

**THE INFLUENCE OF ACCENT ON
COMPREHENSION: AN
INVESTIGATION.**

BY

ELIZABETH GRIMBEEK

To my husband, Niek, with all my love.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 *The Problem Defined*

According to Peirce (1989:401) there are over 750 million speakers of English over the world, and less than half of them speak it as a mother tongue. English has become the lingua franca of the modern world. According to Trudgill (1986:18) English, as we know it, comes in many different forms. The English heard on different continents differs. Australian English does not sound like Indian English, yet both are described as English. Fromkin and Rodman (1978) state that regionalism, even in one country, may persist and may lead to different forms of English being spoken in that country.

According to Lanham (1985) the South African community is highly heterogeneous. Social and political factors have divided ethnic groups over nearly two centuries and have contributed to a highly divided society. “Language and dialect differences are, in consequence, of considerable significance, and attitudes evoked by them, and the social information which varieties of English convey, are extremely complex” (Lanham, 1985:242).

Lanham (1985:243) distinguishes as follows between these different varieties of English used in South Africa.

1. White mother tongue English, which can be divided into three different accents with regional and social associations, namely;
 - a. Conservative South African English (Cons. SAE). This accent is close to Standard Southern British English and does not have the defining variables of SAE with any degree of prominence. Cons SAE has a correlation with the highest socio-economic status. It is spoken mostly by city dwellers of 55 plus years of age, who have strong links with Britain and pride themselves on being “English”.

- b. **Respectable South African English (Resp SAE).** This English originated in the English of Natal where the British settlement came at a later stage in the mid-nineteenth century. The social and regional origins are in Britain. This society is characterised by remaining close to Britain and places a high prestige on being “English”. Resp SAE spread to upwardly mobile groups, especially in the mining and industrial society of the Witwatersrand.
 - c. **Extreme South African English (Ext SAE).** This speech pattern has its origins in the speech of the first British settlers in the Cape in the early nineteenth century. This type of English reflects the speech patterns of the lower and middle-class accents of the Home Countries at the turn of the eighteenth century. This accent is associated socially with the Cape and industrialised cities. It denotes a low status.
- 2. **Afrikaans English (Afrik E).** This is spoken by Whites who have Afrikaans as mother tongue.
- 3. **South African Black English (Bl E).** This is spoken by Blacks who have a Black language as mother tongue.
- 4. **Coloured English (Col E),** spoken by the coloured community who traditionally have Afrikaans as mother tongue.
- 5. **South African Indian English (Ind E),** spoken by people of Indian descent in South Africa.

Lanham speaks of dialectal differences in these various forms of English spoken in South Africa. Yule (1985:181) describes a dialect as a term that incorporates features of grammar and vocabulary, as well as aspects of pronunciation in variations of a language. Trudgill (1983:24) says the term dialect refers to language variety that is grammatically different from any other, as

well as having vocabulary and pronunciation differences. For the purpose of this study, accent will be seen as differences in vocal contours that indicate a difference in pronunciation. The term accent will refer only to the phonic and phonetic realm.

Thus, the term dialect will be distinguished from accent. Dialect will refer to aspects of grammar and vocabulary, whereas accent will refer to aspects of pronunciation only. Furthermore “..it is a myth that some speakers have accents while others do not. Some speakers may have particularly strong or easily recognised types of accent while others do not, but every language user speaks with an accent” (Yule, 1985:181).

Studies by Strongman and Woosley (1967) and Cheyne et al. (1968) proved that speakers speaking with a RP (received pronunciation) accent were accepted as being more intelligent and socially acceptable. Labov (1972) found a correlation between social stratification and accent with his studies in the inner city of New York. Smit (1996) found in a study undertaken in Grahamstown, that pupils were able to recognise social standing of accents although not having been exposed to them.

Mzinyati (1980) set out to examine the attitude of Blacks towards their own group and towards English and Afrikaans speaking South Africans. Accent did, however, affect the evaluation of the commentary, and this seemed to be due to the fact that the African accented commentary was easier to understand.

Mgoduso (1986) conducted various studies to determine attitudes of Black High school pupils in Soweto towards certain accents. He found that “....accent did affect the evaluation of the commentary and this seemed to be due to the fact that the African accented commentary was easier to understand.....all those who heard the African commentary understood it, whereas approximately half or less of those who heard the other commentaries understood them” (Mgoduso, 1986:29). He claims that the pupils probably understood B1 E because it mirrored their own accent.

Jacobs (1994:16) states that White South African academics apparently experience acute speech perception problems with Zulu tertiary students. "It is felt that the English accent of most Zulu students is broad to the extent that it impedes student-tutor communication. A primary concern is the harmful effect which poor verbal interaction has on the quality of courses at universities, Technikons and teacher-training colleges. In the words of an Economics professor:

We are constantly being urged by future employees to teach students critical thinking skills, but this is impossible without spontaneous conversation. How are we to develop students' capabilities for thought and judgement if they do not understand our speech and we do not understand theirs, even though we all speak English (Jacobs, 1994:16).

Lanham (1985, 243-244) contends " South African Black English (BI E) is immediately recognised by all in South Africa with its prominent pronunciation variables reflecting Bantu language phonology, idioms and fixed expressions, redefined semantic content and peculiar grammatical structures. In a century and a half of learning English as a second language, norms peculiar to BI E have evolved and characterize an acceptable variety of English as a second language".

From the above evidence, it becomes apparent that accent inadvertently evokes certain perceptions, attitudes and preconceptions on the part of the listener. Labov (1972) states that accent identifies the speaker according to ethnic background and social standing. The listener experiences an evaluative reaction when confronted by accent.

In terms of this study it is important to determine whether the influence of accent stretches as far as, and includes, comprehension. At the University of Durban Westville, Du Plessis (1985) found that Zulu students felt frustrated by lecturers who relied primarily on discussion methods. They showed a marked preference for lecturers who conducted most of their work on a textbook basis. This becomes relevant in the South African context today, as education is experiencing a multi-culturalism as never seen before. If a scenario arises where students in a tertiary situation do not understand material being lectured to them in an accent different from their own, it could have a profound impact on education in South Africa.

The problems which this study aims to investigate are:

- * Is there a correlation between comprehension and accent?
- * Do BI E speakers understand a BI E accent better than an accent belonging to one of the other categories as defined by Lanham (1985)?
- * Should accent be taken into consideration when lecturing ethnically diverse groups?

1.2. *Aim of this Study*

The aim of this study is to determine (in the South African tertiary context) the influence of accent on comprehension, and to ascertain whether a correlation exists between accent and comprehension.

1.3. *Hypothesis*

Accent does have a minimal effect on the comprehension of BI E students when confronted with an accent that is not similar to BI E.

1.4 *Method of Research and Measuring Instruments*

A study of relevant literature on accent, dialectology and comprehension was conducted.

In order to determine the influence of accent on comprehension, a design, involving two randomly divided groups, was used. Technikon Pretoria students, all taking the same course in Public Management at the satellite campus of the Pretoria Technikon, were used for the tests. The population, consisting of 155 students, was numbered on the official registration list and divided into two groups using random numbers as exemplified in Steyn et al. (1994:680). Only full-time students took part in the test. There were 62 participants in Group 1 (G1) and 58 participants in Group 2 (G2).

The tests were conducted in immediate sequence in the same room, and each test took one hour.

The students were subjected to a listening comprehension test, the same passage being used for both groups. The passage, in two different accents, was pre-recorded by a professional studio and replayed to the two groups on professional equipment. The first group listened to a B1 E accent and the second group to an accent resembling Cons SAE. The B1 E recording took 7.30 minutes and the Cons SAE recording 7.15 minutes. Two groups were randomly divided, where Group 1 was to listen to the B1 E recording and Group 2 to the accent resembling Cons SAE. Each group listened to only one accent. The groups were, however, tested on the same material. The passage chosen was from *Professional Management Review* and dealt with marketing in rural areas.

The recording of the passage was played twice, during which time the students had to complete 10 comprehension questions relating to the passage. In these questions certain words were printed in italics and used as lexical markers. Students were told to listen for these words, as the relevant answer would follow. They were given 10 minutes to study the questions before listening to the recording. The questions relating to the content were done in sequence, so as to facilitate the answering of the questions.

Comprehension lies in the cognitive domain. The following verbs in the cognitive field were used because they are measurable and applicable verbs which can be used to define the question.

(See table 1.1 following page)

Table 1.1

Sample of Verbs in the Cognitive Domain

<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>to recall, to repeat, to recollect, to memorise, to list</i>
<i>Comprehension</i>	<i>to identify, to recognise, to select</i>
<i>Application</i>	<i>to use, to solve, to practice, to reproduce, to compare, to contact</i>
<i>Analysis</i>	<i>to investigate, to separate, to study, to research, to describe</i>
<i>Synthesis</i>	<i>to combine, to formulate, to deduce, to unite, to assemble, to create</i>
<i>Evaluation</i>	<i>to appraise, to judge, to assess, to assign value, to accept, to reject</i>

(Gunther et al., 1990:23)

The listening comprehension test was designed with multiple-choice questions so that only one answer could be taken as correct. Verbs testing the various cognitive domains were included in the questions relating to the listening comprehension test. Questions were preceded by verbs identified by Gunther et al. (1990:23) so as to facilitate one answer. The groups were not given both accents to listen to, since this would influence their retentive memory and thus negatively impact on the comprehension aspect. Each group thus listened to only one accent.

The questionnaire contained 25 questions. The last ten related to the listening comprehension test and the first 15 to the student's historical profile. The students answered the first 15 questions concerning the historical profile before the onset of the listening comprehension test.

Data were thus collected through questionnaires. Because only one answer in the listening comprehension test may be considered as correct, and because the students were required to respond to pre-determined stimuli in the form of the lexical markers, the data collection parameter may be considered as having a high degree of explicitness. The data were then edited and coded by the Statistical Services at the Potchefstroom University. As the two groups were randomly divided by number, it was decided to use a t-test to determine the influence of accent on comprehension.

1.5 Synopsis of Chapters

Chapter 1

In this chapter the problem, purpose of this study and hypothesis are defined. The research method is discussed and explained.

Chapter 2

In this chapter accent is defined and described in relation to dialects. Idiosyncratic dialects and interlanguage are discussed. The focus then falls on the various English accents in S.A., the influence of accent on the listener, and perceptions conveyed by English accents in South Africa.

Chapter 3

In this chapter comprehension and learning are discussed. Factors influencing comprehension are mentioned and linguistic factors that influence comprehension are studied. Mention is made of the role of surface structure, intonation and discourse meaning in comprehension.

Chapter 4

Empirical research methods, population and subjects, data collection procedure, aims of the project, the design and statistical analysis techniques are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5

This chapter discusses the results, contains the conclusions and has recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

ENGLISH ACCENT AND DIALECT IN SOUTH AFRICA.

2.1. Introduction

Various studies (Lambert et al. 1960; Labov, 1972 and Williams, 1974), on accent have shown that accent plays an important role in determining social stereotyping, social acceptability and prestige. As early as 1967 Lambert found that stereotyped impressions of an individual's personality may be formulated by listeners when presented with a speaker's voice "...whose vocal contours are representative of phonological patterns peculiar to specific group membership" (Lambert, 1967:211). He also found that when modifications of the individual's style of speech to another dialect or language occurred, the listeners tended to adopt a contrasting set of personality judgements. For this he made use of the well-known "matched guise" technique. This technique makes use of one person imitating various accents that read fairly neutral content. Respondents are then asked to evaluate the personality of the speaker.

Williams (1974:113) refers to certain vocal contours in a person's speech which serve as an estimate of a speaker's social status. Labov (1972:44) found that accent was responsible for ranking speakers on a scale that indicated social status and that listeners perceived social information from vocal cues. Lanham (1985:242) states that social information conveyed by accent can be very complex: "Language and dialect differences are, in consequence, of considerable significance [as well] as the attitudes evoked by them."

Mzinyati (1980) set out to examine the attitude of Blacks towards their own group and towards English and Afrikaans speaking South Africans. He also used Americans as an outside reference group. The subjects, high school pupils from Soweto, divided into four groups, were asked to respond to a film with spoken commentary in various accents. The group listened to an African English accented commentary, an Afrikaans accented commentary, and an American English accented commentary. All the groups were exposed to the three accents. After the film, the respondents were required to fill in a questionnaire about whether they had understood the film

and how they evaluated it. The results of the study showed that there were no significant differences, in terms of the rating of the film and the commentator, between the four groups exposed to the different accents. However, accent did affect the evaluation of the commentary, and this seemed to be due to the fact that the African accented commentary was easier to understand.

