CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

‘...it’s kind of weird, for instance Domingo, he talks very white for a black guy...then you have someone like Belinda and Helen or whatever, they talk very black or they talk white…’ (Interview with Karen)

4.1 Introduction

Post-structuralist theory, as I argued in chapter 2, opens up ways of thinking about issues relating to language, identity and difference (Weedon, 1997; Pennycook, 2004). The significance of post-structuralist theory lies in its recognition of the constitutive force of language in identity formation as well as its conception of the notion of identity that is fluid, complex, contradictory and multifaceted (Norton, 1997; Zegeye, 2001). Hybridity theories of Bhabha (1994) and Hall (1992b) are significant in offering a more complex view of ethnicity and language than simplistic categories premised on the idea of the fixity of positions. As the quote from an interview with Karen above attempts to demonstrate, the learners’ lived experiences in a desegregated school space are those marked by constant acts of border crossing, cultural contestation and appropriation (Coombes and Brah, 2000; Pennycook, 2004). Further, the learners’ negotiation of their different identities is marked by their numerous investments that may not always be compatible (Norton Pierce, 1995).

In this chapter I will begin by presenting detailed case studies of three research participants. The significance of the case studies lies in their focus on particular individuals in providing insights into the English languages practices of learners as well as the way learners position themselves and others as users of English and other languages. Although the research participants are discussed separately, their ‘cases’ are inextricably linked and cross-references are made to include the other three participants who are not the main focus of the case studies. These case studies, it must be noted, do not claim to be exhaustive or generalizable in terms of unravelling these particular learners’ identities, their language practices or the way they position themselves and others to language(s).
After presenting the case studies of the three learners, I will discuss in further detail some of the salient themes that emerged in the research. Although I was mainly guided by the research questions in analyzing the data, consistent with a data driven approach to data analysis, I also examine other themes that emerged from the data that were not explicitly elicited by the research questions (cf. Chick and McKay, 2001). Nonetheless, only those themes that are relevant to the overall aims of the study have been presented in further detail and I have left out those themes that I feel are tangential to my objectives. I believe the elaboration of these themes will help in giving my study more context and nuance. Among the themes I present in further detail include: the salience of English in my research participants’ lives, the varieties and accents of English used, the position of Zulu, the subversion of institutional discourses, and the construction of ‘race’.

I selected three research participants (Thabo, Teboho and Anna) for detailed case studies on the basis that they attend quite a number of classes together and as a result there were more interactions between them than with the other participants in this research. Furthermore, the other research participants (i.e. Shazeem, Sello and Karen) engaged sparingly in talk in the classes where they were observed.

All three of the research participants selected for the detailed case studies have been together at Excel High School from the time they were in Grade 8 (i.e. the first year of high school). The three research participants are in the same English class that is mostly African\(^{28}\) and were positioned by their English teacher as being ‘privileged’ for being at Excel because in her view there are other children in South Africa attending poor and under resourced schools (Field Notes Day 6 01/06/2005 English). They also attend the same Zulu second language/additional language class that gives these learners a common identity in the eyes of the teachers and the school administration. These learners were in the same Zulu class in Grade 8 and 9 that achieved notoriety for always being in trouble and being generally ‘unruly’. As a result they are positioned as a problematic group carrying over a history of being

\(^{28}\) One African learner (Wandile) from the same English class informed me that one thing he dislikes about the school is that Ms. Jones’s English class is ‘too black’. He was not sure if having a racially homogenous class was deliberate by the school authority or was simply coincidental. Our senior researcher in the SANPAD project 04/06, however, pointed out to me that the English class is composed mainly of ‘African’ learners because many of them are taking Zulu and are required to attend all language classes together.
uncontrollable learners. The English teacher\textsuperscript{29}, explaining why a number of learners from the problematic Grade 9A fail, states that:

\begin{quote}
Ms. Jones: (…) I mean they fail English not because of their ability. They fail because they never hand anything in and they don’t do the work and they don’t want to be here at all…
(Interview with English Teacher, Ms. Jones)
\end{quote}

The principal further states that the complicated timetabling the school has, has been necessitated by the need to break down undesirable subcultures that emerge from having a homogenous learner group that speaks the same African language and understands each other well (Interview with principal).

\subsection{4.2 Thabo}

Thabo is an African learner residing in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg whose home language is Xhosa. He also reported using English and Zulu at home:

\begin{quote}
…I mix Xhosa and Zulu and sometimes English; depends on who you are speaking with, you know, when I speak with my dad I speak English and Xhosa…when I’m with my mum it’s just Xhosa and Zulu, and then with my sister I just speak anything. (Interview with Thabo)
\end{quote}

Thabo is a very lively student in class frequently taking part in discussions, asking questions and fond of passing witty commentaries while the teacher or other learners speak. He was observed in his interactions in the classroom and in informal spaces as well as in interviews to be a fluent speaker of English. He also demonstrates a high proficiency in African languages and was frequently heard code-switching (with friends between English and other African languages) more than any other research participant. In the interview I had with him, he reported using a ‘mixture’ of Zulu, Sotho and English with friends at school. Thabo also reported that he chose Zulu instead of Afrikaans as his second/additional language. His justification of why he chose Zulu instead of Afrikaans is interesting:

\begin{quote}
George: …why didn’t you choose Afrikaans?
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{29} The teachers whose classes I observed were all female. The teachers of English, Geography, Mathematics and History were white, while those of Biology and Zulu were African.
Thabo: It’s not me; I don’t want to do Afrikaans.
George: You don’t want to do Afrikaans?
Thabo: I find it difficult.
George: You find it difficult?
Thabo: I’ve been speaking Zulu for a long time and so just changing to Afrikaans…it’s not natural…you find that white people find it easier to speak Afrikaans and black people find it easier to speak Zulu.
(Interview with Thabo).

Thabo here does not see Afrikaans as a constitutive part of his identity (‘It’s not me’). By stating ‘I don’t want to do Afrikaans’, Thabo also expresses an antipathy to Afrikaans that could be traced to the stigmatised status of Afrikaans among some South Africans as the ‘language of the oppressor’ (Alexander, 1989). Another research participant (Shazeem) reported that he chose Zulu instead of Afrikaans because his mother says that ‘Afrikaans is a dying language’ (Interview with Shazeem), while Motshabi (Anna’s friend) adamantly stated that ‘I have had enough of it (Afrikaans) …where is it going to take me?’ (Field Notes Day 4 27/05/05). The little ‘investment’ of learners in Afrikaans, as these excerpts demonstrate, shows that the learners are very much aware of the decreasing functional importance of Afrikaans in South Africa. What is not sufficiently clear is whether this has significantly translated into improved fortunes for indigenous languages like Zulu or has just led to a corresponding increase in the functional importance of English across different domains (cf. De Klerk, 2001).

Thabo’s comment that ‘it’s not natural’ for him to change from speaking Zulu to Afrikaans echoes the essentialist apartheid understanding of ‘race’ and ethnicity. The apartheid ideology emphasised an essentialised division of people along ethnic/linguistic lines such as ‘Zulu’, ‘Xhosa’ or ‘Tswana’ all of whom were separated into different Bantustans (homelands). Language during the apartheid era, as Kamwangamalu has pointed out, ‘served as an important identity marker of - and dividing factor between - various ethnic groups…and was a crucial factor in ascribing ethnic identity’ (2001: 79). Thabo’s remark that ‘it’s not natural’ for him to speak Afrikaans is revealing of the way essentialist labels of the apartheid era that emphasise an idea of boundedness have been internalized by people in South Africa in the way they construct their identities (Kamwangamalu, 2001).
Thabo in the excerpt above also uses ‘race’ as a factor in terms of the ease in learning a language claiming that ‘white people find it easier to speak Afrikaans and black people find it easier to speak Zulu’ (Interview with Thabo). However, this claim does not have any biological basis (McKinney, 2003) nor does it have pedagogical or linguistic grounding, as any person is capable of learning any language. Nonetheless, a body of research suggests that it is easier to learn a language from the same language group as the language one is familiar with. The different ways historically in which the different racial groups were socialized in South Africa also made it easier for one group to learn one language and not the other. Segregationist policies of the apartheid regime such as the use of separate amenities such as schools by different racial groups gave, for instance, urban Afrikaans first language learners little or no opportunities to come into contact with and to learn other languages such as Zulu. This, however, need not be the case in the current democratic dispensation where schools have been desegregated and learners have a fairly high amount of exposure to different languages.

