bastardised" Afrikaner

Athol Fugard often calls himself a "bastardised Afrikaner"<sup>2</sup> – his father is of Irish descent, while his mother was an Afrikaner. Vandembrouck says the following about him:

Fugard sometimes refers to his family as *bywoners*, literally "squatters" or "share-croppers", a term applied generically to all poor whites ... Fugard claims, however, there was no English-Afrikaner conflict in his home, though he does call himself "a bastardised Afrikaner, a product of cultural miscegenation" .... His father had a poor command of Afrikaans and usually conversed with his wife in English, but Fugard remembers, "We spoke both languages with indiscriminate proficiency".

(Vandembrouck 1986: 15)

Fugard was born in Middelburg (Northern Cape) and grew up in the Eastern Cape region of South Africa (Port Elizabeth). He understands and speaks Afrikaans fluently, although he does not have the confidence to write in Afrikaans. According to Vandembroucke (1986: 15) he "would not attempt to write creatively in Afrikaans", but is "very conscious of how certain qualities, certain textures, certain moods – in terms of the South African scene – can with total precision be described only by an Afrikaans turn of the word". Some of his earlier plays are situated in Port Elizabeth and the surrounding areas (the so-called PE plays: *Master Harold and the Boys*, *Blood Knot*, *Hello and Goodbye*, *Boesman and Lena*), while his later plays are almost exclusively placed in the small town of Nieu-Bethesda in the Eastern Cape. Fugard has a house in Nieu-Bethesda and often stays there for a few months of the year when he is in South Africa. Many of his characters in these plays are based on Nieu-Bethesda townsfolk, many of whom are coloured and speak Afrikaans. They include Bootjie and Oubaas in *Bootjie and the Oubaas*; and Buks in *Valley Song*.

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2. According to Gray, "Fugard delights in classifying himself as a cultural bastard, English-Afrikaner, black-white" (1986: 23-24).

The following two issues should thus be kept in mind: (1) Fugard's link with the Afrikaner and the Afrikaans language through his mother; and (2) his deep love and affinity for his country of birth (South Africa), especially the Northern and Eastern Cape regions where Afrikaans and English communities live side by side.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.2 Fugard and the Use of Afrikaans in His Plays

Fugard's characters often speak Afrikaans (and other indigenous South African languages) in his plays. The interplay between English and Afrikaans (and/or other indigenous languages, such as Zulu and Xhosa) is found in plays throughout his oeuvre (from *Blood Knot*, which was written in 1961, to recent plays such as *Exits and Entrances*, *Sorrows and Rejoicings*, and *Valley Song*). Many of the characters in these plays intersperse their English with a variety of Afrikaans words, phrases, short sentences and slang. Some plays contain only a few non-English words (*Playland*, 1992), while others include Afrikaans on every page of the written text (*Boesman and Lena* includes approximately 200 Afrikaans words).<sup>4</sup>