Smit (1996:101) found, in a study undertaken in Grahamstown, that pupils were able to recognise social standing of accents although not having been exposed to them. Black pupils were asked to rate five guises in two L1 (first language) accents. Here Lanham's Conservative South African English (Cons SAE) and Extreme South African English (Ext SAE) were used. Although the respondents could not have had close contact with Cons SAE, for this is the accent attributed to city dwellers of age 55 plus, with strong links to Britain, they rated it as a high status accent. She states that in South Africa, which is characterised by ethno-linguistic division, the relevance of accent does not by definition imply a respondent's familiarity with it. "As English is considered to be so important to all South Africans, language attitude studies concerning English need to be administered to L2 (second language speakers) as well as L1 speakers" (Smit, 1996:101).

Mgoduso (1986) conducted various studies on high school pupils to determine their attitudes towards certain accents. He used an English (he doesn't describe what type of South African English), an American, an Afrikaans and a Black English (also no definite definition) accent in his study. These different accents were used to read a short commentary of two minutes to the students, whereafter they had to evaluate the personality of the speaker. Black high school pupils were given 14 descriptive words with which to rate the speaker's personality along a continuum of characteristics from positive to negative. He found a definite correlation between accent and social stereotyping. Although not the main aim of the study, it is interesting to note that accent played an important role in the comprehension and understanding of the content of the commentary. "...accent did effect the evaluation of the commentary and this seemed to be due to the fact that the African accented commentary was easier to understand..... all those who heard the African commentary understood it, whereas approximately half or less of those who heard the other commentaries understood them" (Mgoduso, 1986:29). He claims that the pupils probably understood the Black English accent better because it mirrored their own.

From the above it becomes apparent that accent plays a role in the perception of the speaker's personality, social status, understanding and comprehension of content.

2.2 *Accent Defined*

Yule (1985) defines accent as characteristics in pronunciation that identify where a speaker is from, regionally or socially. "It is to be distinguished from the term dialect which describes features of grammar and vocabulary, as well as aspect of pronunciation." (Yule, 1985:101). According to Lyons (1981:286), the most obvious difference between accent and dialect is that the former is restricted to varieties of pronunciation whereas the latter includes aspects of grammar and vocabulary.

Lyons (1981:270) takes prosodic qualities, allophonic positions and the degree of velarisation associated with nasal qualities of vowels, into consideration when identifying certain accents. He states "...two language systems are the same (regardless of the medium in which they are manifest) if and only when they are isomorphic. It is because phonological identical language systems can be realized differently in the phonic medium that it makes sense to talk of the same dialect of a language being pronounced with one accent rather than another. For accent covers all kinds of phonic variation, including that which is subphonic in the sense that it is the basis of functional contrast". (Lyons, 1981:270). He states that members of the language community often react to subphonic and phonic differences of pronunciation as indicators of the speaker's regional and social provenance. Therefore, consciously or unconsciously, the subphonic differences can be socially meaningful.

Trudgill (1986:20) sees differences of pronunciation making for differences of accent and an accent as something that all speakers possess, and that forms part of their idiolect.

According to Fromkin and Rodman (1978:259) it is possible to distinguish between a standard and non-standard accent. This happens when an accent gets a head start and builds up momentum. The more it is used, the more prominence it achieves, and it then becomes the accent that is used as quality control, or as the norm, in the media and in public.

For the purpose of this study the term accent will refer only to difference in the phonic and phonetic realm. It will not take differences of grammatical structures, vocabulary and semantic content into consideration. Accent will refer to the speech pattern of the individual concerning pronunciation and will be seen as indicative of his regional and social stratification. In the South African context accent will also be seen as indicative of ethnicity. English in South Africa will be seen as consisting of various accents, and for this purpose Lanham's (1985) description of the various South African accents will be used. No accent will be seen as superior to the other, as they all enable the speaker to function in a linguistic society. One accent will not be seen as 'better' or of greater quality. They will be seen only as different from one another.

2.3. *Accent and Dialect*

Yule (1985) describes dialect as a term that incorporates features of grammar and vocabulary, as well as aspects of pronunciation in variations of a language. Trudgill (1983) says the term dialect refers to language variety that is grammatically different from any other, as well as having vocabulary and pronunciation differences. "Grammatical difference here refers to the fact that different dialects may have for example, different forms for the past tense of certain verbs, such as *I wrote it* as opposed to *I writ it*; or different types of sentence construction, such as *I want to go* as opposed to *I want for to go*." (Trudgill, 1983:17).

Trudgill (1986) further states that we are all dialect speakers. A dialect is not a term that may be used to refer to old-fashioned or rustic forms of speech ".....differences in pronunciation alone are not sufficient to make for differences in dialect. Pronunciation differences make merely for a difference of accent" (Trudgill, 1986:18).

According to Trudgill (1994:6) English as we know it comes in many different forms. The English heard on different continents differs. Australian English is definitely not Indian English yet both are described as English. He terms these social and geographical kinds of language dialects. These languages show systematic differences. "Dialectical diversity tends to increase proportionally to the degree of communicative isolation between groups" (Fromkin & Rodman,

1978:257). Fromkin and Rodman refer specifically to the situation that existed between America, Australia, and England in the eighteenth century where the incidence of these individuals mixing with one another was low. Today the isolation is less pronounced, as the mass media and modern transport has made a difference. Fromkin and Rodman (1978) state that, even within one country, regionalism may persist and that the type of dialect spoken in one region will not necessarily spread to another. “ Within a single group of speakers who are in regular contact with one another, the changes are spread among the group and ‘relearned ‘ by their children When some communication barrier separates groups of speakers - be it a physical barrier like a mountain range, or social barriers of a political, racial, class or religious kind - linguistic changes are not easily spread and dialectical differences are reinforced” (Fromkin & Rodman, 1978:258).

How does the linguist determine whether language differences reflect two dialects or two different languages? Fromkin and Rodman (1978) suggest that when dialects become mutually unintelligible they are two different languages.

For the purpose of this study the term dialect will be distinguished from accent. Dialect will refer to aspects of grammar and vocabulary, whereas accent will refer to aspects of pronunciation only.

2.3.1 Standard and Non Standard Dialects

According to Trudgill (1994) dialects can be both regional and social. The English dialect with the greatest prestige is Standard English, which has slightly different forms in various parts of the world. Standard English can be spoken with any type of accent or pronunciation. This is the dialect in England that is used in the educational system, the political system, books, dictionaries and grammar books.

Trudgill (1994) states that Standard English will use grammatical forms such as:

I am sorry.

She hasn't done it.

He hurt himself.

Non-standard dialects, on the other hand, are dialects which use grammatical forms such as:

I am very much sorry.

She ain't done it.

He hurt hisself.

“..... forms such as these are not ‘wrong’ in any way, and should not be regarded as mistakes. They are used by millions of English speakers around the world, and are representative of grammatical systems that are different from Standard English, not linguistically inferior to it” (Trudgill, 1994:6).

However, it is the case that the non-standard dialects have less “prestige” and that standard English is usually spoken by people at the “top” (Trudgill, 1994). He also states that these people are seen as having more money, influence and education, than people lower down the scale.

In South Africa, English is one of the official languages. Lanham (1985:244) states that one and a half million Blacks in South Africa should be included in the English speaking population that has English as a second language. He also states that Blacks have a “love” and “esteem” for English. He claims that Blacks see English as a means of getting ahead and moving “up” in the world. To them, it thus has a certain utility value.

2.3.2 *Dialects Old and New*

According to Trudgill (1986:15) it may sometimes happen that the older generation speaks a different version of the language than the younger generation. This older version may be considered to be a traditional dialect. As the older generation passes away, the dialect will become extinct.

Trudgill (1986:16) also distinguishes between traditional and mainstream dialect. “ Mainstream dialects.....are spoken by the majority of the population, particularly younger speakers.” Platt et al. (1984:2) see South African Black English as a new English. Roodt (1994:58) says that the

“..... isolation of Black speakers, the fact that English is used as a medium of instruction, and the fact that Black English is characterized by certain idiosyncratic features, seem to indicate that South African Black English is a new English”.

Peirce (1989:413), on the other hand, does not view it as a new English and says “ it is clear that the proponents of People’s English do not view it as one of the “New Englishes” such as Indian English, Nigerian English, or Singaporean English. People’s English is not distinguished syntactically, semantically, or phonetically from the spectrum of English usage currently found in South Africa. Thus it does not operate within a sociolinguistic frame of reference. If it did, it might have been referred to as South African English or Azanian English. The intention, however, is not to distinguish People’s English from British English or American English, but People’s English from Apartheid English”.

One might conclude by saying that at present there is much controversy about whether Bl E (Black English) should be seen as an emerging dialect or a new English. What is certain, however, is that it differs from SE and most certainly from other forms of English used in South Africa (Lanham,1985).

2.3.4 *Dialect, Accent and Register*

According to Trudgill (1994:11), not only do we have many regional and social dialects of English, but we also have many different styles which are used in different situations and different registers which are used for different topics. He says that it is important to distinguish between these and dialectal differences. Where dialects involve differences within the English language that indicate where the individual has grown up and his individual status, different types of language usage may occur according to different social situations. He states that situational varieties of English are known as style and take place along a sliding scale of formality and informality. Style more often has to do with the type of words being used:

“ My companion is extremely fatigued.

My friend is very tired.

My mate is bloody knackered.” (Trudgill 1994:11)

These sentences all have the same meaning. “But these sentences would be used in very different social situations, and produce different social effects” (Trudgill, 1994:11). According to Trudgill varieties of this kind are known as style and all dialects contain different stylistic variants. Style is signalled by the use of certain words for certain situations, as can be seen from the examples above.

For the purpose of this study it is important to note that dialect does not refer to slang or jargon. There is no connection between a dialect and technical or social registers. Dialects will be considered to have stylistic variants that differ according to the communicative situation.

2.3.5 *Idiosyncratic Dialects and Interlanguage*

Corder (1981:14) has the following to say about the language of the L2 (second language) learner: “The spontaneous speech of the second language learner is language and has a grammar. Secondly, since a number of sentences of that language are isomorphous with some of the sentences of his target language and have the same interpretation, then some at least, of the rules needed to account for the learner’s language will be the same as those to account for the target language. Therefore, the learner’s language is a dialect in the linguistic sense: two languages which share some rules of grammar are dialects.” Corder sees the speech of the learner of a second language as a idiosyncratic dialect.

According to Selinker (1972:214), the speech pattern produced by the L2 learner and speaker is initially “... not identical to the hypothesized corresponding utterances which would have been produced by a native speaker of the TL [target language]”. Therefore, this different linguistic system, that is based on the speech pattern of the learner, must be recognised as a separate entity. Selinker calls it an interlanguage (IL). This IL is a mixed system reflecting features of both the learner’s mother tongue and the target language.

2.4. *Foreign Accent and Second Language Acquisition*

Chrest (1972) states that speech is not a mechanical process. It consists of an interweaving pattern of tonal and articulatory differences. After the individual has mastered his mother tongue, it may happen that he moves into a new linguistic field or area. In this field he will attempt to acquire a second language. "Second language learning introduces a feature of audition and production of sound symbols not discussed in relation to native language learning but essential to learning theory and speech pathology. When a previously learned habit is to be replaced certain events occur which facilitate or retard the learning of a new activity. Psychologists speak of 'inappropriate response transfer, habit interference, and negative transfer' in relation to a situation. Either useful or useless influence may be transferred from the previous habit patterns. In second language learning, the fact that some auditory and motor habits in producing sound or sound combinations are useful while other interfere with new learning and make the problem more complex" (Chrest, 1972:xx).

Fledge and Fletcher (1992:370) argue that L2 learners are usually able to separate the phonetic systems of their two languages, but "... such a conclusion would diverge from the view that 'mixing' of the L1 [first language] and L2 [second language] is inevitable because a bilingual's two language systems are both *constantly engaged*". Fledge and Fletcher further state that a mutual influence of the L1 and L2 has been observed for processing in the semantic, syntactic and phonological domain. "Moreover, a mutual influence of the L1 and L2 phonetic systems has also been observed, at least for late learners" (Fledge & Fletcher, 1992:370).

