

THE AFRIKANER AND HIS LANGUAGE

(Remarks on R. Angogo, "Language and politics in South Africa")

Yvette Stoops
Antwerp, Belgium

The linguistic situation in South Africa is as complicated as the political one. This is obvious when one reads Angogo [1978]. However, the reader who is not familiar with the subject is given here a one-sided and even completely erroneous impression. In my remarks I'll stick to pure linguistic and historical facts, as I don't want to judge political facts and intentions of the present South African government.

In reference to §2, the so-called "Coloured" population in South Africa originated in the 17th century from mixed blood but initially not "particularly (from unions) between Whites and Hottentots" (p. 211). Recent investigation has shown that so-called "Free Blacks", many of whom had a white father, fairly often married a "Free Burgher". These people can be considered as "the ancestors of today's Coloured population" [Böeseken 1977:97]. Black slaves "came from all parts of the East and from the West Coast of Africa" [Böeseken 1977:97] not from Southern Africa. The statement that Afrikaans "has borrowed from both African and Malaysian languages" [Angogo 1978:211] is an oversimplification of the real situation, as will be shown in connection with §7.

The historical sketch in §3 needs rectification in almost every sentence: "The Bantu people were living in what is now South Africa when the first Dutch and French Huguenot settlers arrived in the 1600's" (p. 212). The Bantu people had no contact with the Whites in the 17th century, as the Whites only had settled in the southern part (Cape Town) and Bantu people invaded the north of South Africa at about the same time. (It is of course a litigious question, opposing black and white propagandistic claims on the rights of the firstcomers. It is clear, however, that Whites and Bantu people made real contact only in the last quarter of the 18th century [*Encyclopedia Britannica Macropaedia - Knowledge in Depth*, London, 15th ed., Vol. I, p. 270, Vol. III, pp. 791-792, Vol. XVII, pp. 279-280].

With the phrase "Dutch and French Huguenot settlers" and the sentence "these settlers came to South Africa at a time of religious oppression in Europe, and they left their motherland to escape from such oppression" (p. 212), the author shows her lack of knowledge of European history: the term "Huguenot" can only be applied to persons of French extraction, not to Dutch people. Religious oppression against the Huguenots existed in France, so Huguenots emigrated to Holland and from there to South Africa, but not before 1685, the year of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. At that time, the Dutch had already firmly established their settlement in South Africa, as they landed in Table Bay in 1652 [Boxer 1965]. The best proof is that, with the exception of a few names, almost no French influence can be found in the language and culture of the Afrikaner (note that the spelling *Afrikaaner* is obsolete).

Who were the original Dutch settlers? Did they leave Holland on religious grounds? By no means: Holland was a Calvinistic country. If people in Holland have been oppressed for their religion, it certainly didn't happen to the 17th century Calvinist ancestors of the present day Afrikaners. It is general knowledge they left Holland in the service of the Dutch East Indian Company. Van Riebeeck, the founder of South Africa, was sent to the Cape in order to establish a refreshment post halfway between Holland and East India (the present day Indonesia); the settlement was implanted for economic, colonial and political purposes. One who does not know this does not understand the background which is necessary to see the consequences of that settlement in historical, political, economical, cultural, and linguistic fields.

As the Dutch colonists at the Cape depended entirely on the Dutch East Indian Company, I don't think "their first institution" was "indeed a democratic constitution" (p. 212). When Angogo claims "the Africans and settlers lived peacefully together" (p. 212), this might cause misunderstanding. First of all, I doubt if this statement is true. In the 17th century diaries and official reports, one can read about constant clashes of Dutch officials and colonists with Hottentots and Bushmen. Secondly, it must be clear that "Africans" in this context must have been Hottentots and Bushmen, not the ancestors of the present day South African Bantu people, unless the author means that the Whites and the Bantu people lived peacefully together because they lived more that 1000km apart.

She states, "The British arrived in the late 1700's and from the beginning they were at odds with the Afrikaaners, whom they found there" (p. 212), but for real understanding of the historical facts, it must be emphasized that the British were at war with the Dutch at that stage. To the British, South Africa was a colony, taken from the Dutch; for the Dutch colonists, the British came as invaders, oppressors who tried to eradicate every vestige of the Dutch past, including the Dutch language. No wonder "they were at odds" [Boxer 1965].

The title of §7 is "Creole", a title probably chosen to shock the Afrikaners, as indeed they do not like to be reminded of the fact that their language has some features which could be described as creolisms. However, it is a gross exaggeration to call Afrikaans a creole. Even the great linguist Hessling, whose opinions about the origin of Afrikaans were not accepted by most of his Afrikaner colleagues, never called Afrikaans a creole language [Hessling 1923]. On the other hand, not a single Afrikaans linguist is so ignorant to believe that Afrikaans "is singularly free from the taint of foreign influence" (p. 218). (To think of the Afrikaner intellectuals as a bunch of racist idiots is the biggest mistake their opponents can make!) If one claims, as does Angogo, that Afrikaans was the result of the mixing of Dutch, Malaysian, and African languages, one must keep several points in mind: (1) in this context, "African" does not mean "Bantu" (Nguni- and Sotho-languages), which had no influence whatsoever on the origin of Afrikaans; a few words of Hottentot origin may be found, but no evident influence on the language structure has been proved yet. (2) Malaysian (and Portuguese) influence can be found in the vocabulary, mainly in the case of objects, plants, and dishes associated with the colonial