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3. Seidenspinner (1986: 98-99) also foregrounds Fugard's particular South African identity – both his sense of “being an Afrikaner” and “the specifically ‘local’ cut of his plays and his dramatis personae, of their characters, their conflicts and attitudes and above all of their idiom and strong accent which they share with Fugard”.
  4. Fugard often uses Afrikaans, from a few Afrikaans words/phrases in some plays to quite a lot in many plays. Here follows a summary of the plays that include Afrikaans:
    - Blood Knot* (1961: 58, 59, 79, 102, 119, 120). This play contains approximately 20 Afrikaans words such as *hotnot* and *swartgat* (p. 79), and *voetsek* (p. 119).
    - Hello and Goodbye* (1965: 136, 158, 166, 169, 176). This play contains six Afrikaans words, including *hoer* (p. 158).
    - Boesman and Lena* (1969). This is Fugard's play with the most words, phrases, short sentences and even a song in Afrikaans. It includes more than 200 Afrikaans words: *moer*, *vrot*, *skof*, *voetsek*, *eina* (p. 194); *pondok*, *hotnot*, *moer*, *kaalgat*, *brak*, *hond* (p. 196); *skeef*, *dop*, *bedonnerd* (p. 203); *hond*, *lawaai*, *leeggesuip*, *loop*, *pondok*, *Outa* (p. 216); *sies moer*, *naar*, *kaffer*, *Outa*, *woel* (p. 238). It also includes phrases: *ou ding* (p. 194); *ou Hotnot meid* (p. 195); *môre baas* (p. 211); *ou drol* (p. 222); *môre is nog 'n dag* (p. 239). The characters use Afrikaans in whole sentences: *Vat jou brandewyn* (p. 194); *Daar kom 'n ding die kant* (p. 227); *Sa! Sa vir die kaffer!* (p. 230). The following Afrikaans song is heard in the play: *Ou blikkie kondens melk/Maak die lewe soet/Boesman is 'n Boesman/Maar hy dra 'n hotnot hoed* (p. 234).
    - People Are Living There* (1969). Only one Afrikaans word, namely *poep* (p. 111).

Most commentators have noted and commented on this characteristic of Fugard's work (Grey 1982).<sup>5</sup> A remark often made in this regard is that although his characters speak English and the play is written in English, the reader or the audience often gets the impression that the characters are really

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*Master Harold and the Boys* (1982). Afrikaans forms of address, like *Boet*, and an Afrikaans exclamation, *aikôna*. In addition, Oom Dawie (an Afrikaner) says: *Dis beter. Nou kan ons lekker gesels* (p. 174).

*Playland* (1992: 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 28, 30, 31, 33, 44, 46, 54, 56, 57, 58, 59): This play contains about 40 Afrikaans words, for example *verneuk* (p. 9), *bakgat* (p. 11), *bosbefok* (p. 12), *skelm* (p. 31), *handlanger* (p. 54).

*A Lesson from Aloes* (1981). Although this play is dedicated to his Afrikaans mother, Elizabeth Magdalena Potgieter, and Fugard uses an Afrikaner, Piet Bezuidenhout, one finds only one Afrikaans word, *maar* (p. 60) and one Afrikaans sentence, *Ons geslag is verkeerd* (p. 64) in this play.

*The Road to Mecca* (1985: 20, 21, 44, 77). Various references to *Afrikaners*, also *regmaker*, *baas*, *doek*.

*My Children! My Africa* (1989). Mr M quotes two Afrikaans sentences spoken by an Afrikaans character, Mr Dawid Grobbelaar: *Dis beter. Nou kan ons lekker gesels* (p. 174).

*Valley Song* (1995: 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 47, 48, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 76, 78, 81). There are more than 60 Afrikaans words, two Afrikaans hymns and several full sentences in this play, including: *Moenie vergeet om die kers dood te blaas nie* (p. 51), *klomp arme ou kleurlinge* (p. 60), and *ouma* and *oupa* (forms of address used throughout the play).

*Sorrows and Rejoicings* (2002: 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 31, 32, 38, 44, 53). Almost all the characters in the play have Afrikaans names and surnames (e.g. Jaap, Frik, Retief, De Lange, Conradie, Scheepers, Vosloo, Weyers). Afrikaans words like *sommer* (p. 8), *vriende of vyande*, *oupa en ouma*, *haai siestog* (p. 9) and a longer phrase, *Warm bruin brood en doringboom heuning* (p. 17), are used.

*Exits and Entrances* (2005/2006: 13, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 22, 23, 24, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42). Since one of the main characters is Andre Huguenot, a famous Afrikaans actor, it is to be expected that one will find quite a number of Afrikaans words, phrases and sentences in the play, including *Hou jou fockin bek! Luis gat!* (p. 3), *half-aan-die slaap domkoppe* (p. 4), *dominee* (p. 11), *snot en trane* (p. 12), *vervloekte, verkrampde dominees* (p. 23). There are approximately 47 Afrikaans words in this short play.