Fledge and Fletcher (1992) conducted a study to determine when a foreign accent, that is, an accent that is different from the so-called standard accent, starts presenting itself. "..... the results obtained here demonstrated that foreign accents of individuals who begin learning their L2 in childhood may speak it with an accent" (Fledge & Fletcher, 1992:371). "The earliest of the estimates of the AOL (age of learning), of onset of foreign accents, 3.1 yr, may be the most valid of the estimates obtained" (Fledge & Munro, 1996:3132). Here AOL refers to the chronological age at which an individual first begins receiving massive input from native speakers of an L2 in a naturalistic context and begins, slowly, to learn to speak and understand L2.

“Many investigators accept that a critical period exists for the learning of pronunciation, either that of a L2 ... or a dialect of the L1” (Fledge & Fletcher, 1992:371). Long (1990) suggests that a sensitive period for speech learning occurs at about the age of 6 years, and not at puberty as suggested by other investigators. Fledge and Fletcher (1992) state that if this is so, then an accent-free L2 pronunciation may be possible if L2 is learned in early childhood. In support of this, Thompson (1984) found that two Russian adults who began learning English at the age of 4 years, apparently did not have perceptible accents. A study by Tahta et al. (1981) included ten subjects who began learning English at the age of 6 years. None of these individuals was judged to speak with a foreign accent. Seliger et al. (1975) report evidence that some individuals who learn L2 in childhood may speak it with an accent. Fledge and Fletcher (1992), however, suggest that this might have happened because these individuals had not received sufficient L2 input.

Long (1990) states that L2 is spoken without an accent till the age of 6 years, which he sees as the AOL. When a second language is learnt after the age of 12, most of the L2 respondents will speak with a foreign accent.

Scovel (1988) states that a foreign accent is noticeable in the speech patterns of most individuals that acquire a L2 after the age of 12. Patkowski (1990) found that the critical period came later at the age of 15.

According to Fledge and Munro (1995:3125) the following three questions remain unanswered:

1. What is the earliest AOL at which persistent foreign accents become common?
2. What is the latest AOL at which accent free pronunciation of an L2 remains possible?
3. Does the critical period for speech learning affect all individuals?

Fledge and Fletcher (1992:386) state: “ A full understanding of why accents arise will have to take into consideration factors other than the age of L2 learning (AOL). As noted by many investigators,.... a variety of cognitive, social, and psychological factors often covary with AOL.”

As can be seen from the above, it is evident that currently much debate is occurring as to exactly when the critical period and AOL for second language acquisition is. The only certainty is that a critical period for L2 learning does exist, and that the AOL may differ from individual to individual.

2.5. *English and English Accents in South Africa*

This study concerns itself with the influence of accent on comprehension as reflected in the tertiary situation at the Nelspruit campus of the Pretoria Technikon. English is the language through which the learning process takes place, as it is used as medium of instruction. It is also the medium of instruction in most tertiary institutions in South Africa.

English has become the lingua franca of the modern world. English is the language in which more than half of the world's technical journals are printed and 80 percent of stored computer information is in English. Across the world it is spoken as a mother tongue and its usage is unparalleled in world history.

Kachru (1986:14) says "English continues to be used as an alchemy for language modernization and social change. It continues to provide unprecedented power for mobility and advancement to those native and non-native users who possess it as a linguistic tool."

English is one of the official languages of South Africa. It is important to remember that English (B1 E) is the medium of instruction in most Black schools. It also plays an important role in the tertiary situation as it is the language of instruction at numerous universities and Technikons.

According to Lanham (1985) the South African community is highly heterogeneous. Social and political factors have divided ethnic groups over nearly two centuries and have contributed to a highly divided society. "Language and dialect differences are, in consequence, of considerable significance, and attitudes evoked by them, and the social information which varieties of English convey, are extremely complex" (Lanham, 1985:242).

As pointed out, Lanham (1985) distinguishes as follows between these different varieties of English used in South Africa:

1. White mother tongue English that can be subdivided into three different accents with regional and social associations.
 - a) Extreme South African English (Ext SAE).
 - b) Respectable South African English (Resp SAE).
 - c) Conservative South African English (Cons SAE).
2. Afrikaans English (Afrik E). This is spoken by Whites who have Afrikaans as mother tongue.
3. South African Black English (Bl E). This is spoken by Blacks who have a Black language as mother tongue.
4. Coloured English (Col E), as spoken by the Coloured community who traditionally have Afrikaans as mother tongue.
5. South African Indian English (Ind E), as spoken by people of Indian descent in South Africa.

Ext SAE

This speech pattern has its origin in the speech of the first British settlers in the Cape in the early nineteenth century. This type of English reflects the speech patterns of the lower and middle-class accents of the Home Countries at the turn of the eighteenth century. This accent is associated socially with the Cape, industrialised cities, and denotes a low status.

Resp SAE

This accent originated in the English of Natal where the British settlement came, at a later stage, in the mid-nineteenth century. The social and regional origins are in Britain. This society is characterised by remaining close to Britain and place a high prestige on being “English”. Resp SAE spread to upwardly mobile groups, especially in the mining and industrial society of the Witwatersrand.

Cons SAE

This accent is close to Standard Southern British English and does not have the defining variables of SAE with any degree of prominence. Cons SAE has a correlation with the highest socio-economic status. It is spoken mostly by city dwellers of 55 plus years of age, who have strong links with Britain and pride themselves on being “British”.

Afrik E

This is the accent that becomes apparent when Whites, who have Afrikaans as mother tongue, speak English. It is clearly distinguishable and has variables drawn from Afrikaans. It is close to Cons SAE yet the two are easily and clearly identifiable. The extreme form of Afrik E may be found in the speech pattern of Afrikaner government officials speaking English.

Bl E

“Bl E is immediately recognised by all in South African society with its prominent pronunciation variables reflecting Bantu-language phonology, idioms and fixed expressions, redefined semantic content, and peculiar grammatical structures. In a century and a half of learning English as a second language, norms peculiar to Bl E have evolved and characterise an acceptable variety of English as a second language” (Lanham, 1985:244).

Col E

This community is predominantly Afrikaans speaking. However, Van Wyk (1978) found that there is a shift in loyalty from Afrikaans to English and that this may be associated with upward socio-economic mobility in larger cities.

Col E is characterized by advanced pronunciation of more extreme Afrik E and differs according to the region in which it is spoken. Col E has many borrowings from Afrikaans and has a distinctive intonation contour. South Africans come into contact with, and experience, Col E as a colloquial form in which English and Afrikaans are mixed.

Ind E

The Indian community in South Africa are all competent users of English.

The Ind E of the older generation has many of the pronunciation variables that characterise English in India. These features have become considerably less in younger generations and in particular in those who are well educated. Most Indians live in Kwa Zulu Natal and are exposed to the local variety of English.

2.6. Black English in South Africa

“Black South Africans have a ‘love ’and ‘esteem’ for English in the words of E Mphahlele, a prominent Black South African writer. Evidence of this is found in the rejection by Black South Africans of the title ‘English as second language’ when applied to their qualifications.....Many Black teachers simply say: “English is a second first language for us” (Lanham, 1985:248).

Platt et al. (1984:2) regard South African Black English as a new English because it fulfills the following criteria;

- * It has developed through the education system where it was used as a medium of instruction and also taught as a subject.
- * Bl E developed in an area where English was not spoken as a first language by most of the population.
- * It is used for numerous functions e.g. in the media, official documents, letter writing etc.
- * It has become ‘localised’ or ‘nativized’” by adopting its own language features, such as sound, intonation patterns, sentence structures, words, and expressions. It has also developed its own different rules for using language in communication.

Platt et al. (1984:6) also state that a new English can develop where English is not spoken by the community at large but remains the language of education. In this situation pupils come to school already able to speak other languages. She does not see Bl E as a pidgin language but rather as language that developed from a Creole through the education system.

Platt et al. (1984:10) does not regard American English, New Zealand English and South African English in the same sense as Indian or Kenyan English because the latter developed from existing English. English speakers came to the above areas and continued to speak English.

Buthelezi (1989:39) sees Bl E as South African Black English (SABE) and feels that the following factors contributed to its coming into being:

- * **Educational experience.** According to her, most Blacks learnt their English through non-native speakers of English. In this sense the dialectical characteristics have been influenced by the teacher and transposed directly to the pupil. “It is, therefore, not surprising that learners or speakers of SABE should exhibit fossilised structures in their idiolect. In other words, a vicious cycle is perpetuated whereby learners learn features directly from their teachers and then reproduce these innocently under the guise of Standard English” (Buthelezi, 1989:40).
- * **Cultural lifestyles and code-mixing.** Blacks possess their own cultural lifestyle that cannot always be reflected in the standard dialect. Therefore new words and expressions are coined. Code-mixing takes place to create a feeling of solidarity within the group and to affirm the socio-economic and educational status of the sociolect.
- * **Group cohesion and demarcation.** Due to the pass laws and the laws on separate education, a secular community came into being that had little or no contact with the other ethnic groups in South Africa. Buthelezi (1989:43) sees this group as “... a speech community which lives in an environment characterised by high enclosure and little meaningful contact with L1 speakers. This, in turn, promotes group cohesiveness and a negative language learning situation”.
- * **Religious affiliation.** Many Blacks still believe in ancient spirits belonging to their forefathers. This is reflected in their language and literary works.
- * **Political experience.** Political activities led to new lexical items being created, and the adaptation of existing concepts to new ideas.

Lanham (1985:244) states: “In a century and a half of learning English as a second language, norms peculiar to B1 E have evolved and characterize an acceptable variety of English as a second language.”

Platt et al. (1984:13) states that there are a number of factors in a community that will determine whether a language will prosper or not. A language, or its adapted version, can be advanced by making it the official language of a country. The attitude of the government of the day, concerning a respective language, is probably the most important factor in determining the future of a language.

2.7. *The Influence of Accent on the Listener*

2.7.1. *Introduction*

Mainstream empirical research e.g. (Day, 1980) has shown that people are from a very early age onward, in the position to correctly identify the varieties of accent in, and relevant to, their societies. Giles and Sebastian (1982:7) see language attitudes as “any effective cognitive or behavioural index of evaluative reactions towards different varieties of their speakers”. Smit (1996) states therefore it follows that these evaluative reactions are not directly observable and that they are partly subconscious: “in other words, people are not totally aware of their own language attitudes and when asked directly, would not be able to reveal them completely” (Smit, 1996:101).

Language plays a cardinal role in human interaction. “Language attitudes are formed on the basis of vocal clues, the perceived prestige of RP forms and related to beliefs and stereotypes held by one’s own social or ethnic group towards the group to which the speaker is perceived as belonging” (Nortje, 1995:4).

According to Agheyisi and Fishman (1970:141) there are three elements present in language attitudes: the cognitive, the affective and the connotative. The cognitive concerns beliefs and rational concepts, whereas the affective includes emotional evaluation and the connotative refers to norms.

In South Africa research (Fasold,1984:34) has concentrated on the social aspect of accent. Fasold says that the diglossia in South Africa refers to multilingual situations where a low and high prestige is attached to a language. An example that may be used here is Lanham's (1985:244) Cons SAE and Resp SAE that have a higher prestige value than Ext SAE.

Lippi-Green (1994:188) refers to discrimination that is related to accent. His work concentrated mostly on studies done in America. He claims that employers are inclined to "hear" an accent and label it. Employers show a greater tolerance towards certain accents than towards others. It also happens that the school, entertainment industry and media gather forces to establish a standard accent that has a 'high' prestige value.

Smit (1996:100) argues that accent recognition can influence speaker evaluations and thus needs to be seen as an integral part of future language attitude investigations.

Jacobs (1995:25) found that consonantal variation is, indeed, one factor that influences the intelligibility of the Zulu mesolect.

From this, it becomes apparent that different accents have different effects on the perception of the listener, concerning his evaluative reaction towards the speaker, as well as his understanding of the mesolect.

2.8. Social Information and Perceptions Conveyed by English Accent in South Africa

Schmied (1991:185) maintains that ".....language and identity are highly susceptible to social forces, and speakers use language and associated phenomena to signal identity, while hearers interpret these clues accordingly".

“Experimental evidence supports a claim that, in spite of differences amounting to those between subcultures, the two main divisions in White South African society perceive the same social information conveyed by varieties of English in South Africa, and probably have the same sensitivities in recognizing the linguistic variables that define them” (Lanham, 1985:245).

De Klerk and Bosch (1993:50) state that “Language attitudes include attitudes to language and to speakers of that language (and often to ethnicity too)”. They further state that language attitude studies are important, because reaction to certain languages may reveal perceptions of speakers and listeners. Tests done by them in the Eastern Cape, using the matched guise technique, showed that English was most often associated with high-status occupations, followed by Xhosa and Afrikaans (medium-status occupations). The study further revealed that Xhosa speakers were in favour of studying in English, as opposed to the English and Afrikaans speakers, who preferred to study in their mother tongue.