Thabo constantly emphasised his identity as African and reported that he associates mainly with ‘black’ learners (as opposed to white learners). A scene taking place one break-time illustrates this:

Thabo: Have you seen the guys I hang around with?
George: You mean those (pointing to a group of African and white learners).
Thabo: No, not those. I hang out with black people.
George: Like who, Teboho?
Thabo: No, I only hang out with Teboho in class.
(Field Notes, Day 15 27/07/05, Break-Time)

Though the African learners in the group I pointed to are part of the group Thabo was observed to keep company with, he denies ‘hanging out’ with them because they are among white learners. While Thabo was seen with Teboho both inside and outside the classroom he denies that this friendship goes beyond the classroom. In the interview with him, he elaborates that he ‘chills’ with Teboho only ‘sometimes’ because Teboho in school ‘chills with those white people’ (Interview with Thabo, my emphasis). When asked who he hangs around with at school he explains that:

30 I retain the categories used by the research participants themselves and will signal this with the use of quotation marks.
Thabo: Me I hang around with... basically me it’s, it’s not mostly a racial thing but me I choose to hang around black people because... they say things that you can relate to and we understand each other, you know, because basically when you are chilling around white people you speak English all the time. (Interview with Thabo).

Here the exclusive usage of English becomes a factor in avoiding friendship groups with white learners. Language becomes an important factor in the dynamics of friendship groups. ‘Whiteness’ here is the ‘other’ (‘those white people’) and is clearly equated to the use of English. Rejection of ‘whiteness’ by implication seems to be a rejection of English as well. Thabo in this instance also clearly imagines categories ‘black’ and ‘white’ as bounded and homogenous entities. Further, Thabo excludes Teboho from his friendship group as he positions Teboho to be the other or a ‘sell out’ for ‘crossing over’ in terms of the people he associates with. Coombes and Brah (2000) have argued that people who hold essentialist notions of purity usually frown upon boundary crossing. Being an ‘African’ from the perspective Thabo espouses here means associating only with ‘black people’ who do not speak English ‘all the time’ and whose world of experience is similar to one’s own (cf. Gaganakis, 1992).

However, although Thabo tries to present a unitary narrative of self (as African) in explaining that he does not ‘chill’ with Teboho yet he does, he is not consistent in the essentialist position. The post-modern subject, as Hall has argued, ‘assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent “self”’ (Hall, 1992a: 277).

In a focus group interview31 Thabo states that when learners make a mistake while speaking English they are laughed at:

Thabo: Sometimes I make a mistake, you know, and bayangihleka (they laugh at me).
Clifford: What sorts of mistakes do you make?
Thabo: …like last year in English we had this other teacher who taught us English right, so manje (now), because we were learning new words, I don’t know how to pronounce these things… you know and they laugh…but it is okay you know, I’m not scared to make mistakes.
(Focus Group Interview).

31 This focus group interview was conducted by one of the researchers on the SANPAD project 04/06 Clifford Ndlangamandla while I recorded the session on video.
While he puts himself in the position of the underdog here in terms of proficiency in English, Thabo confidently declares in his individual interview with me that he corrects those learners who do not speak English well:

**Thabo**: I have to do my bit, so I’m going to correct those people who speak wrong. (Interview with Thabo).

Thabo’s observed verbal behaviour resists the way he reflexively positions himself (Davis and Harrè, 1990) as a learner who struggles with English. He was observed not only to have a wide vocabulary and a demonstrable knowledge of the conventions of the English language, but he also demonstrated remarkable creativity and spontaneity in his use of English. Thabo’s positioning of himself as a learner who struggles with English seems to be a way of distancing himself from those who have been assimilated into the mainstream; a good proficiency in English here seems to be a marker of assimilation. Kapp remarks in her study, conducted in a township school, that appearing to be too “invested” in English may earn a learner derision of aspiration to “white” norms (2000: 253). Kapp also reports that the learners who spoke English constantly to each other earned themselves a derogatory label ‘Model Cs’ (Kapp, 2000: 243). Thabo’s performance of his identities here is revealing of the way in which individuals are usually unaware of their multifaceted identities (Hall, 1992a).

Thabo stated that there are a number of accents with which learners in the school speak English which he called ‘Afrikaans accents’, ‘African accents’ and ‘normal English accents’. Interestingly he stated that he has an ‘English, English accent’. He justifies this by saying that he lives in the suburbs and ‘you can’t go to the suburbs with an African accent…’ (Interview with Thabo). Thabo here creates a separate individual category for himself in terms of where his accent belongs. This seems to be as a result of his refusal to identify with any of the categories he names. While on many occasions he confidently asserted his ‘African’ identity, he resists it when it comes into conflict with the perceived status that goes with the area of residence and requisite linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Studies by Gaganakis (1992), Kapp (2000) and Rudwick (2004) have tried to capture the township-suburban dichotomy in
South Africa as it relates to perceptions of the differing worlds of experience. The township has been described as poor, a place of social breakdown\(^{32}\) and exclusively black, and characterised as having overcrowded schools, insufficient numbers of teachers, insufficient teaching and learning resources, and generally poor facilities. The suburb on the other hand has been described as upwardly mobile, middle class and previously white, and characterised generally as habitable and offering conditions suitable for quality learning and teaching. In terms of the influence of English, learners from townships are positioned as being deficient speakers and users of English whereas their counterparts from the suburbs are positioned as competent speakers and users of English. For Thabo, speaking English with an ‘African’ accent does not measure up with living in the ‘suburbs’ as varieties such as Black South African English (BSAfE) normally associated with the township are usually classified in terms of deficit discourses (\textit{cf.} Gough, 1996) (see 4.6). Nevertheless, Thabo was observed shifting accents and using discourse patterns common in BSAfE as the following excerpt demonstrates:

[Anna in the English class is talking about the notion of lobola (bridewealth) in ‘African culture’]

1. **Anna**: …in African society where you pay lobola there is pressure
2. because when you get divorced the lobola will be returned.
3. **Learner**: Return the lobola, ulahlanya (you are mad)!
4. **Thabo**: Refund. \textit{Ja}\(^{33}\), \textit{ja}, \textit{ja}! Get your money back /bæk/\(^{34}\) (BSAfE).
5. **Teboho**: Why pay in the first place?
6. **Thabo**: Teboho, Teboho please! \textit{Me} I want my lobola back.
7. With interest \textit{m’fana} (my boy)…\textit{ichelete} (the money).
8. **Teboho**: Shit!
9. **Thabo**: \textit{Ke} (the) interest.

(Naturally Occurring Data, 26/07 2005, my emphasis).

