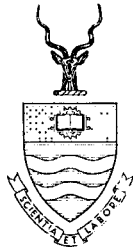


Hofmeyr Foundation Lectures

I

THEORIES ABOUT THE
ORIGIN OF AFRIKAANS

Professor J. J. Smith



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NOTE

When Professor J. J. Smith delivered this lecture, only parts of it had been written out in full, and at the time of his death he had not been able to complete the manuscript. It has been prepared for publication by members of his family, and a member of the audience. They cannot claim always to present the very words spoken in Johannesburg, but, working from his notes and recollections of the lecture, they have tried to reproduce it as exactly as possible.

THEORIES ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF AFRIKAANS

We all know that there is a great diversity of language in the world. Here in South Africa we are every day reminded of this fact when we hear around us not only English and Afrikaans, but also several varieties of Bantu. We continually hear people jabbering away in tongues which are often to us mere volumes of sound.

But it is not only the different languages belonging to different peoples that strike us; even one and the same language becomes a regular Proteus as soon as we try to view it at all closely. The English of Britain is certainly very like the English of America; but whoever believes that the two are identical must indeed be very unobservant. Again, each social group speaks its own language, which differs from that of another social group, though both groups believe themselves to be speaking the same language. Particularly noticeable are the differences in the speech of different generations and different times. The old Teutonic settlers of Britain, the Anglo-Saxons, called their language *Englisc* or English, exactly as modern Englishmen call their language English. But an Englishman of to-day finds that the language of his Anglo-Saxon ancestors, as represented in documents written before the year 1100, is at first sight unintelligible to him and requires as much study as, say, Afrikaans or Danish. Let me give you only one example. We all know the beautiful words of the First Psalm, in which the godly man is compared to a tree standing beside streams of water. The Authorised Version of 1611 reads as follows:

He shalbe like a tree planted by the riuers of water, that bringeth foorth his fruit in his season, his leafe also shall not wither, and whatsoeuer he doeth, shall prosper

The old English Psalter of the first half of the 11th century reads:

Him byd swā þām treowe þe byd āplantod nēah waeters rynum, þæt sylð his wæstmas tō rihtre tīde; and his lēaf ne fealwiad; call him cymd tō gōde þæt þæt hē ded.

Chaucer's language of some 300 years later is totally different; but it is still so far away from modern English that, especially when spoken as Chaucer spoke it, it is practically unintelligible to a modern Englishman. Let me give you the first twelve lines of the famous Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, pronounced more or less as it was in Chaucer's time:

Whan that Aprille with his choures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holte and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,
And smale foweles maken melodie,
That slepen al the nyght with open eye
(So priketh hem nature in here corages)
Thanne longen folk to gon on pilgrimages.

Even Shakespeare's language was appreciably different from modern speech, though the conservative spelling of English and the modernisation of Shakespeare's text hide most of these differences. In fact the vowel system of the language has been completely altered since his time — though the spelling reflects nothing of this great revolutionary change in pronunciation.

In the related Netherlandish-Afrikaans we find changes closely resembling those in English; and the differences in the language of different periods are equally marked. Let us look at the same text of the First Psalm in the old Netherlandish Bible of 1637:

Hy sal zyn als een Boom, geplant aen Waterbeecken, die sijne V'rucht geeft in sijnen Tijd, ende welckes Bladt niet af en valh: ende al wat hy doet, sal wel gelucken.

In the Afrikaans Bible of 1933 we clearly recognise the same language — but how different in form!

Hy sal wees soos 'n boom wat geplant is by waterstrome, wat sy vrugte gee op sy tyd en waarvan die blare nie verdroog nie; en alles wat hy doen, voer hy voorspoedig uit.

