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# South African English: a sociolinguistic investigation of an emerging variety.

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# Abstract

The following study gives a descriptive account of eight vowel variables in two varieties of South African English spoken in present-day Johannesburg, along with a domain analysis of language use of black South Africans and a qualitative assessment of language attitudes of black and white students attending the University of the Witwatersrand.

The eight vowel variables are compared to those varieties documented in the literature known as English-Speaking South African English (ESSA English) and Black South African English (BSAE), an L2 variety spoken by black South Africans. Many of the dialectological studies of varieties of South African English in the past have dealt solely with "white" South African English (ESSA English), which usually has included dialects of L1 English speakers and white Afrikaans speakers. In comparison, BSAE has received considerably less attention regarding its development and phonetic description.

It is argued that BSAE does not exist as one single entity due to drastic differences in levels of proficiency among black South Africans, and that BSAE varieties in Johannesburg have radically been changing, with access to English in schools being one of the primary social factors. The elimination of segregated schools has had a dramatic effect on the varieties of English spoken in the Johannesburg area, and thus, can no longer be categorised neatly into ethnolects.

The analysis of the phonetic variables, the investigation of language use (English vs. an African language) of black students along with a discussion of language attitudes of both black and white students reveal that there are two distinct lects of speakers in the sample population. Each lect was then analysed in terms of its social variables, i.e., ethnicity, educational background and gender. The social composition of each lect suggests a shift from BSAE among L2 speakers of English to a variety closer to that of their white counterparts, and in some cases, contradicts the variants predicted by the BSAE variable system.

## Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degrees or examination in any other university.

_____

Arista Da Silva

_____ day of February, 2008

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## Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AAVE | *African American Vernacular English* |
| AISU | *Academic Information Systems Unit* |
| ANC | *African National Congress* |
| BEE | *Black Economic Empowerment* |
| BSAE | *Black South African English* |
| DET | *Department of Education and Training* |
| EEO | *Employment Equity Opportunity* |
| ESSA | *English speaking South African* |
| HOD | *House of Delegates* |
| HOR | *House of Representatives* |
| HSRC | *Human Sciences Research Council* |
| ISASA | *Independent Schools Association South Africa* |
| L1 | *first language* |
| L2 | *second language* |
| LANGTAG | *Language Task Group* |
| LC | *lower class* |
| LMC | *lower middle class* |
| LOLT | *language of teaching and learning* |
| MOI | *medium of instruction* |
| NLPF | *National Language Policy Framework* |
| PanSALB | *Pan South African Languages Board* |
| PC | *Principle Component* |
| PCA | *Principle Components Analysis* |
| RP | *Received Pronunciation* |
| SABC | *South African Broadcasting Corporation* |
| SafE | *South African English* |
| SAIE | *South African Indian English* |
| SANLAM | *The Suid-Afrikaanse Lewensassuransiemaatskappij [South African Life Assurance Company]* |
| SANTAM | *The Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionale Trust- en Assuransiemaatskappij Beperk [The South African National Trust and Assurance Company]* |
| SASL | *South African Sign Language* |
| TED | *Transvaal Education Department* |
| WC | *working class* |