Thabo in line number 4 of the excerpt above pronounces ‘back’ as /bæk/ as commonly pronounced in BSAfE when he states ‘Get your money back’. However, a moment later when he says ‘Me I want my lobola back’ he pronounces ‘back’ as /bæk/ as pronounced in ‘standard’ WSAfE. Further, in ‘\textit{Me} I want my lobola back’ Thabo also uses two pronouns ‘me’ and ‘I’ consecutively, a common feature of BSAfE caused by

\(^{32}\) An article in the Mail and Guardian newspaper of 10/02/2006 characterises Khayelitsha Township in Cape Town as the most crime-ridden place in South Africa.

\(^{33}\) \textit{Ja} is the Afrikaans word for ‘yes’ and is commonly used and has become part of South African English (\textit{cf.} McKinney, 2003).

\(^{34}\) IPA Convention.
transfer (e.g. *Mina NgumZulu*)\(^{35}\) translating literally as ‘Me I am a Zulu’ (De Klerk and Gough, 2002). The shift in accents for me is an illustration of the different identities that are continually being constructed as the learners interact with others and as they negotiate the school space. Also significant here is the code-switching taking place in the excerpt and the identity work that is going on through it. The switch to African languages (Zulu and Sotho) in discussing an African cultural practice (*lobola*) by Thabo is significant as a way of emphasising his ‘African’ identity and demonstrating his cultural capital, and thus his authority to speak on the *lobola* topic (Bourdieu, 1991) (*cf.* Norton, 1997: 410-11 in reference to Bourdieu’s argument concerning the “right to speak”). It is interesting to note that Teboho who is positioned by Thabo as being more assimilated into the school discourse resists Thabo’s invitation to code-switch and sticks to English.

The usage here of ‘Me I want my *lobola* back’ is also important for me in illustrating the ‘diversionary’ (and problematic) nature of the discourse of language varieties as Makoni (1999) has argued (see 2.13). While Thabo’s sentence is communicatively acceptable in speech, it nevertheless becomes problematic and could be judged to be grammatically incorrect when transposed to writing. As Makoni (1999) cautions accepting such usage as ‘sociolinguistically acceptable’ will only work at perpetuating the stigma and disempowerment of the second language speaker of English and not the reverse as is assumed.

Thabo also asserts a strong ethnolinguistic identity that could be a part of the ‘African’ identity that he claims. Rudwick (2004) has stated that a number of Africanist scholars passionate about the cultural liberation of Africa such as Ngugi, see an inseparable relationship between language and culture. Rudwick’s study shows a strong identification of Zulu first language speaking learners residing in Umlazi township in Kwa-Zulu Natal with Zulu which they perceived to be a ‘cornerstone of ‘Zuluness’ and/or ‘Africanness’ (Rudwick, 2004: 164). Thabo’s ‘home language’ (Xhosa), as opposed to English which is constructed as ‘the other’ (the ‘other tongue’ *cf.* Rudwick, 2004), is the language that he claims he feels most comfortable and at ease with. When asked what language he would choose as medium of instruction

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\(^{35}\) I am grateful to Carolyn McKinney for the example.
apart from English, Thabo confidently declares that he would choose his home language. He explains that:

…it would make me feel even if I’m not at home, the fact alone that I’m speaking my home language will make me feel at home no matter where I am (Interview with Thabo)

What is not clear, however, is whether Thabo would choose his ‘home language’ if the choice was between English and the home language given the centrality of English in the school and learners’ high investment in English. This is further complicated when we recognize that ethnolinguistic identities are dynamically constructed and are usually context dependent (Rudwick, 2004). Strong assertions of an ethnolinguistic identity from learners such as that demonstrated by Thabo are expected, for such assertions are important in some learners’ performance of ‘Africanness’, which is a constitutive part of their multiple, ever-changing identities. Nonetheless, ethnolinguistic identities fail to do justice to the heterogeneity of individuals and groups and also to the contingent nature of identity construction.

Identity construction as we have seen in Thabo’s case is dynamic and at times contradictory (Hall, 1992a). He distances himself from learners like Teboho who he thinks have been strongly assimilated into the dominant culture (‘whiteness’) through the extensive use of English and their association with white learners. Nonetheless, he recognises the linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) that one gets in speaking English with a more prestigious accent. Also of significance is that unlike Teboho, Thabo feels more compelled to perform his ‘Africanness’ perhaps as a result of his residing in the suburbs, a phenomenon with connotations of ‘whiteness’.

4.3 Teboho

Teboho is an African learner residing in Soweto Township who has been at Excel High School from Grade 8. He reported his home language to be Sesotho and that he speaks Sesotho and English at home. Like Thabo, Teboho is a lively learner and participates actively in classroom activities, though he is at times quite disruptive. In fact I had to withdraw from observing the Biology class after Day 5 (30/05/2005) after the Biology teacher told me that my presence in the classroom could be
exacerbating Teboho’s disruptive tendencies. In spite of his disruptive tendencies, his natural charm and ease of manner makes him likeable to most teachers and learners alike. The Geography teacher, whose class at times was quite uncontrollable, remarked that Teboho was a good student since he participates in classroom activities and does not fail, though she felt he could do better if he paid more attention (Field Notes Day 3 25/05/2005). On one occasion she tells him that it is his ‘behaviour’ which brought down his class mark in the previous term and she would not hesitate in giving him a ‘naught’ if he continued with his ways (Field Notes Day 15 27/07/2005 Geography).

Like Thabo, Teboho was observed to be a proficient user of English and African languages. He also reported that he chose Zulu instead of Afrikaans as his second/additional language. He, however, does not give the reasons behind this choice. The history teacher, Mrs. Hamilton, sees Teboho to be a good English speaker despite not being a first language speaker of English. She asserts that:

Mrs. Hamilton: (…) I mean my top children in that class…are not English first language learners and they get the highest marks…there are two white girls there Penelope and Susan, they aren’t the top students in the class; it’s Vusi and Teboho …their English is good, very good. I mean they, they can write English better than those girls who are white and that’s their first language, English.
(Interview with History Teacher Mrs. Hamilton, 12/08/2005).

Quite clearly Teboho is positioned by the history teacher to be a good student and a competent user of English. Also interesting here is the collapsing of the myth of the first language speaker. In much of the literature on language acquisition, the first language speaker is seen as the model of target language acquisition. Leung, Harris, and Rampton have argued that “there is an abstracted notion of an idealised speaker of English from which ethnic and linguistic minorities are automatically excluded” (cited in Norton, 1997: 423). In this instance, however, we see second language speakers of English not being positioned in terms of deficit discourses but rather as competent users of English.

Teboho reported that teachers do not encourage other languages apart from English in class because Excel High School is ‘a white owned predominant school’ (sic)
(Interview with Teboho). It is interesting to note that even after the desegregation of schools, a school like Excel is still imagined to be ‘white owned’ despite the fact that white learners are not in the majority. However, Teboho’s statement characterising the school as ‘a white owned predominant school’ (my emphasis) could be as a result of the predominantly white teaching staff that symbolizes control and authority.

McKay and Chick (2001) report the existence of what they term an ‘English-only discourse’ in their study of six desegregated schools in the Durban area of Kwa-Zulu Natal Province. They found that the use of Zulu in class, the language of 80 percent of the people of Kwa-Zulu Natal (Rudwick, 2004), was strictly forbidden on the basis that this is ‘an English medium school’ (McKay and Chick, 2002: 399). McKay and Chick (citing Auerbach, 1993) contend that this English-only discourse is based on untested assumptions that originate in “the political agenda of the dominant group, and serves to reinforce existing relations of power” (2001: 399). Although all my research participants, apart from Sello, stated that teachers expect and insist that learners use only English in class, I did not observe teachers policing the English-only discourse. It is a possibility that teachers refrained from policing the English-only discourse in my presence given the practice’s connotations of discrimination and racism. It is also possible that the expectation that learners speak English at all times is not stated but is simply assumed by learners given the prominence of English in the school. Nonetheless, this English-only discourse, if it exists, was constantly being subverted, as Teboho was frequently observed code-switching and using African languages with other learners in class.