Schuring (1977) claims that for Blacks between the age of 15 and 54, English has greater prestige. This prestige is linked with the value of English as an international medium of higher education.

Lanham (1985) conducted a study concerning the Black South African perception of, and attitudes to, English in SA society. He used a group of 45 school teachers from the Transkei, who had to have 10 years of schooling, 2 years of further study and a reasonable exposure to White society. B1 E was correctly identified by all whereas there was a remarkably low ability to identify the other accents. Forty one percent identified an obvious variety of Afrik E as American English and 25 percent identified it as the ‘English of England’. British RP was identified by 80 percent as the English of SA. “In questions relating to the social status and occupation of each of the four speakers, Resp SAE was most highly valued, followed by British RP. In this regard B1 E was negatively evaluated (by 57%), obviously reflecting attitudinal norms of the wider society. In response to the question as to which form of English should be taught to Black children, 49 percent of those responding to this question chose British RP and 26 percent chose Resp SAE (which 48 percent had associated with Britain)” (Lanham, 1985:249).

Lanham (1985) states that ‘near British English’ represents a standard of correctness and high social status in South Africa. He also states that obviously local speech is non-standard and

strongly stigmatized.

Smit (1996) asked Black high school pupils to rate five guises in two L1 accents. She used Lanham's Cons SAE and Ext SAE. Although the respondents could not have come into contact with Cons SAE, as these speakers were 55 years plus of age and had very strong links with Britain, they rated it as a high status accent. These respondents, although not regularly exposed to both accents, were able to recognize their social standing.

Due to its socio-political history, the South African sociolinguistic situation is characterized by, on the one hand, compartmentalization along ethno-linguistic lines and, on the other hand, the wish for, and the widespread belief in, the power of English for personal and societal improvements. English is thus seen as socially important irrespective of domain of applicability.

Furthermore, L1 and L2 speakers alike employ it in most secondary domains, such as government or administration or education. In other words, even those who are not able to use English, know of its status and are also regularly confronted with it in, at least, the printed and electronic media (Smit, 1996:101).

Platt et al. (1984:28) state that English has two important connotations for new nations. English may be seen as a status symbol, and as a language of neutrality. Kachru (1986:6) states that English can be seen as a carrier of civilisation and may be considered as an alchemy for language modernisation and social change. "In India, as in other Third World countries, the English language is used to 'integrate' culturally and linguistically pluralistic societies. 'Integration' with the British or American culture is not the primary aim" (Kachru, 1986:107). He also claims "English does have one clear advantage, attitudinally, and linguistically: it has acquired a neutrality in a linguistic context where native languages, dialects and styles sometimes have acquired undesirable connotations. Whereas native codes are functionally marked in terms of caste, religion and so forth, English has no such 'markers', at least in the non native context" (1986:6).

At the other end of the spectrum, Ndebele (1987:11) does not see English in South Africa as neutral. "...I think that we cannot afford to be uncritically complacent about the role and future of English in South Africa, for there are many reasons why it cannot be considered an innocent language. The problems of society will also be the problems of the predominant language of that

society, since it is the carrier of a range of social perception, attitudes and goals. Through it, the speakers absorb entrenched attitudes. In this regard, the guilt of English then must be recognized and appreciated”.

Lanham (1985) states that English, as first or second language, has pre-eminence in South African society in its communicative power and importance, and that the social approbation far outweighs the disapprobation.

2.9 *Conclusion*

This chapter has defined accent as aspects of pronunciation that identify a speaker's regional and social heritage. For the purpose of this study, accent is restricted to aspects of pronunciation only.

It differs from the term dialect in so far as dialect refers to features of grammar and vocabulary, as well as aspects of pronunciation. Trudgill (1986) describes differences of pronunciation making for differences of accent and an accent as something that all speakers possess, and that forms part of their idiolect. As far as this study is concerned, accent will refer only to the individual's speech pattern in the phonetic realm. Trudgill states that differences in pronunciation do not make for differences in dialect and that pronunciation differences make merely for a difference of accent. When language differences become mutually unintelligible, the dialect continuum has been exhausted, and they become two different languages.

It is possible to distinguish between standard and non-standard dialects where the former is a dialect that gains prestige by being used in the media, schools and by the government for record keeping. This standard dialect then acquires “prestige” and becomes the norm against which the other dialects are measured for so called “correctness”.

Dialect should not be confused with style or register. The latter refers to different types of language usage that are dictated by situations. This takes place along a sliding scale of formality and informality. Dialects have stylistic variants that differ according to the communicative situation.

Second language acquisition may lead to a phenomenon called IL (interlanguage). This happens when a language system develops that reflects features of both the learner's mother tongue and his target tongue. It also happens that the phonetic sound in both L1 and L2 exerts a mutual influence and that a foreign accent is generally noticeable in the speech pattern of most individuals who acquire a L2 after the age of 12.

South Africa with its heterogeneous population has various English accents. Lanham has identified seven. This study is concerned with B1 E, which is the English spoken by Blacks whom have a Black language as mother tongue. It is immediately recognised by all in South African society due to its pronunciation variables.

English in South Africa carries various connotations. Blacks perceive it as the language for advancement and a vehicle for upward social mobility. It has great prestige due to the fact that it is linked to higher education.

Most Blacks learnt their English from non-native speakers of English and so exhibit fossilized structures that have inadvertently been transposed from teacher to pupil.

English in its various forms has pre-eminence in South Africa today, due to the fact that it is probably the language that is spoken by the majority of the population. It does, however, exist in various variations and formats. This study aims to determine whether two of the verbal formats are understood equally well by a section of the student population at the satellite campus of the Pretoria Technikon in Nelspruit.

The following chapter will focus on comprehension and then discuss linguistic comprehension, as it is related to learning. If the recipient does not understand what he is hearing, due to phonetic differences, he will be unable to understand what is being said, and learning cannot take place. Chapter 3 will look at the process of learning, as it is directly linked to comprehension, and the various stages that it involves.

There are numerous theories on learning and comprehension. This study will focus on only the cognitive and affective, as they have a direct bearing on comprehension. The behaviourist theory is briefly mentioned in juxta-position to the cognitive theory so as to understand the cognitive theory better.

The following chapter will also look at factors diminishing and enhancing comprehension. Prior knowledge, as a prerequisite for learning, is discussed in the context of attitudes and feelings relating to accent.

As verbal and second language ability may impact on comprehension, these are discussed, as well as the role of surface structure, intonation and discourse meaning.

Encoding Process

How Information is Processed *

Learning Outcome *

What is Learned *

Performance *

How Learning is Evaluated

(Adapted from Weinstein et al., 1986:316).

For the purpose of this study the highlighted section *, i.e. How Information is Processed, Learning Outcomes, What is Learned, and Performance, is relevant. These are the areas that may be linked to accent input and comprehension outcome.

Information processing refers to the encoding of study material and includes the internal cognitive processes relating to the manner in which the learner selects, organises and integrates new information. A prerequisite (Gagne, 1977:17-17; Travers, 1982 :24) for this theory is that the brain has to process and understand information, before it can be stored effectively and used. This, in turn, relies on and follows sensory input (Morgan et al., 1986). It then becomes particularly specific to this study because accent is heard through the auditory senses (sensory input). Accent is a verbal carrier of words that, in turn, convey meaning. This meaning is then integrated with existing information, to assist in global comprehension.

According to Keefe (1986:7) cognitive styles represent the learner's mode of perceiving, thinking, problem solving and remembering. Gunter et al. (1990:23) table 3.1, gives an excellent sample of verbs to use, to elicit responses from the cognitive domain. These will also be the verbs used in the questionnaires for the listening comprehension test, to determine the cognitive effect of the various accents because "...the aim of the listening comprehension exercise should be for the students to arrive successfully at a reasonable interpretation, and not

process every word, and not try to work out all that is involved in the literal meaning of the utterance, since that is, in principle, an impossible task” (Brown and Yule, 1983:57).

Table 3.1.

Sample of Verbs in the Cognitive Domain

Knowledge	to recall, to repeat, to recollect, to memorize, to list
Comprehension	to identify, to recognize, to select
Application	to use, to solve, to practice, to reproduce, to compare, to contrast
Analysis	to investigate, to separate, to study, to research, to describe, to distinguish
Synthesis	to combine, to formulate, to deduce, to unite, to assemble, to create
Evaluation	to appraise, to judge, to assess, to assign value to, to accept, to reject.

(Gunter et al. 1990:20)

Cognitive styles refer to the processing of information by the learner. According to Gunter et al. (1990) this processing may be selective in the sense that it is either declarative or procedural. Familiar or pre-knowledge is declarative whereas procedural knowledge may be described as the knowledge of “how to”. For the purpose of this study, the students previous exposure to various accents becomes relevant as it falls in the realm of pre-knowledge. Seen differently, declarative knowledge may be seen as that which was discovered and written by scholars, whereas procedural knowledge incorporates the processes of reasoning that takes place because the individual has been exposed to declarative knowledge.

3.6 *Affective Learning*

Affective styles are those that are concerned with aspects of personality and specifically with attention, emotion and values. This area then relates to feelings and attitudes that students develop as a result of instruction. In this study, affective styles will link up with emotions experienced when hearing an accent as well as the values attached to an accent. This in turn will determine whether students better understand an accent, that they perceive to be superior or “more learned” than an accent that mirrors their own style of speech.

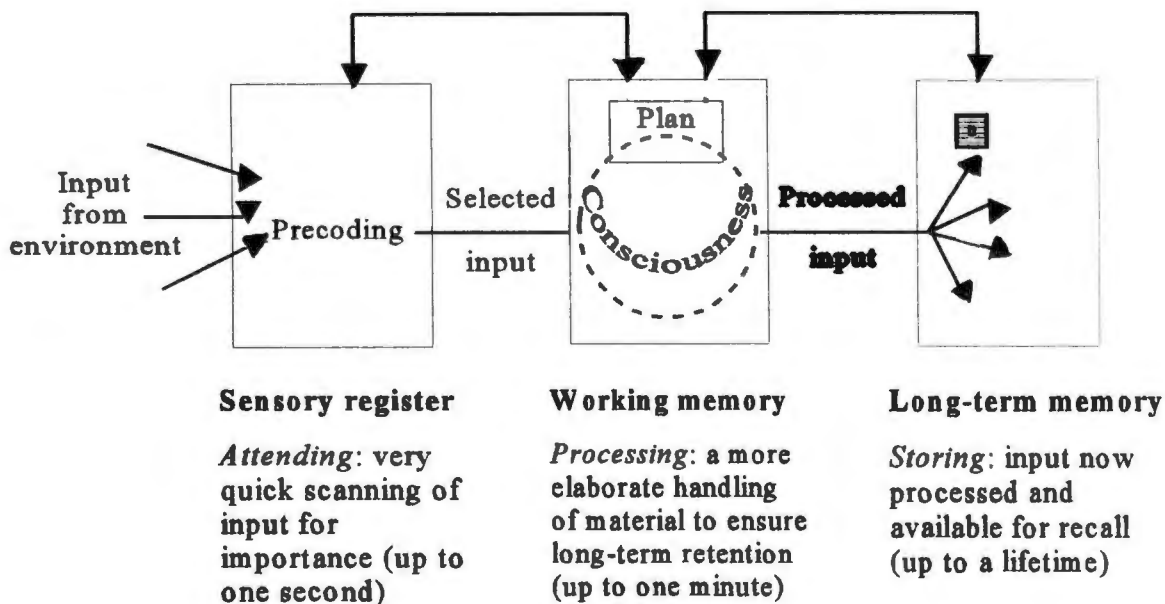
Chaudron and Richards (1986) see comprehension as a mental grasping of related facts or a psychological conceptualization. For the purpose of this study, it is valid to say that accent may be linked to comprehension in the linguistic sense, as it involves perception, the grasping of related facts, the affective domain and certain cognitive elements.

3.7. *Attending, Processing and Storing in Learning*

Biggs and Telfer (1983: 45-50) define the process of learning differently, and in three stages; namely, the stage of attending, the stage of processing and the stage of storing as illustrated in figure 3.2

Here the first system is the sensory register and relates to the learner’s attention, as he selects and pre-codes information that is important to him. It follows that if surface markers are incorrectly pre-coded this may lead to incorrect activating of prior knowledge concerning language structures, and in so doing, impact on general comprehension. This is what this study seeks to determine.

