Chapter One

“Afrikaans is the cultural language which links the African continent with the Germanic cultures and mainland Europe.” (Bas, 2001:4)

This Chapter introduces the study, the purpose and aim of the study, as well as present the research questions that guide the study.

The purpose of this study is to look at a group of ‘coloured’ Afrikaans speaking adult learners at E.W.Hobbs ABET center in Eldoradopark, and examine how the colloquial language the adult learners speak influences their feelings of confidence in the classroom where the standard dialect of Afrikaans is used.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the Afrikaans language and the unique dialect of the Cape ‘coloured’ person. Webb (1992) looks at the standard and non-standard forms of Afrikaans and places emphasis on the dialect that is spoken in the Cape community and how it differs from the standard Afrikaans in the classroom. Although Webb (1992) examines the difficulty that the Cape ‘coloured’ child encounters in the classroom with regard to standard Afrikaans, the adult learners in the study might also experience the same difficulties, as standard Afrikaans is confined to the classroom only. The colloquial variant is used more generally outside of the classroom. Webb (1992) states that standard Afrikaans has a negative connotation for the Cape ‘coloured’ child. It represents a cultural world that is foreign and unusual to the children in this community. This result in

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1 South African of racially mixed descent. (South African Pocket Dictionary, 1994)
them not feeling free to participate in class discussions as the medium of these
discussions are stigmatized and they are afraid to speak the incorrect way.

Standardization is one of the key terms that shape the research as the study looks
specifically at standard Afrikaans. Van Rensburg (1997:47) describes standardization of a
language as a prescribed way of using a language correctly. It is claimed that only then
can everyone else use the language. In this meaning, everyone’s unique way of speaking
the language cannot be accepted as being correct.

Languages are generally standardized as models by establishing an artificial distance
between the standard and the other competing varieties, and this is usually achieved
through the stigmatization of the non standard dialects as sub-standard. (Prab, 2002:162)
This was what happened with the positioning of standard Afrikaans, with the result that
the Cape ‘coloureds’ were made to feel like second-class citizens.
The use of standard and non-standard dialects has been the focus of much debate in
educational circles. (Trudgill, (1983:186) When the standard language is something that
the learners do not encounter in their everyday lives, especially in the home environment,
then adopting the standard language in the classroom becomes a problem as they cannot
freely express themselves in the standard language. This language becomes almost like a
foreign language.
Afrikaans

“Die verhaal van Afrikaans is in ‘n groot mate die verhaal van kommunikasie tussen wit en bruin in Suid-Afrika.” (Belcher, 1987:17) *(The tale of Afrikaans is essentially the tale of communication between white and brown (coloured) people in South Africa.)* A great number of ‘coloured’ people in South Africa speak Afrikaans, mostly colloquial Afrikaans with its many different dialects, like Capetonian Afrikaans and the Afrikaans spoken by the ‘coloured’ adult learners in Eldoradopark, (a suburb of Johannesburg) which is very different from each other. The Afrikaner\(^2\) speaks more formal Afrikaans.

The Dutch, who arrived in South Africa in 1652 and established a colony in Cape Town, are largely credited with the birth of Afrikaans; however, the version spoken today is an accumulation of many other influences. The Dutch dialect established after 1652 incorporated terms and phrases handed down from sailors who had been shipwrecked off the Cape coast. These phrases of both English and Portuguese origin, soon found their way into the Dutch dialect. The Afrikaans language took on a more oriental flavour with the arrival of slaves in the Cape, primarily of Malay extraction, but also from other eastern regions and nearby African islands including Madagaskar. This spiced the language considerably, and when the accents, dialects and phrases were added to the mix, that Afrikaans was completely different from its Dutch parent. From the three main dialects emerged, Cape Afrikaans, Orange River Afrikaans and Eastern border Afrikaans.

\(^2\) A South African, usually white, speaking Afrikaans as mother tongue. (South African Pocket Oxford Dictionary,1994)
The Cape dialect is mostly contains the language spoken by the Malay slaves who worked in the Cape and spoke a form of broken Portuguese. (Santorini, 2002)

Afrikaans was recognized as an educational medium in 1925. During the National Party rule, from 1948 until 1992, Afrikaans experienced extensive corpus development (in the form of standardization and literature) and its status was greatly enhanced. This was in part due to its status as one of the two official languages of South Africa (the other being English) (Reagan, 1995)

The National Party’s institution of Apartheid and its decision to teach black children in Afrikaans only, was an unpopular one and was one of the main reasons for the 1976 Soweto uprising. The National Party’s ruthless Apartheid regime and its simultaneous promotion of the Afrikaans language forged a link between the language and the political system that is still visibly present in South Africa.

Die paradoksale situasie bestaan dat Afrikaans bskou word as die taal van die verdrukker en terselfdetyd as die taal van die onderdrukte gekleurde werkerklasse. Dit bring mee dat die verlangde kommunikatiewe afstand slegs bewerkstellig kan word deur die eie variant, met sy karakteristieke fonologiese, sintaktiese, idiomatiese en leksikale eienskappe te beklemtoon. (The paradoxical situation exists where Afrikaans is regarded as the language of the oppressor and simultaneously as the language of the repressed ‘coloured’ working class. This means that the desired communicative distance can only be accomplished through their own variant, with its characteristic phonological, syntactical, idiomatic and lexical characteristics.)