Code-switching by learners in the classroom was observed to be employed for a number of purposes, such as Thabo code-switching to claim his right to speak and emphasise his ‘Africanness’ referred to earlier (see 4.2). Teboho was observed using code-switching as a strategy of exclusion (Ncoko et al, 2000) as the following scene taking place in the classroom demonstrates:

[Teboho and Vusi talking to each other in English]
**Susan:** You two keep quiet!
**Vusi:** Tell him (Teboho) to keep quiet.
[Teboho says something in an African language]
**Vusi:** Hey jo, use English.
(Field Notes Day 7 02/06/05 History)
Teboho here makes use of exclusive code-switching in making a comment he does not want Susan to understand as she is white and does not understand African languages. McKay and Chick (2001) also report that use of code-switching and African languages such as Zulu was prohibited in the desegregated English medium schools they researched because according to teachers some learners occasionally ‘use Zulu to insult adults and other learners’ (2001: 399). It is interesting in the above excerpt that Vusi asserts the need for English in interactions between the learners. This suggests complicity of learners in policing the English-only discourse referred to earlier, though their motivations might be different from those of teachers.

Though Teboho recognizes the existence of many accents with which English is spoken in the school such as ‘an Indian accent, coloured, black, white…’ (Interview with Teboho), like Thabo, he does not define himself in terms of the categories he has observed as he reported that he did not think that he has an accent. One of the legacies of the apartheid era today, as I stated earlier, is the appropriation (internalization) (see 4.2) of the essentialist categorisation of varieties of English according to ‘race’. While this categorisation is based on an assumed link between race and language in apartheid ideology (racist ideology), such racially constituted categories (cf. Hall, 1992b) are ideologically suspicious and based on an illusion of a neat alignment of language and race (Makoni, 1999; McKinney, 2006). The resistance by Teboho to being perceived as having a particular racialised accent is significant when we realise that the idea of ‘racial’ stability and unified identities is illusory (Hall, 1992a; 1992b; Distiller and Steyn, 2004).

When asked of the existence of a ‘Model C accent’, a descriptor in popular usage that is used to describe accents used by black learners in ex-Model C schools that have features of White South African English (WSAfE) and a few features of Black South African English (BSAfE), Teboho retorts that:

   Teboho: I don’t know what Black English is…no I speak

36 I do not wish to infer here that all white people in South Africa do not understand African languages. Neoko et al (2000) in fact give an instance where exclusive code-switching can backfire and lead to embarrassment where two African learners pass a negative comment in Zulu about a white learner who they assume does not understand Zulu. The white learner, however, understands Zulu and issues a sharp retort. 37 For instance, in popular youth magazines such as Y-mag (cf. McKinney, 2005).
normally, thank you very much!

Ge<em>orge</em>: But you said that there is a black accent…

Te<em>boho</em>: Like the way they <em>talk</em>, not the actual words they <em>say</em>. (Interview with Teboho, my emphasis)

Teboho here resists a positioning of having some fixed identity such as ‘black’, ‘African’ or ‘Sotho’ in relation to language. Alexander (2002) argues that in South Africa today, categories such as ‘African’, ‘Afrikaner’, ‘coloured’ or ‘Zulu’ amongst others are hotly contested. This resistance to being positioned as having a black accent, or indeed some ‘hybrid’ Model C accent that is by implication a deficit model, seems to emanate from a rejection of the ensemble of meanings associated with these identities. In discussion of Model C accents he confidently explicates Model C as meaning:

Teboho: (...) one of them boys <em>ba kenang di schools ka da not ko kasie</em> (one of them boys who go to schools that are not in the township). (Interview with Teboho).

Although Teboho resists the stigmatised ‘black’ accent with associations of a deficit competence in the use of English, he embraces the resources the urban/township environment affords through code-switching between English and varieties that have sprung up in the polyglot townships of Gauteng (Finlayson and Slabbert, 2000). Teboho was also observed shifting accents to parody the accent of the teacher. Although he was observed to frequently speak English with what has been termed as a ‘Model C accent’, in a Biology lesson Teboho mimics the teacher who speaks Black South African English (BSAfE). This mimicking of the teacher is part of the power struggle that ensues in the lesson between Teboho and the teacher that culminates in the teacher reprimanding Teboho at the end of the lesson, and that led to my withdrawing from observing the class (see 3.5.1) (Field Notes Day 5, 30/05/2005 Biology). Canagarajah states that parody and mimicking are some of the strategies that the powerless have at their disposal through a detachment from the ideologies of the powerful and gaining a measure of control in the face of oppressive circumstances (cited in Pennycook, 2004: 16). Further, Pennycook (2004) has argued that parody and appropriation are significant as they open up ways of thinking about how individuals perform and refashion their selves through language.
Though he lives in Soweto, a township south west of Johannesburg, Teboho has attended primary school and secondary school in the suburb where the school is located. His perception of the way he uses English resists any constructions of a fixed, bounded identity. While he sees others as speaking ‘Afrikaans English’, ‘Sesotho English’, ‘slang’ or ‘proper English’, he feels his way of speaking is without boundaries as he speaks in ‘everyway’. He further stated that English should not be used in a particular way claiming that ‘we speak however I want, when I want’ (sic). (Interview with Teboho). Teboho’s statement of speaking ‘however I want, when I want’ is significant in thinking about the role of individual agency in language use (Weedon, 1997) and also how the way people speak is highly tied to the context. Teboho’s reflective positioning (Davis and Harrè, 1990) in the way he imagines himself as a user of English resists constructions of a fixed identity, and affiliates with one that is fluid and context dependent (Hall, 1992; Weedon, 1997; Zegeye, 2001).

Teboho, unlike Thabo, felt less compelled to strongly perform an ethnolinguistic identity. While he felt that it would be fine if fifty percent of his subjects were taught in English and the other fifty percent in Sesotho his home language, he did not however favour Sesotho being the sole language of learning and teaching. Teboho’s argument for this is pragmatic (Granville et al., 1998). He did not feel it is ‘practicable’ for him for Sesotho to be the sole medium of instruction because he felt he is now used to learning in English and a change to Sesotho would require him to relearn all he has learnt through the medium of English in Sesotho. Further, Teboho in performing his identities seemed to be more assimilated into the institutional discourses than Thabo and also more invested in English.

4.4 Anna

Anna is an African learner who has also been at Excel High School since Grade 8. She resides in the suburb where the school is located with her mother and her ‘guardians’ who her mother works for as a domestic worker. She makes an interesting distinction between ‘mother tongue’ and ‘first language’ by reporting that her ‘mother tongue’ is Sepedi, which she said she ‘can’t really speak’, and English as her ‘first language’ as it was the first language she learnt (Interview with Anna). Anna, like Thabo and Teboho, was observed to be an active learner who contributes and
participates in a number of classroom activities and extramural activities such as athletics. The Geography teacher said that Anna is ‘intelligent’ and participates effectively in class but is quite moody (Field Notes Day 3 25/05/2005). In spite of being an active learner in the classroom, Anna was always being reminded by the teachers to be more serious with her work. She was found on several occasions not to be on task and not having notes as the following incident from a History lesson illustrates:

**Teacher:** Anna, can you please do some work.

**Anna:** I don’t have the notes.

**Sello:** Ma’am, that’s a demerit.

**Teacher:** You can’t sit here day-in-day-out and not do any work…you must be concerned about yourself. Your marks are going down and down. (Field Notes, Day 16 29/07/2005, History).