Figure 3.2

Three Memory Systems in Processing Input

(From Biggs and Telfer, 1983:47)

The second system refers to the working memory, or short term memory. The third system refers to long term memory.

For the purpose of this study, it becomes necessary to ask; to what extent do students understand RP, Cons SAE or Ext SAE? Can their sensory system interpret it correctly? As South African society has been deeply divided in the past, one may assume that rural Siswati students have had limited exposure to these accents and that they are limited or non-existent in their short and long term memory. According to van Niekerk (1996) “comprehension problems of second-language students should not be attributed to lack of vocabulary knowledge, but that an incapability to decode conversation markers [accent may cloud these conversation markers] plays a big role”. She further states that, by focusing on certain conversation markers the next sentence, or phrase, can be predicted and this means that word for word processing becomes unnecessary.

3.8 *Other Aspects of Learning Further Defined in Brief*

There are certain other factors that also exert an influence on learning. The model of Thomas and Rohwer (1988:23) will be used as a basis for discussing these other components of learning. According to Thomas and Rowher (1988) the four components of learning are: student characteristics, course characteristics, study activities and learning outcomes. A brief outline of how these entities relate to comprehension and accent will now be given.

Student characteristics

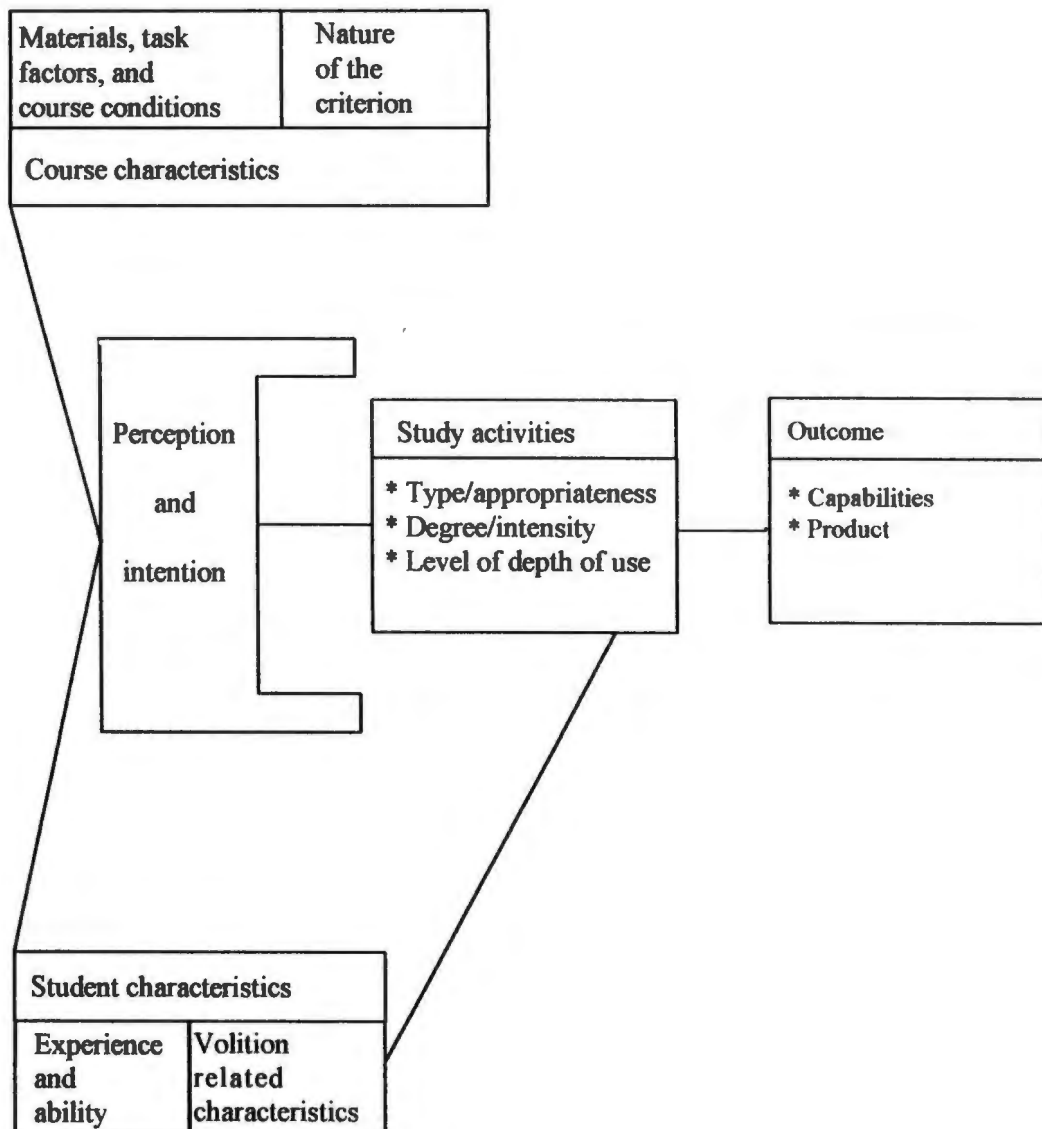
These can be divided into cognitive entry behaviour and affective entry characteristics. Cognitive entry behaviour refers to experience and ability, which mean the extent to which the student has already acquired the basic prerequisites for learning to take place. Since English is a second language that is poorly taught in Black schools, it is seen as a fossilised version of Standard English in South Africa (Roodt, 1994) and one may then assume that Black tertiary students in Mpumalanga do not possess the necessary cognitive entry behaviour characteristics.

Affective characteristics refer to the extent to which the student is, or can be, motivated in the learning process (Keefe, 1986:6 & Thomas and Rohwer, 1988:26). Gunther et al. (1990:27) state "objectives in this domain concern feelings and attitudes that students are expected to develop as a result of instruction." These objectives may be classified on a continuum, ranging from willingness to receive, to an internalization of the beliefs of the values presented. Bloom also states that much teaching is directed toward the development of beliefs, attitudes and values and that it is important to take cognisance of these beliefs. Accent recognition can influence speaker evaluations and can be seen as an integral part of affective characteristics in the learning and comprehension process. Giles and Sebastian (1982:262) describe language attitudes as "..... any affective cognitive or behavioural index of evaluative reactions towards different language varieties or their speakers." This means that people are not totally aware of their own language attitudes, which are partly subconscious. In a society like South Africa, which is so ethno-linguistically divided, accent will impact on the attitude and affective aspect related to comprehension and learning.

A central aspect of learning is the integration of new information with a pre-existing information base. (See information processing model (Figure 3.3), Thomas and Rohwer, 1988:27).

Figure 3.3

The Information Processing Model



(Thomas and Rohwer, 1988:27)

Students who have more prior knowledge should be more adept at learning. This poses the question of how much prior knowledge the students have concerning the different accents of English in South Africa? In various studies, Mgoduso (1986), Platt (1984) and Macdonald (1975), English accents were incorrectly recognised. In this study two differing South African English accents will be conveying information during a listening comprehension test. The one will be B1 E, that the students are familiar with, and the other resembles Cons SAE, to which the students have had limited exposure to.

Study Activities or Learning Strategies

Study activities and learning strategies consist of a variety of processes and behaviours, both overt and covert, that occur during the learning process (Klauer, 1988: 354, Thomas and Rohwer, 1988:23). These include 'primary' task focused activities together with 'support' or learner focused activities. According to Brown (1984:213), the functions involved in learning activities can be divided into two classes, namely cognitive activities, that serve to facilitate information processing and improves criterion performance, and self management activities that serve to maintain and enhance the attention, effort and time students devote to learning.

Course Characteristics

This refers to the numerous external factors that have an influence on studying such as reading assignments, exercises, teacher characteristics, projects etc. and is not relevant to this study as it concerns the written word.

Outcomes

Learning outcomes refer to results that can be classified into two categories. These are capabilities and informational products. Informational products differ with respect to the forms of processed information, and here we distinguish between the forms verbatim or interpreted, and constructed

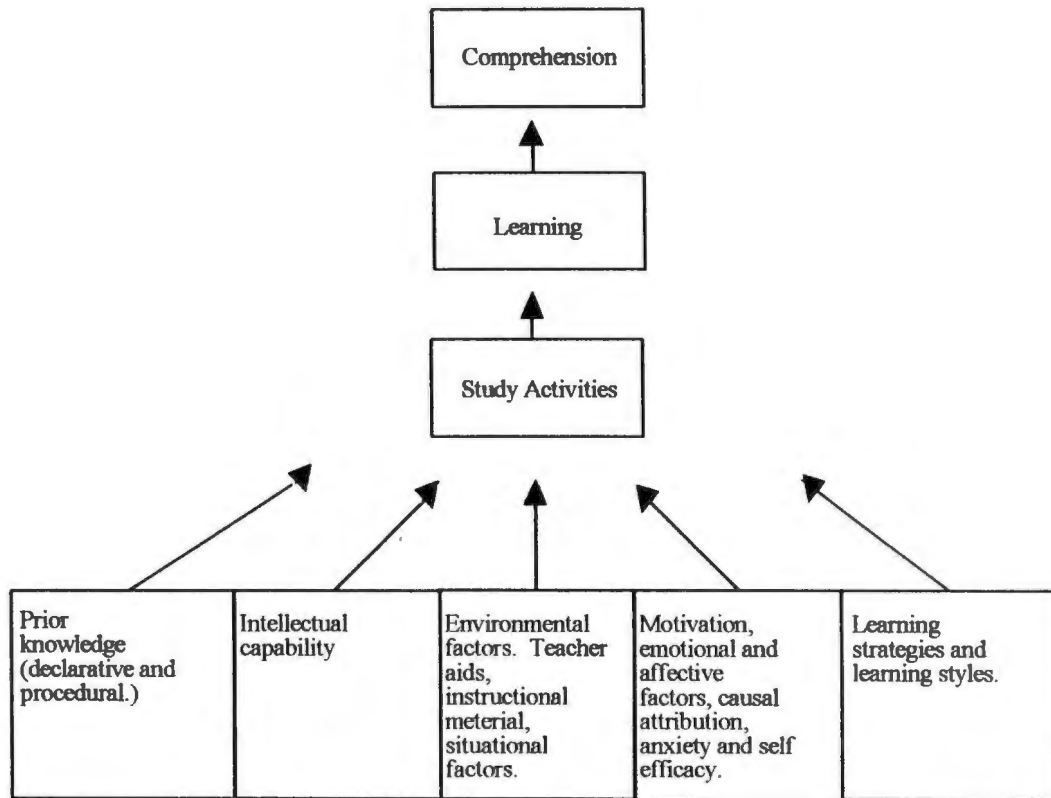
information. With verbatim information students try to distinguish between exact and inexact reproduction of learned information, and they also identify paraphrases of information they have learned. They try to give a synopsis of what they have learned. Constructed information is dealt with by supposing underlying pre-suppositions, intentions, comparisons etc. (Spiro,1980:87; Thomas and Rohwer, 1988:22).

Since learning outcomes are determined by student characteristics, information processing and instructional quality, it is important to investigate the interactive relationship of the result of the learning outcomes, and what pupils have been taught. This study investigates the inter-relationship between information processing and accent. Since intonation forms part of pronunciation, it may be linked to accent.

3.9. *Factors Influencing Comprehension*

Klauer (1988:353) has identified aspects that might influence comprehension and learning. He claims learning is dependant on study activities, which in turn are dependant on five groups of factors; namely, prior knowledge, intellectual capabilities, environmental factors, motivation, and learning strategies and styles. These groups do not co-exist separately from one another but exist in a complementary state as illustrated in figure 3.4. In this instance the first section of prior knowledge may refer to the prior knowledge that students have regarding the various accents. According to Klauer, comprehension is diminished when prior knowledge, intellectual capability, environmental factors and affective factors do not function interactively.

Figure 3.4.

Aspects that Influence Learning

(Klauer, 1988:353)

Prior Knowledge

During comprehension discourse, that which is stored includes that which is directly stated, as well as what seems to follow from that information. According to Klauer (1988:351) the operative background is not general knowledge concerning the world, but operating knowledge of a language. Specifically in our case, it will refer to the background of English as a second language. It also specifically refers to multiple meanings of a word in the natural language. This study aims to investigate whether a diminished operating knowledge of a language affects comprehension. In South Africa, Black students' prior knowledge of English relates only to Bl E. As this is the English that is taught in schools, and probably the only English that they come into contact with, due to apartheid and social segregation, Black students may be unable to distinguish linguistic surface markers and therefore may be unable to comprehend what is being said.