way of life, one of the few exceptions being the frequent adverb and adjective baie 'much'; it must be kept in mind that the Cape fell under the Dutch-Indian administration in Batavia (now Djakarta). (3) It is true that the simplification of the Afrikaans morphology, compared to Dutch, is a striking fact for which no plausible explanation has been found. Creolization might partially account for this, but several other explanations are no less probable: many (white) servants of the Dutch East Indian Company were foreigners. It is a well known fact that many Germans and Scandinavians, who must have had poor command of the Dutch language, played an important role at the Cape. The educational level of the Dutch soldiers and settlers was very low. To any scholar of the 17th century Dutch language, it is clear that in that period the language underwent important changes and that a big cleft between the ordinary spoken language and literary Dutch arose. The Dutch language (in Europe) was to a certain extent stopped in its natural evolution by the growing force of the standard language, but this was not the case in the remote and backward settlement in Africa. Trying to "explain" all differences between Afrikaans and Dutch by the miracle word "creolization" shows a highly unscientific approach to the problems of the origin of Afrikaans.

Another statement, probably resulting from lack of real knowledge of the Afrikaners, is the following one: "many Afrikaners have transferred their ideal of racial purity to the purity of their mother tongue As a result, a number of Afrikaners advocate keeping their language free from the corrupting influence of foreign words, especially of English words" (p. 218). The effort to discard English words has nothing whatsoever to do with "racial purity". English speaking people of European descent are not considered to be less "white" than Afrikaners, so English words cannot be stigmatized as being "black" or "coloured". In fact, it is just a reaction of a small language community that fears the increasing and suffocating influence of an international language. This can be noticed everywhere in the world, e.g. the Dutch speaking Flemish people have a greater tendency to avoid foreign words than the speakers of Dutch in Holland, just because they have had to struggle for the survival of their language. If I understand Angogo well, Bantu speakers in South Africa don't seem to be very happy with the "bantuzing" of English (and Afrikaans) words either. Does that mean they are concerned with "racial purity" as well?

In her statements, Angogo has evidently been influenced by Valkhoff [1971]. This is implicit in her reference to Sebeok [1971], which contains the Valkhoff article, and it is even clearer in statements made by Angogo which paraphrase some of Valkhoff's exaggerated claims. For example, she says "Afrikaaner linguists tend to confine the study of their language to the useage of whites. In historical studies, only when a linguistic phenomenon occurs among whites it is regarded as being a legitimate part of the language" (p. 218). Compare this with the following statement by Valkhoff [1971:464]: "Furthermore these and other linguists are also apt to confine themselves to the study of their language in the mouths of the Whites. When an Asian or African slave or a Hottentot is reported to have used a sentence or creolized—wrongly called 'corrupted'—Dutch, long before we have examples of simplification by Whites, the fact is not entirely

ignored but is simply recorded as an anecdotal event. Only when the same linguistic phenomenon occurs among white speakers does it become part of the history of the Language." Valkhoff is very critical of the present political situation in South Africa, an opinion to which he is of course absolutely entitled, but unfortunately his opinions about Afrikaans are the only ones available in English. These opinions have been seriously criticized by, among others, Raidt [1975], Raidt [1977]. Angogo does not mention a single Afrikaans linguist in her bibliography, and by referring only to the one-sided (and even false) opinions of Valkhoff, in the end she leaves not scientific truth, but anti-Afrikaner propaganda.

I am not going into the matters dealt with in other sections of Angogo's paper, but I cannot refrain from commenting on one passage in §6.1: "For the whites there are eleven universities: 6 English-speaking and 5 Afrikaans-speaking. The policy of separate development has effectively divided children and isolated them in monolingual schools during the most impressionable years of their lives." Angogo seems to ignore the existence of the University of Port Elizabeth, a bilingual university, attended by about 3000 youths, 55% of them Afrikaans and 45% English speaking, where half of the subjects are taught in Afrikaans, half of them in English. As I said in the beginning, I have no intention of judging the South African government policies, as I am not qualified to do so. For the sake of scientific truth, however, I really do hope Angogo's views about politics are more reliable than those about the Afrikaner, his history, and his language.

REFERENCES

- Angogo, Rachel. 1978. "Language and politics in South Africa." *Studies in African Linguistics* 9:211-221.
- Böesken, A.J. 1977. *Slaves and Free Blacks at the Cape 1858-1700*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Boxer, C.R. 1965. *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600-1800*. London: Hutchinson.
- Hesseling, D. 1923. *Het Afrikaans, bijdrage tot de geschiedenis der Nederlandse taal in Zuid-Afrika*. Leiden: Brill.
- Raidt, E.R. 1975. "Linguistische und soziologische Faktoren des Sprachwandels im Afrikaans des 18. Jahrhunderts." *Akten des V. Internationalen Germanisten-Kongresses Cambridge*, pp. 155-164. H. Lang.
- Raidt, E.R. 1977. "Afrikaans and 'Malayo-Portuguese': light and shadow." *African Studies* 36:71-78. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Sebeok, T. (ed.). 1971. *Current Trends in Linguistics*, Vol. 7. The Hague: Mouton.
- Valkhoff, M. 1971. "Descriptive bibliography of the linguistics of Afrikaans: a survey of major works and authors." In Sebeok, pp. 455-500.

[Editor's note: This paper exceeds the *NOTES AND QUERIES* 1000 word limit. The author was not aware that such a section existed, so the paper has been included with only slight revision by the editor.]