Comments about Anna not being a serious student were not just restricted to teachers as the following scene between Anna and one of her closest friends, Motshabi, demonstrates:

**Motshabi:** I’m not like you Anna; I bring my notes.

**Anna:** I also bring my notes!

(Field Notes, Day 14 26/07/2005, Geography)

She was also observed to be keen on non-academic details like what the teacher was doing over the weekend, where she bought her bracelet and those kinds of things. The English teacher sums up her perception of Anna as:

**Ms. Jones:** You know Anna is an interesting case. She’s got so much potential…so much potential. I like her a lot…sometimes I think maybe she shoots herself in the foot.

(Interview with English teacher, Ms. Jones).

Apart from the lack of concentration in some lessons, Anna was also observed to be quite subversive in class frequently engaging in subversive activity as an individual and also in collaboration with other learners as the following incidents in a single lesson demonstrate:

**Teacher:** (to Anna) will you please sit properly in your desk and stop chewing gum…
Anna: It’s a sweet ma’am.
Teacher: Put your bag on the floor
Anna: It’s going to get dirty.
Learner: (disagreeing with Anna) Aaah No!
[Later on in the lesson]
Teacher: (to learners standing up in anticipation of the bell) Can you please sit down.
Anna: Someone, what’s the time please? (Anna continues to stand)
Teacher: Anna, please take your seat.
Anna: Doesn’t anyone have a watch? (Anna does not sit down)
(Field Notes, Day 13 25/07/2005, Geography)

Revealed in these two extracts is Anna’s defiance to authority. In the first extract
Anna playfully refuses to obey the teacher’s requests for her to ‘stop chewing gum’
and to ‘put…bag on the floor’ through clever verbal play. Instead of accepting that
she is eating or chewing something, prohibited by the regulations, Anna overturns the
teacher’s injunction to point out her mistake ‘It’s a sweet ma’am’ - and not ‘gum’. In
the second extract, Anna openly defies the teacher’s commands for her to sit down by
continuing to stand. Disobedience by learners was observed to be a common feature
of the Geography class unlike other classes I observed.

At times it was difficult to tell whether Anna’s behaviour was sarcastic or she was
trying to be a good student as the following incident demonstrates:

[The class is generally uncontrollable. The teacher is trying to explain
something but no one seems to be paying attention]
Teacher: (Shouting) Grade 10! Would you shut up! Close your mouths.
I’ve had enough. Will you stop it! I’m talking to people who are also
talking…shut up! I don’t understand this disrespect.
Learner: Sorry ma’am.
Teacher: I’ll not get this sorry business.
Anna: Guys, Ms. Fox is a qualified teacher and you are making
fun of her.
Learner: Shut up! You are the one mocking her.
(Field Notes Day 6 01/06/2005 Geography).

I see the possibility of sarcasm by Anna in the above excerpt in her stressing that Ms.
Fox is ‘a qualified teacher’. This is because Ms. Fox had just started in the school in
the capacity of a full time teacher at the beginning of the year after a spell in the same
school as a trainee teacher\textsuperscript{38}. The other interpretation of Anna’s statement would be that she recognises the authority of the teacher that she feels other learners should respect.

Anna was observed to be a very competent speaker of English. Though Anna is proficient in one or more African languages as well, she was rarely observed speaking African languages. In fact, in the early stages of the research I was under the impression that Anna was unable to speak any African language given that she had stated that she cannot speak her ‘mother tongue’ and her ‘English speaking’ domestic arrangement. However, analysis of the naturally occurring data revealed Anna code-switching between English and Zulu in directing a presentation she and other learners were supposed to make in the Zulu class. Using a combination of data resources proved in this instance to be extremely useful in understanding behaviour which could not have been possible through observation or participants’ reports of their behaviour alone.

An important observation that emerges from the interviews with most of the participants is the notion of ‘proper English’. While most learners spoke of the existence of many ‘Englishes’, there was also a perception of an existence of ‘proper English’. For Teboho ‘proper English’ is English with ‘no slang’ and ‘no mix’ (Interview with Teboho). Anna stressed that good proficiency in English (‘proper English’) is valued in the school. Further, Anna reported that, Excel being ‘an English medium school’, learners are expected to speak English at all times:

So now when teachers if they hear you talking other languages they’ll tell you this is an English medium school; you came here to speak English, so speak it; you came here to learn English so learn it, speak it. (Interview with Anna)

Other research participants such as Teboho and Karen echoed Anna’s assertion that teachers discourage them from using other languages (‘English-only discourse’, \textit{cf.} McKay and Chick, 2001). Nonetheless, I did not encounter such comments in my observation as mentioned above, though the principal hints at this in his interview with other researchers on the SANPAD project 04/06 when he states that ‘we would

\textsuperscript{38} Learners are notorious for giving trainee teachers a hard time.
like to actually impose a rule…that you may only speak English at this school’ (Interview with principal).

Anna reported that learning through the medium of English for her is easy as she ‘grew up with English’ but stated that there are other learners who struggle to cope in English at school:

Anna: (...) if you look around here there are some kids from the townships, you see, and ekasie (in the township) they speak the Zulu and what, what…whereas the ones from the suburbs we are used to speaking English full time… (Interview with Anna, my emphasis)

For Anna, other learners experience problems in learning through the medium of English as they have limited opportunities to practice English since they use their different home languages at home and socially (on the streets). Anna’s statement reveals a common positioning of learners coming from the suburbs as being competent speakers of English and those from townships in terms of the deficit discourses marked by a less than proficient competence in English (cf. McKay and Chick, 2001). Anna’s use of the pronoun ‘we’ is significant as it shows that she clearly identifies herself with the group from the suburbs (and suburban schooling) with an assumed better competence of English and speaks English all the time (‘full time’) unlike the group from the townships. However, it is doubtful that a clear distinction exists between learners from the townships and those from the suburbs in terms of proficiency in English. Teboho, who lives in Soweto, resists this positioning as despite his residing in a township, he is a proficient user of English as discussed earlier. Nevertheless, one cannot disagree that learners with more opportunities to use and practice English are more likely to do better in an English medium school like Excel than those with fewer opportunities to use English39.

Though Anna is satisfied with learning through the medium of English as she reported that she does not experience any problems with English and that English is a good medium of communication between different people, she also stated that:

…In another way it’s bad because people are forgetting their

39 Nonetheless, it must be noted that living in the suburbs does not guarantee more opportunities to use English, unless suburban schooled.
roots and their own languages because they are conforming to English …when you learn English …you also learn the culture of the English…and people become more modern and more westernised instead of sticking true to their roots. I don’t know…it contradicts. (Interview with Anna).

Anna here expresses ambivalent feelings about the privileged position English occupies in South Africa and globally. Learning of English for her in spite of its communicative and integrative advantages also leads to a loss of an ethnolinguistic identity (cf. Rudwick, 2004). The ‘loss’ of an ethnolinguistic identity is experienced at a personal level for Anna as she reported lacking proficiency in her mother tongue, Sepedi, which makes her feel she has ‘lost’ her culture. In discussions of the spread of English in various domains across the world, scholars such as Phillipson (1992), Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1999) and Pennycook (1994) doubt that the spread of English could be considered to be neutral. As language and culture are considered to be inextricably linked (Rudwick, 2004; Duff and Uchida, in Norton, 1997), it is through a language like English that “speakers come to absorb entrenched attitudes” (Pennycook, 1994: 25). Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1999: 21-22) are also emphatic that ‘[n]either Englishisation (the spread of English) itself nor the study of English is a neutral activity’. Scholars such as Skuttnab-Kangas (2000), Grenoble and Whaley (2001), and Kamwangamalu (2003a) underscore that English is not a neutral language by asserting that the spread of English poses a significant threat to other languages with which it comes into contact. This may not necessarily be as dramatic as language death (see Batibo, 2005), but could involve significant shifts, as shown in the case of Anna, that may have negative identity and social consequences.