Intellectual Capability

Many cognitive and psychomotor abilities, such as intellectual ability, language ability and reading ability, have been identified over the years. These abilities develop slowly but once developed, enable the individual to deal effectively with his world. According to Sternberg (1985:1-4) language abilities may influence the comprehension of the learner.

Environmental Factors

According to Scott- Jones (1984:267 -268) numerous environmental factors that have been used in explanations of relationships between family background and school achievement can be divided into status variables, and process variables. Status variables are those that are used to label a child as the doctor's child, the minister's, child etc. South Africa's past has definitely given certain status to certain languages with Afrikaans being seen as the language of the oppressor and English as the medium of instruction. Status variables, as described by Scott-Jones, can therefore successfully be transferred to languages in South Africa. Smit (1996) proved that respondents were able to attribute certain values to certain accents.

Roodt (1994) states that the isolation of Blacks from mainstream English, the very heavy communicative demands made on them to speak English and the fact that the teachers use the same Interlanguage (IL) as the pupils, seem to have contributed to the fossilization of B1 E. "Although Blacks in general have a very positive attitude towards the learning of English, they do not realise that the IL they speak is far removed from the TL [target language] norm" (Roodt, 1994:42).

Process variables are more specific. These variables actually include what people do when they think, feel and value. Accent may play an important role here as it is directly linked to thinking and forming opinions of the speaker. Scott-Jones (1984:268) also states that learning aids and instructional materials can have a positive influence on the comprehension of the learner. In this study accent may be seen as a learning aid since it may aid or hinder comprehension.

Motivational Factors

Another factor influencing comprehension encompasses those aspects of personality that have to do with emotions, attention and anxiety. In the chapter on accent it was shown how certain accents carry definite emotional value and attributes.

3.10. Verbal and Second Language Ability

There is a psychological dimension of ability associated with the comprehension of language. Verbal ability is characterised by being able to express oneself in words, either orally or graphically, and it involves comprehension (Sternberg, 1985:54). Language comprehension involves many subprocesses. These range from automatic involuntary acts of lexical identification to planned strategies individuals use to extract meaning from lengthy texts.

According to Sternberg (1985:55), these processes combine to form verbal intelligence. Verbal intelligence is seen here as the power to extract meaning from written and spoken words. Vocabulary size is a good indicator of verbal ability. General verbal intelligence is also correlated with the ease with which words are used. Skilled listeners recognize common words automatically as compared to unskilled and second language listeners, because their vocabulary may be better.

Second language ability refers to the ability of the individual to learn a second language in a relatively formal situation such as in school or in a tuition program. Individuals worldwide have no difficulty in learning their mother tongue, and understand whatever is in their mother tongue, because they have acquired it since birth. Up to the critical period (defined as different ages by scholars, but in general, up to puberty) children have no difficulty learning a second language if it is used in their immediate environment. In the case of Black children in South Africa, their second or third language, namely English, is not learnt in their immediate environment. It is only heard at school. The problem is further compounded by the fact that the English they hear is not the standard form. This cycle is perpetuated in which B1 E is carried from generation to generation. According to Sternberg (1985:53-88) and Kagan and Lang (1978:411:418), some individuals are fortunate enough to acquire a second language quite easily but most children seem to have great difficulty and take a long time to acquire mother tongue proficiency. This happens even though the individuals are highly motivated and give serious effort to learning.

3.11. *Linguistic Factors and Comprehension*

Linguistic factors are concerned with written and spoken language. Kagan and Lang (1978:411) found that some psychologists have suggested, that because the English language contains letters or combinations of letters that can stand for different sounds, e.g. church and crunch, the pupils who learn English encounter problems that are not encountered by pupils learning another language, such as Siswati, for example. Learning English, and mastering the English language, is a challenge. Pronounced words differ greatly from their spelling and English words are not always associated with their sounds (Consider *phlegm* and others). This may create problems for Black matriculants for whom English is a second, third or fourth language. The realization that the English language permits only some combination of letters, sound combinations and prohibits many others, has stimulated much research on word identification (Edu, 1973:203). Those who speak the language are prepared to identify a word like “thorough” but not “trohug” because the former is composed of letter sound sequences that form part of the English morpho-phonological structure. In addition, the first word can be pronounced easily. It is important to remember that no two people are likely to give the same pronunciation. Black students may have the same problems in hearing the correct word. In Mgoduso’s study (1986: 12) he found that “.... accent did affect the commentary and this was due to the fact that the African accented commentary was easier to understand”.

3.12. *The Role of Surface Structure, Intonation and Discourse Meaning in Comprehension*

Much and varied research has been done on this topic. Brown and Yule (1983) conducted research to determine the influence of intonation on the broader meaning of discourse. Syntax was not used in their study. Other researchers have supplemented traditional syntax with non-related syntactic principles (Cooper and Cooper, 1980). Selkirk (1984) has advocated an autonomous level of intonational structure for spoken language, that is separate and distinct from syntactic structure. It seems as if the involvement of two uncoupled levels of structure complicate the route from speech to interpretation and complicate the process of speech recognition.

“The consequent simplification of the path from speech to higher level modules including syntax, semantics, and discourse pragmatics, seems likely to facilitate a number of applications in spoken language understanding” (Steedman, 1993:228). This makes it easier for high level modules to filter ambiguities that unavoidably arise from low level word recognition. From Steedman’s studies it becomes apparent that intonation contours, when not recognised, can influence comprehension.

In spoken English, intonation helps to determine which of the many bracketings permitted by the combinatorial syntax of English is intended. The various interpretations of these bracketings may lead to differences in comprehension.

3.13 Conclusion

In this chapter the importance of linguistic input on comprehension has been discussed. Comprehension cannot take place unless the recipient understands what is being said. Listening comprehension in the recipient’s first language is partly effortless, due to experience and due to the fact that surface elements and phonological cues are recognised easily. The second or third language student does not have this advantage and will find it more difficult to retain items of information that will help him to arrive at an overall grasping of the learning context. These students have to be instructed in the decoding of contextual markers and surface elements.

Chaudron and Richards (1986) state that good receptive skills are linked to academic performance. Academic performance is, in part, dependant on comprehension and information processing.

Because comprehension is intimately linked to learning this chapter gives a brief overview of the learning process. Klauers (1988), Gunter et al. (1990), Morgan et al. (1986), Biggs and Telfer (1983) and Weinstein and Mayer’s (1986) models have been used as the basis for argument. Cognitive and affective learning components, in relation to accent, are discussed in detail.

The cognitive theory of learning states that information is processed after it “....is received from the senses” (Morgan et al., 1986). During a listening comprehension the auditory sense is actively involved. It may be deduced that accent, as it is aurally perceived, contributes to this involvement of the learner/listener on the cognitive level.

Affective theories of learning involve aspects of attention, emotion and values. This is related to accent, as accent evokes certain emotive responses from the listener (Smit, 1996; Mgoduso, 1986). Feelings evoked when hearing an accent can therefore be linked to the learning and comprehension process. This is especially true given that language attitudes are partly subconscious. In a multi-cultural society like South Africa this becomes even more relevant.

Comprehension also depends on the activating of prior knowledge. Klauer (1988) sees this element as co-existing with four other factors, namely, intellectual capability, environmental factors, motivation and learning. These groups exist in a complementary state. Klauer (1988) sees prior knowledge as an operating knowledge of a language. Blacks in South Africa have, generally speaking, not been exposed to the other English accents and do not have prior knowledge of them. It is interesting to note that, although they have not been exposed to them, they are able to associate status with them (Smit, 1996).

In contrast to this, behaviouristic theories give little attention to internal processing and see the learner as a passive participant who simply digests information and relies on memorization. Cognitive theories on the other hand, actively involve the recipient in the process of learning and what happens during the learning process. Cognitive theories also focus heavily on perception (Keefe, 1986:7). As accent is linked to perception, it follows that accent might be linked to certain cognitive levels. A prerequisite for the latter theory is that the brain has to process information before it can be effectively stored and used. (Gagne, 1977:16-17; Travers, 1982:24).

This chapter mentions factors such as intellectual capability, and verbal ability contributing to effective comprehension. Sternberg (1985) states that language abilities may influence the comprehension of the learner.

In this chapter environmental factors that may have impacted on comprehension and learning were discussed. Status variables relating to the status that certain languages have had during the past were mentioned. English has been seen primarily by Blacks as the language of advancement and Afrikaans as the language of the oppressor. Language status in this regard may be linked to the affective aspects of comprehension and learning.

The sub-processes of language identification have been discussed. These range from involuntary lexical identification to verbal intelligence. Verbal intelligence is correlated to comprehension, as it refers to vocabulary size and the ease with which words are used. Skilled listeners recognise common words automatically, as compared to unskilled and second language listeners, because their vocabulary may be better.

Surface structure and intonation play a role in comprehension because it becomes apparent that when intonation contours are not recognised, this results in a low level of word recognition.

In the next chapter data collection methods, population and sample as well as the aim and hypothesis of this study will be discussed.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD OF RESEARCH

4.1. Introduction

The methodology used in this study is discussed under the following five main headings:

- * the aim of the study
- * the subjects
- * instrumentation/materials used in this study
- * variables
- * how the data was collected and administered, and
- * the design and statistical analysis techniques used in this study.

4.2. The Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to determine, in the South African tertiary context, the influence of accent on an overall listening comprehension test (OC), the influence of accent on specific comprehension (SC), as described by Gunther et al. (1990:20), and the influence of accent on analysis (AC), also as described by Gunter et al. SC and AC are indicated in Item 3A in the addendum. This study tried to determine whether students had greater difficulty in understanding work presented to them in an accent that did not mirror their own and that they had not regularly been exposed to.

4.3. *Subjects*

The accessible population comprised 155 students who took Communication 1 and English A as a subject for the National Diploma in Public Management at the satellite campus of the Pretoria Technikon in Nelspruit. This population included full- and part-time students who were all registered for the subject. The subjects were numbered using random numbers whereafter they were randomly divided, using the tables in Steyn et al. (1994), into two groups comprising 77 and 78 respectively. In Group 1 (G1) only 59 students arrived to participate in the test and in Group 2, (G2) 63 students arrived to participate in the test. The students who did not arrive to participate in the test were part-time evening students who were unable to come during the day as they worked in steady employment. The tests were scheduled before a semester test to ensure maximum participation of day students.

The students were fairly homogeneous in that they came from similar backgrounds. In the population, 60% of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 22. (Item 4 Addendum, table 4.1.) Furthermore, 77.8% had had their schooling through the DET system and 61.7% came from a rural area. It is interesting to note that 82.5% had received their schooling through medium of English. However, these students represented a wide range of abilities (i.e. their level of English proficiency and ability in English differed).

4.4. *Instrumentation/Materials Used in This Study*

The instrumentation used in this project consisted of one comprehension passage, recorded on tape in both BI E and an accent resembling Cons SAE, and a listening comprehension answer sheet, that tested various cognitive levels. Questions pertaining to the students' historical profile were included in the first section of the listening comprehension answer sheet to compile brief demographic statistics.

Comprehension Passage

The passage was taken from *The Professional Management Review*, dated February 1995 (Item 2, Addendum) and dealt with market research in rural areas. This extract was chosen because it was felt that students would be able to identify with the background portrayed in the piece. Both population samples heard exactly the same passage being read on tape.

Accent

As the influence of accent on comprehension was to be tested each group was exposed to the same passage being read but in a different accent. Two lecturers, one exhibiting a Bl E accent and the other exhibiting an accent closely resembling Cons SAE, were recorded reading the same passage. Thus both groups listened to a recording of the same passage but in a different accent. A brief description of the two accents will now be given.

The Bl E accent was exhibited by one of our Black lecturers who is currently a Sectional Head in our Engineering Department. His mother tongue is Siswati. His parents were illiterate and he grew up in the Barberton region on the mines. He received his schooling through the previous DET system in Kanyamazane. According to him it was one of the best Black schools at that time. Neither his parents, nor his teachers at secondary and primary school spoke English. He stated that he did not hear English at school and that lessons were conducted in Siswati. From his rural upbringing he went to work at the Post Office after finishing matric. There he spoke mainly Afrikaans. While at the Post Office he continued his studies and did a diploma in Telecommunications. He then moved on to Panasonic and was employed in the region of Sun City. This is where he became fluent in English. Siswati is his mother tongue. He says he is comfortable in Zulu, as well, and considers Afrikaans and English his third and fourth languages. His English shows definite traces of Bl E as described by Lanham (1985:244).