Esterhuyse (1986:115)
For many South Africans the language is thus loaded with negative connotations because of its tyrannical political history in South Africa. This also, however, the language of the ‘coloured’ person of South Africa, with its range of colourful and unique dialects that is reflective of their history and identity. The ‘coloured’ form of language spoken is a type of Afrikaans that consists of English as well as ‘tsotsitaal.’

Flaaitaal or tsotsitaal is a South African urban township argot which is used mainly, but not exclusively, by black males in various urban centers. Flaaitaal probably owes its origin to language contact in a multilingual setting in nineteenth century South Africa and to the rise of the urban township communities. ‘Coloured’ male speakers employ a variety of Flaaitaal and have over the years contributed to the association of Flaaitaal with Afrikaans.

Makhudu (1995:298)

**Background Information**

As a ‘coloured’ female and speaker of the Afrikaans language, I was motivated to investigate how adult learners cope with the demands of standard Afrikaans in the classroom, while they mostly engage in the colloquial form of Afrikaans in every day life. Based on my own observation, a great number of learners that I attended school with developed distaste for all school subjects, and this resulted in a high failure rate. I believe that the reason for this may be attributed to the linguistic confusion between the written and spoken dialects of Afrikaans in the classroom, and the colloquial dialect that we speak at home.
Standard Afrikaans was not welcome in social circles, like with friends or family, and the colloquial form of Afrikaans was not always welcome in the classroom. I personally worked out a strategy to combat this problem. I spend numerous hours in a day familiarizing myself with standard Afrikaans, by reading through textbooks and other Afrikaans reading material, and I also kept a few Afrikaans dictionaries. This helped me to develop my competency in the language, and in this way I was able to pass all my subjects well. My fellow classmates did not spend as much time doing the same, as they did not identify a problem with standard Afrikaans and colloquial Afrikaans.

From personal experience I realised early in my life as a learner that when you take time to acquaint yourself with the standard dialect, it will ultimately help you achieve greater success in all school subjects. However, you also somehow lose your position within the culture. When you are at home or with friends, you are not allowed to speak the standard dialect. You will be labeled as ‘larnie’ (white) or thinking that you are better than those who do not speak like you. You are immediately isolated. When you concentrate too much on the colloquial language, your competency in the classroom gets affected. Finding a balance between the colloquial language and standard language is often very difficult.

I am interested in investigating whether the adult learners in this study face the same challenges as I did with regard to standard and colloquial Afrikaans, and if the language variation also causes confusion for them and leads to little or no interest in school subjects.
Aim

The aim of the study is to highlight the influence that the standard language has on a learner who is forced to learn a language in its rigid and standard form, while outside of the classroom, this language has no real significance to the learner. The aim is also to foster a great sensitivity regarding teachers’ awareness of culture and language. In this way they might help their learners to appreciate their own vernacular and not view it as ‘broken’ because it does not adhere to the standard form.

Research Questions

1. How does having to use the standard form of Afrikaans in the classroom effect adult learners who speak a non standard dialect of Afrikaans at home?
2. What is the value of Afrikaans to this group of adult learners, and what value does it have for their teachers?
3. What significance does colloquial Afrikaans have for the adult learners?
4. What are teachers’ perceptions of the impact of colloquial and standard Afrikaans on the learner in the classroom?
Assumptions

I come to this research with my own set of assumptions. I have been acquainted with standard Afrikaans in the classroom for 12 years, and the colloquial form of Afrikaans for 21 years. The Afrikaans I spoke in the classroom was very different from the Afrikaans I spoke at home.

Given my personal experience, I imagine that adult learners hold on firmly to their colloquial language and appreciate the cultural significance of the language spoken at home, but I believe that they might struggle even more than younger learners to cope with the standard language in the classroom.

Rationale

This research is important because the research that has been done thus far on the issue of colloquial language and standard language has mostly been limited to English. The little research on Afrikaans that has been undertaken in South Africa on this issue has only been done in relation to the Cape ‘coloured’ dialect of Afrikaans. This dialect does not constitute the only dialect of Afrikaans in South Africa – there are various dialects of Afrikaans in use. This is a gap in the research, which needs to be addressed in order to assist teachers outside of the Cape to deal with the issue of dialects. It is hoped that this research will have direct relevance for Afrikaans speaking adult learners in Eldoradopark, Gauteng.
Limitations

Although there is a wealth of literature relating to language and learning, as well as a substantial body of theory on social literacies, there is very limited literature that exists with regard to standard dialects of Afrikaans in the classroom. There is, however, research that has been done exclusively on the Afrikaans speaking Cape ‘coloured’ child. This research can be seen in the light of work done on the Cape ‘coloured’ child by Webb (1992), and the research done on standard and non-standard dialects of English.

My own personal experiences and relationship with Afrikaans also adds a limitation to the study, as I come to the study with my own set of assumptions.

The remainder of the study

The Literature Review in Chapter two will explore three themes: Identity and language, status and power, and spoken versus written language. It is essential to explore these themes as they reveal the link between Afrikaans and the ‘coloured’ identity in the South African context, with regard to education. A few of the main authors that will be looked at are, Trudgill (1983) on his work on Standard English, Webb (1992), and Macswan (2000). Chapter three will look at the research design of the study. In chapter four the findings from the data collected will be discussed in detail, and chapter five will give an
overview of the findings and state their implications for education practitioners.

Recommendations for further research will also be included in this chapter.