At another level, it is important in qualitative research to reflect on the kind of clichéd responses that respondents can make. For instance, the statement that Anna makes of English also being perceived to be negative because ‘people are forgetting their roots…’ as a result of learning English (Interview with Anna) should not be read too literally. In most cases the distinction between the traditional (‘roots’) and modernity that is couched in static views of culture is unproblematically appropriated. In her comment, Anna does not show an awareness of the complexity and fluidity of culture and identity but merely reproduces the clichéd categories where the ‘modern’ is synonymous with the ‘western’. The clichés Anna reproduces do not ring true to herself as there is no real sense of loss given that she is rooted in modernity where the
knowledge of English gives one access to all important domains. Anna states that even she herself is not sure of what she is saying (I don’t know…it contradicts). In the next section I will discuss in further detail some of the salient themes that emerged in the study.

4.5 The salience of English

The salience of English in the lives of my research participants cannot be over-emphasized. English plays a pivotal role in the lives of these learners in several domains in which they move. Apart from Sello, all the other five research participants report using English at home either as the first language, second, third or even fourth language. Significantly, it is through the English language that these learners are taught in school. It is also one of the sites through which they make sense of the world, and where their multiple, and changing identities are constructed and contested (Weedon, 1997).

All three learners (Thabo, Teboho and Anna) discussed in the case studies earlier were observed to be good users of English. Further, none of them reported experiencing any problems in expressing themselves or indeed in negotiating other parts of the learning experience for which the grasp of English is required. However, this ‘rosy’ picture cannot be extrapolated to the experiences of all other learners. In the research process I did encounter some learners who struggled to express themselves in English. The History teacher pointed out that Sello, one of my research participants, struggles with English:

…Sello is also battling; but his English is not that bad orally, you know, when you speak to him he is okay, but when he writes he doesn’t write very well. Nabeelah is battling but I mean she is Indian. English is her first language, but she is also battling… (Interview with History teacher Mrs. Hamilton)

My impressions of Sello from my observations in class and the recorded interview with him are similar to those of the History teacher. While he could express himself in English and make himself understood, he lacks the variety and spontaneity of the other five research participants (Thabo, Teboho, Anna, Shazeem and Karen).
Discourses that emerge from observations and interviews with my research participants reveal that they place a high ‘investment’ in the English language. Anna poignantly expresses this ‘investment’ in English arguing that:

…English is (a) universal language. So if they had to do things like teaching in Zulu, what would be the point because you get to university and you get taught in English…
(Interview with Anna).

Learners are very much aware of the importance and power of English as a language of higher education in South Africa among other domains where knowledge of English is vital. Anna’s high investment in English is not surprising owing to the fact that she lives in an ‘English world’ in the household of her English-speaking ‘guardians’, her mother’s employers. In her case it is not just what English can get her, but also what it represents: affluence, power and a comfortable life in the suburbs. The linguistic needs of learners, as Anna’s case shows, are inseparable from their social needs and aspirations (Norton, 1997). Kapp has also argued that while it may well be that English is desired for its status as the language of power and privileges in South Africa, ‘to characterize students’ desire to be proficient in English as “assimilationist”, is overly simplistic’ (Kapp, 2000: 230). This she affirms is because:

students’ language attitudes and practices are embedded in far more complex, and often contradictory processes of identity construction which are influenced and constrained by their school and social-economic contexts (230).

Despite a high investment in English some learners also express ambivalence in learning through the medium of English. Sello states that:

…I don’t really prefer studying in English…I just want to know standard English like how to communicate…
(Interview with Sello).

This ambivalence in Sello’s case stems from a fear of making mistakes (cf. Rudwick, 2004). He states that he faces problems in learning through the medium of English:
…because they use words that I don’t understand and I will like be confused, you see, and I would get things wrong.
(Interview with Sello).

One of the things which I observed almost immediately in the English class that Sello and the other research participants (apart from Karen) attend, is the high level at which the English language is pitched. A number of ‘big’ words whose relevance and appropriacy was at times not immediately apparent to me were a common feature of the English lessons. In an interview, the English teacher accepts in a moment of personal reflection that:

I think sometimes the words that I use might be too big, might be too complicated, might leave some kids behind and then they switch off… (Interview with Ms. Jones).

Other learners such as Anna (see 4.4) also expressed ambivalence towards learning in English arguing that learning in English, despite its advantages, could lead to a ‘loss’ of an ethnolinguistic identity. As Kathleen Heugh has argued, ‘an attachment to and high value accorded (to) English does not negate an attachment to indigenous languages in a multilingual society’ (2002: 180). Nonetheless, given the power of English in South Africa, these learners have little ‘choice’ (cf. Pennycook, 1994: 74) but to learn it properly as the choice not to learn it properly may significantly limit their educational advancement, future earnings and mobility in wider society.

4.6 English varieties and accents

Most learners expressed an awareness of the existence of different varieties of English (‘Englishes’) and ways in which English is spoken. Most categories of varieties and accents as named by the learners follow essentialised racial and linguistic categories such as ‘black English’, ‘Indian English’, ‘coloured English’, ‘white English’, ‘Afrikaans English’, ‘Indian accent’. However, although learners mentioned such categories, none of them for various reasons defined themselves in terms of the categories they mention (See 4.2 and 4.3). Boundary crossing, it must be noted, is the everyday reality of individuals in ‘contact zones’ like desegregated schools. The sense of these youths’ daily reality of continuous border crossing is well brought out in Karen’s comments about the way some learners speak: ‘…it’s kind of weird, for
instance Domingo, he talks very white for a black guy...then you have someone like Belinda and Helen or whatever, they talk very black or they talk white...' (Interview with Karen). For these learners, bounded entities like ‘black English’ are not their lived experience amidst so many influences and learners are therefore less likely to make a claim to any essential way of being (Bhabha, 1994). The learners’ resistance to being defined in certain categories could also be explained as being a result of the negative attitudes to some varieties such as Black South African English (BSAfE), varieties40 of English commonly used by mother-tongue speakers of African languages (De Klerk and Gough, 2002), which have been described in terms of ‘a prescriptive framework of deviance from standard English’ (Gough, 1996: 57). Shazeem, who is Indian, also disassociates himself from what is known as ‘Indian English’, a variety which also suffers from stigma like BSAfE, stating that:

I don’t have the accent (Indian accent) because I was born in Johannesburg and I have a bit of a British background and I’ve got a bit of a British accent...
(Interview with Shazeem).

While popular usage of the term ‘Model C accent’ suggests that African learners attending ex-Model C schools speak a particular brand of English, what constitutes a Model C accent is difficult to define at this stage and most of the research participants could not articulate what this English is. For Karen, the Model C accent is:

…like in between [BSAfE and WSAfE]. They [some African learners] speak Zulu but they are English…like although they speak Zulu and stuff in and around the school, they have adopted the English accent because of every subject being in English…in our time…we haven’t had apartheid, so it hasn’t been you have to be in school surrounded by black people, you have to be in school surrounded by white people. It’s a mixture; so everyone adopted things from each other in a way.
(Interview with Karen).