The second accent is close to Cons SAE as described by Lanham (1985:244), although not exactly like it in every respect. This accent belongs to a lady, also a lecturer, who grew up in the

former Rhodesia. Her father was a direct descendant of the 1820 British settlers in the Eastern Cape. She did her schooling in Rhodesia. Her parents were very English and prided themselves on being so. She grew up with “God save the Queen” and Beatrix Potter. After matriculating she went to England to further her studies. She returned to Rhodesia, married and settled down. Before Independence she and her husband emigrated to Perth, Australia and remained there for 9 years. Since 1992 she has made South Africa her home. She speaks a beautiful cultured English that could be described as being close to Cons SAE although not exactly like it in every respect.

Listening Comprehension Answer Sheet

As comprehension was to be tested it was decided to use Bloom's (1990:20) sample of verbs to formulate the comprehension questions (see fig.3.1). The cognitive domains tested were comprehension and analysis. (See Item 1 in the Addendum).

The two groups were issued with a question sheet on which they had to indicate by multiple choice the correct answer while listening to the pre-recorded comprehension passage being played. The question sheet contained 15 questions relating to historical profile and 10 questions relating to the content of the passage they were listening to. The 10 questions, relating to the listening comprehension, were formulated to elicit only one correct answer. The listening comprehension test questions had lexical markers indicating when the correct answer was to follow. The lexical markers were indicated in cursory.

The listening comprehension test consisted of one main comprehension test (OC) and two sub-tests testing SC and AC.

4.5. Variables

The dependant variable is overall comprehension (OC) and the independent variable accent.

4.6. *Data Collection Procedure*

The two randomly divided groups were each exposed to a tape recording of the same passage on market research in urban areas. Each group listened to the same passage being read only in the accent that was randomly designated to them. Each group only heard one accent. To determine which group listened to which accent, the accents were written on a piece of paper and drawn from a hat. The first group listened to Bl E and the second to the accent resembling Cons SAE.

The accents reading the passage were taped prior to the listening session. They were taped by a professional company using a spirit Mixer Sound Craft 10 channel mixer, an SM Shure microphone, and a Double Deck Technics RS-232 Tape Machine. The duration of the Bl E tape was 7:30 minutes and the duration of the accent resembling Cons SAE 7:15 minutes. The difference may be attributed to the varying reading tempo of both lecturers. The recordings were re-taped three times to try and get the two time spans as close as possible. It was decided to let the students listen to a tape recording and not to let the lecturer stand in front of the class so as to eliminate subjective opinions of the speakers and accents. Students were also not told that the other group would be listening to a different accent, only that the content of the listening comprehension was the same.

The tape recordings were played to the students on a Technics Stereo Double Deck TR232 with a Toa Mx 601 Mix Amplifier and 12" speakers with Pizo Tweeter. The reason for this was to limit interference and for the students to be able to hear well. The airconditioning in the room was switched off and distractions kept to a minimum.

The tape recording of each particular accent was played twice to the relevant group. G1 listened to the Bl E accent twice and G2 listened to the accent resembling Cons SAE twice. The tape recordings were repeated without a pause in between. The rationale for playing the recording twice was the fact that the students had to answer 10 multiple choice questions that involved a lot of listening and reading that had to be done in approximately 7 minutes.

The questionnaire (Item 3 Addendum) that the students had to answer was given to both groups to study for 15 minutes before the tape was played. This was done to enable them to complete the historical profile and to familiarize them with the structure of the listening comprehension. Students were told to listen carefully for the lexical markers, as these were the cues for the correct answers. The questions were done in sequence so that the students did not have to scramble back and forth for answers while listening to the listening comprehension. This would enable them to focus their attention on what was being heard.

4.7. *Design and Statistical Analysis Used in This Study*

The demographic data were analysed by means of a SAS statistical programme package (SAS Institute Inc. SAS Users Guide: Basics, Version 5 Edition. 1985). The t-tests were done by using the Statistics version of the same programme.

Due to the fact that the two groups were randomly divided, a t-test was used to compare the mean scores of the OC, SC and AC of the two groups in order to determine whether the means differed statistically significantly from each other.

A difference in means can be regarded as statistically significant if the results are significant at the specified level alpha. An alpha value of 0,05 (the cut of point for the p-value) was established. Therefore if $p < 0,05$ then the nil-hypothesis is rejected. If $p > 0,05$ then the nil hypothesis cannot be rejected. Here the nil-hypothesis is: $H_0: m_1 = m_2$, while the alternative hypothesis is $H_a: m_1 \neq m_2$, where m_1 and m_2 are the real means of the two groups. If the nil-hypothesis cannot be rejected it will mean that there is not a difference in the performance of the two groups.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1. Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the presentation and discussion of the analysed data. The aim of this chapter is to attempt to answer the question posed in chapter 1 of whether accent has an influence on comprehension.

The second section of the chapter will focus on future research.

5.2. Determining The Influence of Accent on Comprehension

Table 5.2 represents the descriptive statistics for both groups concerning their performance in the listening comprehension test (OC).

Table 5.2.

Results of The Listening Comprehension Overall (OC)

	Number of Participants	Mean	P-Value
G1	58	61.72	0.53545
G2	62	59.83	

After the t-test was done regarding the two group's performance in the listening comprehension the p-values were 0.5345. As this value reflects $p < 0.05$ and is thus statistically non-significant, one could conclude by saying that accent did not have any influence on comprehension (OC) in this experiment.

In order to further investigate the results obtained in table 5.2 it was decided to do a t-test to compares the groups in performance regarding analytical ability (AC) and specific comprehension (SC). The way in which the questions were formulated, indicated which cognitive domain was being tested. Table 5.3 and 5.4 give the results of this further verification.

Table 5.3.

Analysis (AC)

t-test for Analysis (AC)

	Number of Participants	Mean	P-Value
G1	58	55.86	0.7967
G2	62	54.83	

Table 5.4.

Specific Comprehension (SC)

t-test for Specific Comprehension (SC)

	Number of Participants	Mean	P-Value
G1	58	67.58	0.4805
G2	62	64.83	

In both the t-tests done for analysis (AC) and specific comprehension (SC) $p < 0,05$, which is statistically non-significant. It means that the nil hypothesis cannot be rejected. The two accents used in this test thus had no influence on the analytical and comprehensive performance of the students in both G1 and G2.

5.3. *Conclusion Regarding Statistical Analysis*

One might conclude by saying that the statistically non-significant results of these tests have proved that, in this experiment, accent did not influence comprehension. The students' performance in the listening comprehension did not improve when exposed to an accent that mirrored their own. Neither did their performance decrease when they were exposed to an accent not like theirs. Bl E and Cons SAE made no difference to the way in which the students understood and performed in the listening comprehension. Accent, for the purpose of this test, thus had no influence on comprehension.

The fact that accent did not have an influence on comprehension may be attributed to the following factors:

In South Africa it is difficult to point to a fixed kind of spoken English that is called standard and a good deal of variety is tolerated as standard. The tertiary students have access to the media and are thus exposed to the different accents in South Africa. Bl E is not so far removed from the other forms as to be mutually unintelligible. Bl E and the other forms share the same writing system and this in turn contributes to mutual intelligibility.

The learner's language, in this instance Bl E, has a large number of sentences and constructions that are isomorphous with those in the other forms of English heard in South Africa. Therefore the rules that account for the written language are the same for all the accent variations. This makes it easier for the Siswati students to understand the other accents as well. Bl E may also be considered an interlanguage as there is a language set in existence that shows systematic features to the other forms.

The term “entirely fossilized competencies” as used by Selinker (1972:2) applies in this sense as the second or third language learner, in this case the Black learner, has mastered enough of the target language to communicate well in a non-standard form. When this scenario arises they often feel that they have the necessary communicative skills and the motivation to improve and aspire to a higher standard form that does not exist. This seems to be the case with this study as most of the students felt that they spoke English reasonably in some instances, very well. (Table 4.1 Addendum).

It seems to be a reasonable claim to state that learners who have successfully communicated for many years with a reduced form of the target language would have tremendous difficulty in improving their grammatical accuracy and accent. Accent can also not be improved after AOL, the onset of which differs considerably.

It is then reassuring to note that in the new multi-cultural South African society, where students may be increasingly tutored by a lecturer who is not from their own cultural background, and speaks in a different accent, that this does not impact negatively on comprehension and the learning process.

5.4 Further Research

The tests done in this study were done under controlled circumstances. The passage was played twice, students had lexical markers to indicate when an answer would follow and it was set up in a formal situation.

Seen in the light of the studies undertaken by De Klerk and Bosch (1993) and Van Niekerk (1996), it would be interesting to note what the results of a listening comprehension would be if it were done under less controlled circumstances or even circumstances resembling a natural lecturing situation. Maybe this could be the basis of research for future linguistics.

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SUMMARY

The aim of this study was to determine in the South African tertiary context, and more specifically at the Nelspruit Campus of Pretoria Technikon, whether accent had an influence on comprehension and whether it could be correlated to comprehension in any way.

The idea for this study arose from the fact that the Siswati students at the Nelspruit campus of Technikon Pretoria, often ask lecturers to speak slower and to re-explain work. The students mostly speak B1 E, as described by Lanham, and the English that lecturers speak falls into the other categories. This posed the question as to whether the English accent exhibited, by the mostly White lecturers, had something to do with the students' slow grasping of content, as their accents did not mirror those of the Siswati students.

This study took a two pronged approach. One focused on what constituted and contributed to accent and the other focused on elements of comprehension. As comprehension is interwoven with learning it was necessary to describe learning in brief. It became apparent that learning had certain elements that could be linked to accent such as certain cognitive and affective levels. Prior knowledge could also be linked to accent.

Two groups of students, randomly selected, were tested and rated on a listening comprehension test that was read to them in two different accents. Each group listened to only one accent but was tested on the same material. The accents used were B1 E and an accent resembling Cons SAE. A questionnaire determining the student's historical background also had to be completed by them for a demographic profile. A t-test was used to determine the results.

This study showed that for the Black tertiary students at the Nelspruit Campus of the Pretoria Technikon, accent had no influence on comprehension.

This study then has relevance in the new South African context today as education is experiencing a multi-culturalism as not yet seen before. According to the results obtained with this study it is reassuring to note that accent does not impact negatively on comprehension.

OPSOMMING

Die doel van die studie was om te bepaal, of aksent, in die Suid Afrikaanse tersiêre konteks, enige invloed op begrip uitoefen en of dit met begrip gekorreleer kon word. Die omvang van die studie is beperk tot die Nelspruit kampus van die Pretoria Technikon.

Op kampus is opgemerk dat studente wie se moedertaal nie Engels is nie, dikwels dosente vra om stadiger te praat of om werk weer te verduidelik. Dit het die vraag laat ontstaan of die Engelse aksent, wat deur die dosente gebruik word, en nie dieselfde is as die van die Siswati studente nie, dalk 'n invloed kon uitoefen op die studente se begrip en verstaan van werk.

Met die studie is besluit om te fokus op twee aspekte nl. begrip en aksent. By aksent is daar breedvoerig gekyk na wat aksent is, wat bydra daartoe, hoe dit verskil van dialek, Engelse aksente in Suid Afrika, en die affektiewe konnotasies daarvan. Omdat begrip deel uitmaak van die leerproses is daar besluit om dit kortliks te omskryf. Hieruit het dit duidelik geword dat sekere elemente van die leerproses soos die kognitiewe- en affektiewe vlakke asook die ontsluiting van voorkennis gekoppel kon word aan aksent.

Studente is ewekansig ingedeel in twee groepe en blootgestel aan 'n luister begripstoets. Elke groep het slegs na een aksent geluister maar dieselfde teks en vrae gehad om te beantwoord. Die aksente waarna hulle geluister het was B1 E en 'n aksent wat byna klink soos Cons SAE soos omskryf deur Lanham. Die studente moes ook 'n vraelys rakende hulle historiese profiel invul. Daar is van 'n t-toets gebruik gemaak om die resultaat te bepaal.

Die uitslae van die studente rakende die luister begripstoets het nie verkil nie.

Die studie het gevolglik relevansie in die nuwe Suid Afrika waar opvoeding en onderrig tans 'n multi-kulturalisme ervaar soos nog nie tevore nie. Gesien in hierdie konteks is dit gerusstellend om te sien dat aksent nie negatief impakteer op begrip nie.