5. "The lengthy glossaries of South African words at the ends of his published collections do not, of course, pertain on stage: for the actors in performance no passages become italicized as one or another language barrier is crossed. The result of this use of English across the board, imbedded with acquisitions from its neighbouring, intermingling languages, is that Fugard can give whole plays over to no-go non-communication situations and make communication occur; the marriage of Piet and Gladys in *Aloes* is a key example" (Grey 1982: 25-26).



speaking a certain type of Afrikaans. This is especially noticeable in his Afrikaner and coloured characters).

Grey (1982: 25) makes an incisive and valuable contribution in this regard and argues that this interplay between English and Afrikaans or other indigenous languages is in fact more complicated than I have stated above. He takes as example Johnnie Smit and his sister in *Hello and Goodbye*. Although they speak English in the play they are most probably “‘poor white’ victims of the 30s Depression’ and in this case the Smits were most probably Afrikaans-speaking”. Grey concludes that “Fugard’s play is thus a linguistic pretence, not a literal, documentary representation”. Grey also mentions that the same holds true for the Sizwe-Buntu exchanges in *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, as well as for the dialogue in *Boesman and Lena*. One can in fact find many more examples of this “linguistic pretence” in plays written by Fugard after these remarks Grey made in 1984. (See for example Marta Barends and her daughter Rebecca’s exchanges in *Sorrows and Rejoicings*, or Buks and Veronica’s dialogues in *Valley Song*.)

Grey writes the following:

Fugard has frequently talked of his having had to “translate” the entire dialogue from Eastern Cape Afrikaans-based dialect into the slightly more generalized, mostly English, stage version. Fugard’s use of South African language resources, then, is far more artefactual than one would have supposed. He frequently transposes and adapts real-life speech into a theatrical language that is largely of his own devising, and so the plays are more “contrived” and further from actuality than one might imagine .... His synthesized English, however deeply rooted in the recognizable and the every-day, however derived from the market place and the street-corner, is filtered and adjusted to become a go-between medium that is more the language of an ideal state of communication than representative of an existing reality.

(Grey 1982: 25)

He comes to the conclusion that Fugard’s use of dramatic language is “ultimately more Fugardian than South African” (1982: 25). Grey’s foregrounding of the aspect of contrivance or “pretence” in Fugard’s use of dramatic language echoes Herman’s statement about dramatic discourse in general, namely that it is a mimicry of the “mechanics” of real-life dialogue. The characters in Fugard’s plays that use Afrikaans are often poor coloured characters like Boesman, Lena and Bootjie, or poor whites like Hester and Johnnie. More cultured Afrikaner figures are also found (e.g. Andre Huguenot in *Exits and Entrances*;<sup>6</sup> and Dawid Olivier in *Sorrows and Rejoicings*). Fugard depicts Afrikaners with surprising sympathy, even in his earliest

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6. See Keuris, M. 2008. Athol Fugard’s *Exits and Entrances*: The Playwright, the Actor and the Poet, *JLS/TLW* 24(2): 71-84.

plays that were written at the height of apartheid. (See Coleen Angove's study of Fugard's early work, specifically his portrayal of the Afrikaner.)

Some characters, for example Dawid Olivier in *Sorrows and Rejoicings* (2002), express a deep love for Afrikaans: "Dawid: .... Couple of times I went out and just walked aimlessly around London streets speaking in Afrikaans to myself ... when I landed in Jo'burg and spoke Afrikaans to the Immigration officer, it was like kissing my grandmother again, or Martha, or little Suikerbekkie" (p. 44).

### 3.3 Afrikaans and English in South Africa

It is clear when studying the interplay of Afrikaans and English in Fugard's plays that one cannot discuss the matter as if these two languages were simply two South African languages on equal footing. We cannot separate them and their shared historical and political context. The essays in Jourdin and Tuite's book, *Language, Culture, and Society*, clearly state and demonstrate that these three concepts (as highlighted in the book's title) cannot be seen in isolation from each other.