In the excerpt above, Karen suggests that African learners have adopted some of the mainstream ‘English accent’ (WSAfE) as a result of the opportunity that desegregated schooling has created in that ‘race’ is no longer a limiting factor to the learners’ world of experience. Significant here too is Karen’s direct comment of the possibilities of

40 Black South African English (BSAfE) as a single variety is highly contested. (cf. Makoni, 1999).
hybridity in identity construction and negotiation in the school space (‘It’s a mixture; so everyone has adopted things from each other’). Her comment about African learners ‘who speak Zulu but…are English’ could be revealing of assimilation going on in the school in the processes of cultural contestation and appropriation (Pennycook, 2004). The question is whether the assimilated learners who ‘speak Zulu but…are English’ become totally assimilated, ‘English’ to the core. Vivian de Klerk has stated that as a result of political, economic and educational reasons, Xhosa speaking parents have sent their children to English medium schools ‘to be assimilated into a single unified national culture which will probably be Western to the core’ (2002: 11).

Learners refrained from explicitly making judgments about accents (at least in interviews). In the interview, Karen asserted that:

I can’t see the accents in some people, you see, for me everyone talks normally, they way they talk is the way they talk (sic).

(Interview with Karen).

However, this does not mean that negative attitudes to some accents do not exist. Elsewhere in the naturally occurring data while being quizzed by her friends (who are all white) about why she is wearing the audio recorder, Karen informs them that it was given to her by a researcher who wants to know:

…like (…) to see how I talk, how I talk in…when I’m talking to friends and stuff like that; or [in an exaggerated voice sounding like a parody of BSAfE] your chomis or your yo, yo, yo; proper English or what, what...

(Naturally Occurring Data , Karen 21/07/2005).

While in the interview Karen claims to be oblivious to the specific ways in which different learners speak English in the school, in the absence of ‘the observer’ she mentions three different ‘categories’ to her friends. Firstly, there is herself (she reported using a ‘mixture’ of ‘slang’ and ‘proper English’), secondly the ‘chomis or your yo, yo, yo’ through which she shifts the way she speaks to refer to African learners who are fond of calling each other ‘chomi’ (especially girls) and using the exclamation ‘yo’, and thirdly ‘proper English’ which she said is the type of English ‘which people in Britain speak’ (Interview with Karen). In referring to the African
learners, Karen parodies their speech patterns ‘your chomis or your yo, yo, yo’ that are introduced by the determiner ‘your’ which is distancing and diminishing as it is used ‘to indicate all things or people of a certain type’ (McLeod, 1987: 1170). Parody in this instance is effective as a tool in the construction of the ‘other’.

In the interview, Karen takes up a seemingly liberal stance as revealed in the following excerpt:

…I think English (…) English is English…if you say it with an accent or you say it with a twist…for instance we have adopted, English has adopted a lot of Afrikaans and quite a few Zulu words…I think it’s fine if everyone speaks the way they want to speak… (Interview with Karen).

However, this liberal stance should not be taken at face value in light of the categories she designates to her friendship group in the naturally occurring data, for the very act of labeling these categories is value laden. Ndebele as cited by Norton, asserts that naming is a political act for “[t]he namer isolates the named, explains them, contains them, and controls them” (1997: 424). Karen’s usage of the pronoun ‘we’ in ‘we have adopted, English has adopted…’ is also important in observing the identity she constructs in this particular instance for herself. She clearly identifies herself with English not just in terms of an ability to speak it but also as an act of ownership, (Norton, 1997; De Klerk and Gough 2002).

4.7 The Position of Zulu

One of the changes that have taken place at Excel High school in the last ten years has been the introduction of Zulu as a second/additional language. As a result, Afrikaans is no longer compulsory as a second/additional language as learners have a choice between Afrikaans and Zulu. There is one Zulu class in each Grade with more learners in each class in the lower Grades (8, 9 and 10) than in the higher Grades (11 and 12) (Interview with Ms Khumalo 12/08/2005). The position of Zulu in the school is an important one for my study in that five of my six research participants take it as a second/additional language.
Whereas ‘Afrikaans achieved a hegemony alongside English’ during the apartheid era (Granville et al 1998: 260), Zulu together with other African languages during the same period was systematically underdeveloped and undervalued. Though the post-apartheid Constitution recognizes Zulu as an official language alongside other African languages; and the language-in-education policy has as one of its aims ‘to promote and develop all the official languages’ (Republic of South Africa, 1997), the position of Zulu in the school remains a subsidiary one. The principal sees Zulu as a ‘very difficult subject to learn’ and further argues that ‘it has inadequate (grammatical) structures’ (Interview with the principal). For him Afrikaans is ‘easier’ to learn in comparison to Zulu. This positioning of Zulu is also shown by one Grade 10 African learner who stated that as compared to Zulu, even Chinese would be easier to learn! (Field Notes, Day 1, 23/05/2005). The Zulu teacher recognizes that Zulu as a subject is still stigmatized in the school as ‘something not to be taken seriously’ as evidenced by the few learners taking it (Interview with Ms Khumalo 12/08/2005). Nevertheless, she finds the attitude of those learners taking it to be ‘positive’.

The low status of Zulu is further exacerbated by the stigma which has been attached to the Grade 10 Zulu class that my research participants attend which has been positioned as ‘unruly’ and generally uncontrollable by the principal (Interview with principal). However, neither I nor the other researchers on the SANPAD project 04/06 picked up any difference in behaviour by learners in the Zulu class and other classes observed. The main issue here as I see it is the threat this racially homogenous group of African learners41 poses to the assimilation project in the white dominated space of the school. The principal argues that it is ‘dangerous’ to have a homogenous racial grouping within the school for they will have ‘an identity of their own’ that is different from the rest of the school (Interview with principal). Speaking Zulu (and other African languages) by learners who share these language resources in the school space is assumed to be for the purposes of subversion. The principal in fact stated, as I earlier mentioned, that they would like to impose a rule which states that learners ‘may only speak English’ in the school. This, he argues, is the ‘best way to learn the language (English)…to speak it’ (Interview with principal). The fortunes of Zulu (and

41 There is only one Indian learner in the Grade 10 Zulu class, Shazeem, who is also one of my research participants.
other African languages)\(^42\) in the school and in these learners’ school life are indeed dire in the face of this ‘Anglicization’ project underway in the school. It is ironic that while the school could be positioned as ‘progressive’ in offering Zulu as a second/additional language, as few ex-Model C schools do, this is undermined by the principal’s views.

4.8 Subverting institutional discourses

Although there are a number of ways through which learners subvert ways of doing things in the school in performing their identities such as swearing, code-switching (see 4.3) and parody among others, I will focus in this section on how learners use swearing for their own purposes. Swearing by learners in their interactions, both in formal and informal contexts, seems to form part of their ‘fashionable’ linguistic repertoire that also plays an important subversive role for the learners. While it is quite difficult to define clearly what swearing is, I use the term following Andersson and Trudgill who define it as:

\[
\text{a type of language use in which the expression (a) refers to something that is taboo and/stigmatized in the culture; (b) should not be interpreted literally; (c) can be used to express strong emotions and attitudes (1990: 53).}
\]

This kind of language was mostly observed in the boys ranging from the humorous and playful ‘fuck off’ to the aggressive ‘fuck you’. These instances of ‘bad language’ were observed to be quite frequent in spite of the restrictions imposed by the school on this kind of linguistic behaviour. In one class alone, I observed no fewer than five instances of swearing by Teboho and Sello:

Teboho: (to a learner) Happy birthday Lucy.
Sello: Shut the fuck up!
Teacher: Stop swearing! Why do you keep on swearing? You are inviting me to give you demerits.
(Field Notes Day 7 02/06/2005 History)

Though the teacher continually admonishes these learners to ‘stop swearing’ and threatens punitive action, this subversion of the normal classroom balance continues

\(^42\) The fate of Afrikaans is not examined here as it is beyond the scope of this project.
as the learners refer to ‘bloody notes’ or laugh off some classroom joke saying ‘that’s some funny shit’ (Field Notes Day 7 02/06/2005 History). Language, and significantly in this particular instance English, is the site where these learners resist and subvert social and institutional discourses for their own purposes. Interesting for me is that although these learners have the linguistic resources to swear in African languages which in ordinary circumstances would not be picked up by the teachers who are not proficient in African languages, they choose to swear mostly in English. Learners seem to swear in English to transcend the boundaries circumscribed by the school discourses to show their affiliation to global popular cultural trends such as Hip-Hop and Gangster Rap. The English language here is appropriated by these learners for popular, informal subcultural use and is made to perform—“to work in the service of revising and altering the wor(l)d” (Pennycook, 2004: 17).