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*ITEM 1***Sample of Verbs in the Cognitive Domain.**

Knowledge	to recall, to repeat, to recollect, to memorize, to list
Comprehension	to identify, to recognize, to select
Application	to use, to solve, to practice, to reproduce, to compare, to contrast
Analysis	to investigate, to separate, to study, to research, to describe, to distinguish
Synthesis	to combine, to formulate, to deduce, to unite, to assemble, to create
Evaluation	to appraise, to judge, to assess, to assign value to, to accept, to reject

(Gunter et al. 1990:20)

Marketing Research Cultural protocol in market research

■ Aaron Tengani: Account Director,
Markinor

Successful urban and rural marketing research can depend on empathising with cultural etiquette such as 'Never on Friday' or 'Dress - Sunday best'.

South Africa's vast geographical area, variety of cultures and languages, myriad of consumer demands and huge economic disparities present enormous challenges to marketers.

In particular, many marketers don't realise the difficulties in establishing a brand's image or finding new markets in this kaleidoscopic, often turbulent, country.

Marketing research in black urban and rural areas - whether for commercial or social responsibility reasons - are totally different disciplines, requiring particular skills. Both however necessitate an understanding of different cultures.

The major challenge of rural research is bridging the gap between a First World business tool and Third World ideals and values. Issues such as accessibility and sampling methods are secondary. The point of departure for any rural research is obtaining interviews. Usually this means acquiring the local leader or chief's permission to conduct a survey, and finding a central meeting point such as a community hall - or even under a large tree.

Suspicion and scepticism

The next phase - overcoming people's suspicions - is usually more difficult. Researchers have often been mistaken for police spies, or vice squads on liquor raids! Taste tests on edible products are another source of deep scepticism.

Once interviewees have been recruited, researchers usually spend a few days with them and it's interesting to track how the community's feeling towards the research alters over the period.

Offering interviewees a financial in-

centive for taking the time to attend can have a tremendous effect on the following days of research. Day two, in contrast to day one, may see a flood of respondents who don't match the sample specifications and have to be turned away - such as males for a washing powder survey. The local chief usually turns up as well!

An incentive scheme has other effects on rural people. It is not uncommon for a church meeting to be called on the spot to give praise. Some people are less confident, believing that money from strangers is 'magic' and will disappear if not spent immediately.

Total understanding - to the point of empathy - of the needs of different communities is essential. Some cultures dress up for the occasion and so must the interviewer. Others don't and a well-dressed interviewer might be regarded as superior, leading to untrue 'pleasing' answers being given during discussions.

The advent of new regions in South Africa shouldn't have an immediate effect on the projects conducted in rural areas, since researchers are already close to the different cultures which exist even within provincial boundaries.

For example, recruiting interviewees in a Xhosa area takes much longer than in other areas. Respondents want to know all about the study, the interviewer and his/her background before they commit themselves to a project. The Zulu areas have a shorter recruiting phase as people are more trusting.

Dicing with death

Urban area research might not be marked by the same traditions, suspicions and superstitions as rural areas, but it certainly holds its own cocktail of problems.

While the major obstacle in rural research is ignorance, urban marketing research is characterised by danger to the researchers. Researchers and interviewers in Dobsonville during the taxi war for



DO YOU HAVE A FAX MACHINE?

example were attacked, beaten and threatened at gunpoint. One particularly close shave saw a researcher at the Denver hostel mistaken for Winnie Mandela. If the Induna hadn't known her, anything might have happened.

The seemingly insurmountable problems of that particular research project, aimed at establishing living conditions in hostels, were overcome by the Markinor team's strong network of contacts in the area. Recruits were identified, approached at work and taken to safer, neutral venues for free and fair interviewing.

Although urban blacks are more used to research, they also have their particularities. For example, it's inadvisable to conduct interviews with males on Fridays as it is pay-day and they're not interested. Mondays are better.

The most promising aspect of marketing research in rural and urban Africa has been the chance to educate, as well as to learn.

Although we enter the field with the primary aim of establishing what consumers think and want, we leave having explained the benefits of research. People understand that input into research projects leads to better products and services being available to them. And this is good whether your home is in the mountains of Natal or a city in the PWV.

PMR

Masked Media Muggers

From a fashion page in Style... "white peach skin shirt R259,01 and crochet handbag R91,20". All other prices are rounded off. Wow! Is this a new pricing trend? Gosh! Will a 1c profit put the outlet (Habits) in the big league? Gasp! Is the owner maybe just 20c away from bankruptcy? Or is this ridiculous pricing just considered 'cool'?

It's all so tedious.

PMR

ITEM 3A Questionnaire identifying Verbs in the Cognitive Domain

QUESTIONNAIRE.

INSTRUCTIONS.

1. *You will listen to a set piece being read on a tape recording. During the course of this reading you must please answer the following questions. You will be given 15 minutes to read and study the questions before the tape recording is played.*
2. *The questions are in the form of multiple choice questions, please tick the correct answer as you go along.*
3. *Words that can help you find the answer, as you listen to the tape recording, have been highlighted in all the questions. Listen carefully for them as they are the cues to the answers.*
4. *Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.*
5. *Remember to answer the questions according to the tape-recording.*

Confidentiality will be assured.

Thank you for your time.

Bloom's (1990:20) sample of verbs that indicate the processes of the cognitive domain were used to formulate the questions and elicit a corresponding answer. At the end of each question the applicable sector of the cognitive domain tested will be indicated.

CULTURAL PROTOCOL IN MARKET RESEARCH

Questions

1. Identify one aspect that presents *enormous challenges* to marketers.
 - a. The variety of products available on the market
 - b. The variety of cultures present in South Africa *
 - c. Cultural protocol amongst city dwellers.
(Comprehension – identify)

2. Select a major *challenge of rural research*.
 - a. Bridging the gap between first world and third world *
 - b. Etiquette in urban areas
 - c. Hiring the community hall
(Comprehension -- select)

3. What causes *scepticism* among the local population when doing market research.
 - a. Accessibility
 - b. Taste tests *
 - c. Sitting under trees
(Comprehension -- identify)

4. The *advent of new regions* in SA will have the following effect.
 - a. It will take more time as the regions have to be identified and mapped out.
 - b. The Xhosas will ask many questions and the Zulus will become trusting.
 - c. The researchers are already close to the different cultures so it shouldn't take more time. *
(Analysis -- deduction)

5. Select what has a *tremendous effect* on the number of people turning up for a research project.
 - a. Marketers being seen as spies
 - b. Taste tests on edible products
 - c. Financial incentives and rewards. *
(Comprehension – select)

6. Which is the most appropriate word to best describe the conditions under which marketers operated in *Dobsonville*.
 - a. Dangerous *
 - b. Winnie Mandela
 - c. Denver hostel.
(Comprehension – select and identify from tape).

7. The Markinor research team did a survey concerning living conditions in hostels. The *seemingly insurmountable problems* in doing the survey were overcome by
- a. ignoring the taxi war in Dobsonville
 - b. dressing informally or formally to suit the occasion
 - c. by taking the recruits to a safer areas. *
- (Comprehension -- recognition of situation).
8. Which days are *advisable* for doing research?
- a. Fridays
 - b. Mondays *
 - c. Thursdays
- (Comprehension -- selection)
9. The *most promising aspect* of market research is to
- a. Sell and introduce new washing powders.
 - b. To educate and learn. *
 - c. To select and train recruits.
- (Comprehension -- to recognize)
10. An advantage of market research and *research projects* is that people learn about
- a. better products and services that are available. *
 - b. insurmountable problems in rural areas.
 - c. promising aspects in urban surroundings.
- (Analysis --to distinguish)

ITEM 3B Questionnaire that Students Used

QUESTIONNAIRE.

INSTRUCTIONS.

1. *You will listen to a set piece being read on a tape recording. During the course of this reading you must please answer the following questions. You will be given 15 minutes to read and study the questions before the tape recording is played.*
2. *The questions are in the form of multiple choice questions, please tick the correct answer as you go along.*
3. *Words that can help you find the answer, as you listen to the tape recording, have been highlighted in all the questions. Listen carefully for them as they are the cues to the answers.*
4. *Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.*
5. *Remember to answer the questions according to the tape-recording.*

Confidentiality will be assured.

Thank you for your time.

1. Are you.....

MALE	1
FEMALE	2

2. In which age group do you fall?

18 – 22	1
23 – 27	2
28 – 32	3
33+	4

3. Through which educational system did you receive your schooling?

DET	1
MODEL C SCHOOL	2
PRIVATE SCHOOL	3
CHURCH SCHOOL	4

4. To which population group do you belong?

ZULU	1
SISWATI	2
SOTHO	3
SHANGAAN	4
INDIAN	5
COLOURED	6
OTHER	7

5. In which area have you spent most of your life?

RURAL	1
FARMING	2
URBAN	3
TOWNSHIP	4
OTHER	5

6. What was your medium of instruction at school? This refers to the language that was most often used by the teacher in the classroom.

ZULU	1
SISWATI	2
SOTHO	3
SHANGAAN	4
ENGLISH	5
AFRIKAANS	6
OTHER	7

7. How well could you understand the English that your teacher spoke?

EXCELLENT	1
GOOD	2
AVERAGE	3
POOR	4

8. How often were you exposed to English outside the classroom?

OFTEN	1
SELDOM	2
NEVER	3

9. What language would you prefer as medium of instruction?

ZULU	1
SISWATI	2
SOTHO	3
SHANGAAN	4
ENGLISH	5
AFRIKAANS	6
OTHER	7

10. How do you speak English?

POORLY	1
REASONABLY WELL	2
VERY WELL	3

11. Are you able to distinguish between various English accents?

YES	1
NO	2

12. Do you have difficulty in understanding other English accents?

YES	1
NO	2
SOMETIMES	3

13. How often do you hear English outside the classroom?

OFTEN	1
SELDOM	2
NEVER	3

14. Is the classroom at Technikon Pretoria the only place where you hear English?

YES	1
NO	2

15. Outside the classroom where do you hear the most English?

MEDIA, RADIO, TV	1
FRIENDS	2
CHURCH	3
SHOPPING	4
OFFICIAL MATTERS	5
HOME	6
OTHER	7

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS DEAL WITH THE LISTENING COMPEHENSION

16. Identify one aspect that presents *enormous challenges* to marketers.

The variety of products available on the market	1
The variety of cultures present in South Africa	2
Cultural protocol amongst city dwellers	3

17. Select a major *challenge of rural research*

Bridging the gap between first and third world	1
Etiquette in urban areas	2
Hiring the community hall	3

18. What causes *scepticism* among the local population doing market research?

Accessibility	1
Taste tests	2
Sitting under trees	3

19. The advent of new regions in South Africa will have the following effect.

It will take more time as the regions have to be mapped out and identified	1
The Xhosas will ask many questions and the Zulus will become trusting	2
The researchers are already close to the different cultures so it shouldn't take more time	3

20. Select what has a *tremendous effect* on the number of people turning up for a research project.

Marketers being seen as spies	1
Taste test on edible products	2
Financial incentives and rewards	3

21. Which is the most appropriate word to best describe the conditions under which marketers operated in *Dobsonville*?

Dangerous	1
Winnie Mandela	2
Denver hostel	3

22. The Markinor research team did a survey concerning living conditions in hostels. The *seemingly insurmountable problems* in doing the survey were overcome by

ignoring the taxi war in Dobsonville	1
dressing formally or informally to suit the occasion	2
taking the recruits to a safer area	3

23. Which days are *advisable* for doing research?

Fridays	1
Mondays	2
Thursdays	3

24. The *most promising aspect* of market research is to

Sell and introduce new washing powders	1
To educate and learn	2
To select and train recruits	3

25. An advantage of market and *research projects* is that people learn about

better products and services that are available	1
insurmountable problems in rural areas	2
promising aspects in urban surroundings	3

ITEM 4

Table 4.1 Demographics of Population Group
(Both groups combined)

Age Group	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
18 - 22 years	72	60.0	72	60.0
23 - 27 years	43	35.8	115	95.8
28 - 32 years	5	4.2	120	100.0

School Attended	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
Det	91	77.8	91	77.8
Model C	12	10.3	103	88.0
Private	11	9.4	114	97.4
Church	3	2.6	117	100.0

Frequency Missing = 3

Area spent most of my life in	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
Rural	74	61.7	74	61.7
Farming	1	0.8	75	62.5
Urban	15	12.5	90	75.0
Township	30	25.0	120	100.0

Language that teacher spoke	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
Zulu	3	2.5	3	2.5
Siswati	8	6.7	11	9.2
Sotho	7	5.8	18	15.0
Shangaan	2	1.7	20	16.7
English	99	82.5	119	99.2
Other	1	0.8	120	100.0