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An investigation of student teachers' attitudes toward varieties of spoken English

Biesman-Simons, Claire

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AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENT TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD VARIETIES OF SPOKEN ENGLISH

Claire Biesman- Simons

A thesis submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand, Department of Applied English Language Studies in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts

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Supervisor: Dr Visvaganthie Moodley

I declare that the following work is my own work, unless otherwise indicated. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination at any university.

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Claire Biesman-Simons

30 April, 2010

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ABSTRACT

As the *lingua franca* of South Africa, English is spoken by first language (L1) and additional language (AL) speakers, resulting in varieties of English being spoken. Internationally, research findings suggest that listeners form attitudes toward people according to their language (Cargile *et al* 1994 and Labov 1969a, b, 1972). In a country with much diversity in language, South Africans' attitudes and their subsequent behaviour toward speakers are likely to be affected by a speaker's language or variety thereof. This research aimed to establish the attitudes that student teachers of English, Mathematics and Science hold toward varieties of spoken English, with a specific focus on learners' spoken English. Two AL varieties of English (Afrikaans South African English and Black South African English) and two L1 varieties (Indian South African English and White South African English) were investigated. 18 third and fourth year student teachers from the University of the Witwatersrand participated in focus groups interviews. Each focus group followed a two-part format. Firstly, participants responded, by means of a questionnaire, to four voice recordings, each representing one of the varieties of English being researched. Secondly, the student teachers discussed their attitudes toward varieties of English. These attitudes were then analysed within a qualitative framework. This analysis was informed by Labov (1969a, b, 1972) who demonstrated that one's variety of English is not an indicator of one's intellect and ability. Kachru's Three Concentric Circles (1996) provided a model for the interpretation of the data. This model distinguishes between L1 and AL varieties of English and illustrates the equality that exists between varieties of English - both of which are key factors within a study of attitudes toward varieties of English in South Africa. The findings indicated that, despite the equality that both Labov (1969a, b, 1972) and Kachru (1996) outline, student teachers' attitudes toward a speaker's variety of English are affected by numerous factors. These factors include the student teachers' racial background, language, education and teaching subjects. Participants voiced a range of attitudes toward varieties of spoken English with some believing that one variety of English, White South Africa English, holds more linguistic capital while other participants perceive English to be a means of communication and therefore do not stress

a specific variety of English. A potential consequence of these attitudes is that the participants' interaction with and treatment of speakers of other varieties of English might be influenced, either negatively or positively. Within the classroom this could affect the teaching and learning process if teachers' treatment and assessment of their learners are modified according to a learner's variety of spoken English.

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

R1	researcher/interviewer
R2	co-interviewer
RS1-4	Radio Speakers 1-4
P	participant
l followed by a number	line
ll followed by numbers	lines
/	interruption in talk
{ }	overlapping in talk
[pause]	used to indicate a pause, longer than two seconds
[raises hand]	square brackets used for transcriber's comments to include additional information such as participants' gestures
(…)	part of transcription has been omitted
underline	emphasis on a word
Italics	indicates a word spoken in a language other than English

ACRONYMS

AL	additional language
ANC	African National Congress
ASAE	Afrikaans South African English
BSAE	Black South African English
ISAE	Indian South African English
L1	first language
NP	National Party
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WSAE	White South African English

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