4.9 The construction of ‘Race’

Scholars have pointed out that the idea of ‘race’ in post-apartheid South Africa continues to be the most significant factor in the construction of post-apartheid identities (McKinney, 2003). As I have stated above, one of the most poignant remnants of apartheid thinking in post-apartheid South Africa is the appropriation of racialized labels in labeling accents and varieties of English. Learners invoked the idea of ‘race’ in a playful manner in pointing out some essentialized racialized mannerisms, attitudes and aptitudes in their interactions in both formal and informal contexts. However, at times the use of the category of ‘race’ led to some awkwardness and discomfort marked by silences and hasty change of subject. In an instance where Teboho and Sello play noisily in class with an African girl, Vusi, an African boy, shouts ‘Heyi Heyi darkies’ (Field Notes Day 3 History 25/05/2005). Later on in the same class when Teboho and Sello play rough with each other, Vusi shouts ‘Bloody Kaffirs! You are so violent’. What is interesting for me here is that in all these instances Teboho and Sello do not rebut Vusi’s use of derogatory words (‘darkies’ and ‘kaffirs’) that have been used historically (and are still used pejoratively) to describe Africans and people of a dark skin colour generally. It seems that these words lose their racist resonance when they are used within the context of the friendship group and most importantly, by someone of the same ‘race’, as others have documented.
However, the labeling of ‘race’ becomes uncomfortable and a cause of much awkwardness when it comes from someone of a different ‘race’ as the following incident demonstrates:

[The (white) Geography teacher a few minutes ago threatened to send Risse, a coloured learner, out of the classroom for being rude. Teboho is meanwhile talking to Smangaliso as the teacher explains something.]

**Teacher:** Smangaliso, Teboho, out!

**Thabo:** Yes, Teboho go out.

**Anna:** That is so racist ma’am! How do you let the coloured boy stay and let the two white boys, sorry black boys go?

(Field Notes Day 5 Geography 30/05/2005)

The teacher does not say anything in reply to Anna’s accusation. She is obviously stunned by Anna’s presumptuous accusation. The uncomfortable situation is only defused by Risse who retorts: ‘Which white boys? You don’t even know who is white and who is black’. The argument Risse picks up with Anna allows the teacher to recompose herself and continue with the lesson. Another instance where the construction of ‘race’ is poignantly evoked in the way learners imagine themselves and ‘others’ is in a History lesson where the History teacher tells the class the names of the learners she expects to get A grade marks in the end-of-term examinations. Then Teboho blurts out that ‘…only Indians and whites! Blacks are not expected to get A’s’ (Field Notes Day 5 History 30/05/2005). As in the other example the teacher does not respond to this ‘accusation’ and hastily changes the subject.

While an explicit examination of ‘race’ is not part of the overt aims of this study, as I have stated earlier, the construction of ‘race’ is important in understanding interactions in desegregated schools in South Africa where the constructions of ‘race’ have never strayed far from the way people imagine themselves and others. A discussion of socially constructed categories such as ‘black’, ‘white’, ‘coloured’ or ‘Indian’ in the way learners imagine themselves and others is thus appropriate in a study concerned with language in a context where aspects concerning language such as varieties and accents are highly racialized.

**4.10 Conclusion**
In this chapter I presented detailed case studies of three learners through which I opened my presentation of the findings of my study. In the second part following the case studies, I discussed some themes and issues that emerged in the research in further detail. These include: the salience of English in the learners’ lives, varieties and accents of English, the position of Zulu in the school, the subversion of institutional discourses and the construction of ‘race’. The three learners discussed in the case studies (Thabo, Teboho and Anna) were all observed to be proficient speakers of English with varying degrees of investment and equally different motivations for their investment in English. I argued that the construction of identity by the learners is contingent, multifaceted and contradictory. I found Thabo’s ‘case’ revealing in showing how individuals are often unaware of their multifaceted and contradictory identities. While Thabo was observed to be a good speaker of English, in one instance he put himself in the position of a learner who struggles with English, while in another he triumphantly declared that he corrects other learners who do not speak English well.

English has emerged as an important site for the construction and contestation of these learners’ identities. English was perceived, among other things, to be a marker of assimilation into ‘whiteness’. Thabo in his attempt to present a unitary narrative of his self as an ‘African’ not only claims that he struggles with English, but also rejects close friendship with ‘Teboho’ who he claims interacts in school mostly with white learners who are always speaking English.

Another way in which English was seen playing a significant role in the way in which the learners imagine and position themselves as language users has to do with the ‘kind’ of English used. All three learners stated that there are different accents with which English is spoken and different varieties of English. Further, all the learners use racialized categories such as ‘Indian accents’, ‘White accents’, ‘Black accents’ and ‘Black English’. I argued that the maintenance of racialized categories is revealing of how essentialised racist labels of the apartheid era have been internalised in how individuals in post-apartheid South Africa imagine themselves and others. However, in spite of the racial categories these learners identify, none of them identified themselves in terms of the essentialised categories they mentioned. In fact, Thabo and
Tebogo construct new separate categories for themselves. This I argued is as a result of the lived experiences of the learners where boundary crossing is everyday reality, especially in the context of a desegregated school space, which by its nature is a site of cultural and linguistic confluence.

The idea of ‘proper English’ was invoked by Teboho and Anna, who appeared to be more assimilated into institutional discourses than Thabo, in relation to the way they position themselves and others as users of English amidst institutional expectations. For Teboho and Anna, ‘proper English’ is synonymous with ‘standard’ White South African English. Anna stressed the idea of ‘proper English’ as a signifier of cultural capital in the school which she emphasises is an ‘English medium school’. She positions herself among those learners from the suburbs who do not struggle to fit-in in the school as she grew up listening to and speaking English unlike other learners from the townships who she claims struggle. Significant here is the township-suburb dichotomy that was constantly invoked in learners’ positioning of themselves and others. Similarly, Rudwick’s study in a township school in Umlazi in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province reveals perceived boundaries by Zulu-speaking learners ‘between isiZulu mother-tongue speakers and those who acquire English first in the life’ (2004: 167).

Learners in Rudwick’s study positioned those who speak English frequently, like learners attending ex-Model C schools, to be practising ‘white culture’. Despite recognising the importance of English for their future mobility, Rudwick asserts that the majority of the Zulu speaking youth who participated in her study ‘do not seem to experience English as a major part of their identity’ (2004: 167). Anna’s emphasis on ‘proper English’, I argue, is also related to her subjective investment in English as it is linked not only to the hegemonic position of English but is also tied to her aspirations given her domestic arrangements; her living in the suburbs in the household of her mother’s employers who are English speaking. I also argue that Teboho who lives in a township needs to demonstrate, more than Thabo and Anna who live in the suburbs, that he fits into suburban schooling, hence his frequent use of English, consistent use of a prestigious variety of English and also the ease with which he crosses boundaries to associate with white learners.