On the face of it Afrikaans and English were placed on an equal footing in 1925, when Afrikaans achieved official status. Both languages have therefore had official status since 1925. Although more than 11 languages (the current number of official languages in South Africa) were spoken at that time and are still spoken in the country, only Afrikaans and English were elevated to the status of official languages. Both languages were used in government departments and structures during the period of National Party rule (1948-1994). After the 1976 uprisings in the townships, when Afrikaans was made the official medium of instruction in black schools, the language came to be regarded as the "language of the oppressor" – a label that persisted even long after the 1994 democratic elections had brought the ANC into power. After 1994, Afrikaans lost the special status it had enjoyed under the National Party rule; it is now seen as only one of the 11 official languages in South Africa. This loss of status has enormous implications for Afrikaans. English has emerged as the language of choice, not only in government structures, but also as the preferred lingua franca of the South African society at large.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.4 Fugard's View of Afrikaans

Since 1994, Fugard has made many remarks about the status of Afrikaans in the new dispensation. He has expressed his own views on different occasions: Although some South Africans still despise Afrikaans because of

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7. See Giliomee: "Afrikaans as Official Language" (2003: 376-379); "Language Issues in New Democracy" (pp. 644-645).

its perceived close link with Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid, many now accept the language as one of the major languages of South Africa spoken by millions of people of various races. Fugard often defends his belief that people should discard the political baggage associated with Afrikaans and embrace the uniqueness of the language. Afrikaans has mainly originated from Dutch spoken in the Cape during the period of Dutch colonisation and is considered the only indigenous European language in Africa. Fugard's sympathetic attitude towards Afrikaans can probably be attributed to the fact that his mother was an Afrikaner and Afrikaans-speaking. In addition it is likely that Fugard has been influenced by the large numbers of Afrikaans-speakers in the communities where he grew up (Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape) and where he spends his time when he is in South Africa (Nieu-Bethesda, Eastern Cape). His affinity for these communities, which include many coloured speakers of Afrikaans, is clear.

An interesting development in Fugard's work is a project that had been launched to translate his plays into Afrikaans (with Fugard's approval). Idil Sheard, a resident of Nieu-Bethesda, approached Fugard in 2005 to obtain permission to translate his work. He fully supports her endeavour and to date she has translated five of his plays (*Road to Mecca* as *By kerslig in Mekka*; *Booitjie and Oubaas* as *Booitjie en die oubaas*; *Valley Song* as *Lied van die vallei*; *Master Harold and the Boys* as *Master Harold en die boys*; *Victory* as *Victoria*). These plays have all been published by Maskew Miller Longman with the stated aim to "get a series of about five of the translated works onto school curriculums" (Rogers 2006: 3). In 2006 Sheard received the Sati/Via Afrika Prize for her excellent translation of *Valley Song*, namely *Lied van die vallei*.

It is interesting to take note that even before this project had been conceived, Fugard himself made the following comments on the aspect of translation when asked whether his plays had been performed in Afrikaans: "Certain of them have .... In fact, some of my Afrikaans friends claim, because I use a lot of Afrikaans characters in my plays, that my plays were translated before they were written. They claim I've translated from Afrikaans into English, and that the plays should go back into Afrikaans, if you know what I'm saying" (Fugard 1993: 391-392).<sup>8</sup>

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8. Fugard repeats the idea that the plays were really written in Afrikaans and only "translated" into English when he produced them in English, in a review of *Valley Song* by Johann Botha in *Die Volksblad* (9/4/1996: 6): "Woorde, frases, sinne, gesange in Afrikaanse vorm was vanselfsprekend deel van die Engelse teks van Athol Fugard se jongste stuk, *Valley Song*, wat ook op die Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees opgevoer is ... 'Jan Rabie sê mos my stukke is in Engels vertaal nadat ek hulle in Afrikaans geskryf het! Baie van my werk is in wese Afrikaans. Dit spruit uit, gee uitdrukking aan 'n Afrikaanse leefwêreld.'" ["Words, phrases, sentences, hymns in Afrikaans were of course part of the English text of Athol Fugard's latest play,

The reaction of Afrikaans theatregoers to the translations of Fugard's plays has been overwhelmingly positive as can be deduced from the title of Guy Rogers's review in *The Herald* (25/8/2006: 3) entitled "Rave reception for Fugard in Afrikaans – Thank you for putting my plays into their rightful language – author". Fugard himself made the following remarks on Idil Sheard's translation of *Valley Song*: "When I read *Lied van die vallei* for the first time, I wished I had written it." The publisher, Marisa Steyn, commented as follows: "The translation into Afrikaans adds new value. It broadens the appeal, through language, to communities which up until now have probably not engaged with Fugard's work" (Rogers 2006: 3).

The Afrikaans translations of Fugard's plays are generally welcomed as an important development in South African (especially Afrikaans) drama and theatre, which will hopefully familiarise Afrikaans audiences with Fugard's work. However, there is one aspect that is lost and as a result might affect the impact of the plays on audiences negatively: In the original plays tension is created by the interplay between English and Afrikaans (when Afrikaans words and phrases are used, and when typically Afrikaans grammatical structures are superimposed on the English spoken by the Afrikaans of coloured characters). This tension disappears when the plays are presented in Afrikaans only. Sheard has succeeded in retaining some of this tension in her translations of the plays by adding a few English words and phrases to characters' conversations. By reversing the language issue (from the use of Afrikaans in the original English plays to the use of English in the Afrikaans versions of the plays)<sup>9</sup> the "mixing" of two languages is retained in plays. However, some effect is lost: the grammatical difference (the way in which English utterances by Afrikaans-speaking characters reflect an Afrikaans syntax and grammar) is lost in the Afrikaans plays.

### 3.5 Afrikaans and English: An Ironic Reversal?

Fugard quickly received international acclaim as playwright with his first work (*The Blood Knot*), and his collaborative work with John Kani and Winston Ntshona (*The Island: Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*), his outspoken opposition to the political system of apartheid during the sixties and

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*Valley Song*, which has also been produced at the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees ... 'Jan Rabie always says that my plays were translated into English after I had written them in Afrikaans! Much of my work carries the hallmarks of Afrikaans. They originate from and express an Afrikaans world view.'" ]

9. For example, the translation of "Don't think about him Veronica! He was a rubbish, a good for nothing rubbish" (*Valley Song* 2007: 46) as "*Moenie aan hom dink nie, Veronica, Hy was 'n rubbish, 'n nikswerd rubbish* (*Lied van die vallei* 2005: line 260).

seventies (during interviews and in his work) made him a popular liberal figure in South Africa and overseas. Although many Afrikaners shared his views and opinions during this period, it was clear that the Afrikaner society in general considered him a South African English playwright critical of the status quo and therefore someone who was unsympathetic towards Afrikaner beliefs and concerns.

It is clear from the corpus of writing on Fugard's oeuvre that he has been almost exclusively studied by English-speaking (local as well as foreign) commentators. Very few Afrikaans commentators have made extensive studies of his work. In the past, reaction to his work in Afrikaans consisted mainly of Afrikaans reviews of his plays or interviews with him in the popular press. There is very little academic discussion of his work (with the exception of *Boesman and Lena*, perhaps) in Afrikaans.

However, the situation has started to change since South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994 and many so-called political writers were asked whether their work would still be relevant in the new dispensation. The question was: Would their approach to writing change after the demise of National Party rule and apartheid? During an interview Dennis Walder asked Fugard whether he still thought of himself as "a 'dissident voice' – phrase used about yourself during the apartheid years" ("A voice for the Afrikaner? An interview with Athol Fugard" on 20 February 1996 in London (Blumberg & Walder 1999: 219)). Fugard denied this. The next question Walder put to him, was: "Are you still a voice; and if you are, who are you speaking for?" Fugard answered as follows: "One of the things that I've been liberated from – maybe dangerously so – is a sense of having to speak for a silenced majority; of having to try and break a conspiracy of silence that was abroad in South Africa" (p. 220).

After 1994, English and American critics and commentators gave Fugard's work mixed reviews. As Durbach (1999) indicates in an article, there are at least two divergent groups commenting and critically assessing Fugard's work: those (like Dennis Walder) who focus on the "liberal-existential discourse" (Durbach 1999: 63) in his plays, and those (like Martin Orkin and Jeanne Colleraen) who see Fugard as the "outmoded voice of democratic liberalism" (Durbach 1999: 61). Some of his post-1994 plays have also been criticised for being "preachy and saccharine" (Zinman on *Valley Song*, in Blumberg & Walder 1999: 94). Even Stephen Grey has become critical of Fugard, especially of his later work. He mentions a comment made by Rachel L. Swarns: "But for much of the post-apartheid era, critics say, Mr Fugard has struggled to find his voice". Grey responds as follows to this comment: "He's been an absolutely staunch pioneer, a complete trendsetter, but he lost his bearings .... We hardly see him .... He's writing for overseas" (Swarns 2001). It is ironic that the play under discussion in this article by Swarns, namely *Sorrows and Rejoicings*, is described as

peppered with things South African, with phrases in Afrikaans, with mentions of Five Roses tea and Koo apricot jam and vivid descriptions of the vast, forbidding Karoo, where the stay is set. Dawid delights in the Afrikaans town names on the highway signs, and Mr Fugard does too, whenever he drives from Johannesburg to New Bethesda and passes Wonderboom, Rietfontein, Heuningspruit.

(Swarns 2001: 2)

Swarns also quotes Marianne MacDonald, who remarks that Fugard “sees the passing of a certain kind of culture, the Afrikaner culture and some literary traditions dying” and that “[h]e’s advocating trying to save some of those things” (p. 2).

In contrast with the decline of Fugard’s reputation with local English commentators, his standing within the Afrikaner community has grown since 1994: *Victory* premiered at the KKNK (mainly an Afrikaans festival), the Afrikaans version of *People Are Living There* (*Daar leef mense daar*) was presented at the Suidoosterfees of *Die Burger* (31 January – 8 February 2008), and more and more of his plays are now being translated with a view to introducing his work to secondary school Afrikaans syllabi. He even received an honorary doctorate from Stellenbosch University in 2006 and in an interview with Willemien Brümmer in *Die Burger* (2006: 17) mentions that a number of professors congratulated him after the ceremony, stating that his work belongs more to the literary works of the Afrikaner than to those of the English-speaking South Africans.

Although Fugard has always acknowledged his link to the Afrikaner, he used to call himself a “bastardised Afrikaner”, someone who still finds himself outside that community. It is only when we read Fugard’s full answer to Walder’s question above that we realise that his position has now shifted: “I speak for myself, except that – something I became conscious of in the writing of *Valley Song* – one of the wonderfully liberating aspects of the experience that I’ve gone through as a new South African – I’m now free to be a total Afrikaner, and maybe I could even consider of a scenario where I am a voice for the Afrikaner” (Fugard in Walder 1999: 220). It is perhaps only when we assess Fugard’s work today that we can recognise that (even though he opposed the political regime of apartheid) the seeds of a closer affinity with the Afrikaner and Afrikaans can be found even in some of his earliest work. While he saw himself as a “bastardised Afrikaner”, the Afrikaner society regarded him as an outsider, and most English-speaking and foreign commentators focused on the socio-political thrust of his plays, his connection with Afrikaans and Afrikaners was only noticed in passing. It is only when Fugard declares himself to be a “total Afrikaner” that one realises that his oeuvre should perhaps today be revisited from another (language) perspective, namely that of Afrikaans.

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