The transformation of Netherlandish-Dutch to South African Dutch — or Afrikaans as it is now usually called in English also — is rightly regarded as one of the most remarkable events in the history of the language originally spoken only in the ‘low countries near the sea’, which to-day comprise not only the Kingdom of the Netherlands but also Flemish-speaking Belgium. Why 17th century Netherlandish should have changed into Afrikaans in such a comparatively short period of time has engaged the attention and gripped the imagination of several erudite philologists, as well as of many ordinary people. Learned hypotheses and lay guesses have indeed been numerous. Most people formerly believed that the great difference between modern English and Anglo-Saxon was due to the conquest of England by the Normans, that modern English was really the result of a mixing of Norman-French and English, and that many of the old Anglo-Saxon flexions were dropped because so many French people had to speak English and were naturally more concerned with the words than with their endings. (Foreigners picking up a language orally always regard the vocabulary as more important than the grammar). People believing such a false theory about English naturally jumped to the conclusion that the dropping of so many Afrikaans flexions must also have been due to a clash with another language, a large body of foreigners having been forced by circumstances to speak Netherlandish. And of course there were comparatively large bodies of such foreigners — French Huguenots, German settlers, Hottentots and slaves. English could not be held responsible in any way, since it was soon realised that, according to all the available evidence of travellers and written documents, Afrikaans had assumed its modern form before the arrival of the English in 1795. The French theory was advocated by some Netherlanders and South Africans, but it was almost immediately rejected by other investigators. The French Huguenots, who arrived in South Africa during the years 1688-90, formed only one-eighth of the white population. The total number of French Huguenots was 176. Netherlandish was then the language of seven-eighths of the population and enjoyed all the prestige of an official language. The result was that the French language disappeared almost without leaving a trace — except for surnames and farm names. Formerly, some people believed that *ons* instead of *wy* in the nomina-

tive of the first person plural pronoun was due to the Huguenots, since French also used *nous* both for the nominative and the accusative. But the accusative *ous* is commonly used also in the nominative in the Dutch province of Zeeland, from where a proportionately large number of early settlers in South Africa, particularly women, came before the year 1691. We may also note a similar use of *us* for *we* in several English dialects, where there can be no question of French influence. And standard English *you*, which is really the accusative of the old nominative *ye* is evidence that the substitution of the accusative for the nominative in pronouns is not very unusual. Some people also believed that the double negative was due to French influence. But in Afrikaans the double negative is by no means used in the same way as in French. Many kinds of Afrikaans sentences have only one negative — e.g., *Lik loop nie, Jy skrywe nie*. Compare French: *Je ne marche pas, Tu n'écris pas*. Then again the position of the negatives is totally different in the two languages: *Ek het die boek nie gesien nie*; French: *Je n'ai pas vu le livre*. But apart from these facts the double negative is extremely common in Netherlandish dialects in cases like *geen . . . nie, nooit . . . nie, niemand . . . nie, nérens . . . nie*. *Nie . . . nie* is indeed not so common; but examples have been cited from the dialects of Utrecht and of the Jordaan, formerly a farming neighbourhood near Amsterdam.

Even in the vocabulary there are very few traces of French. People used to think that the following words were due to Huguenot influence: *andoelie*, a kind of haggis; *kaskenade*, gasconade, adventurous or boastful deed; *koewertuur*, dish cover; *oblietjie*, kind of confectionery; *portfesiedeur*, porte brisée, door between the reception room and the living rooms of a house; *punteneurig*, jealous of one's honour, finicky. But all these words are found in the very same forms in the Dutch dialects. In this connection we should bear in mind that Holland had been strongly influenced by French culture and the French language ever since the 12th century, and that literally thousands of French words had been incorporated in the Netherlandish language long before the Dutch Colonists settled in South Africa. These words were brought to South Africa by the Dutch colonists and not by the French Huguenots. Such words are, e.g., *affaire*, affair; *affodil*, daffodil; *akkoord*, agreement; *aspersie*, asparagus; *balie*, tub;

different, different; *ferweel* or *fluweel*, velvet; *kapabel*, capable; *korrekt*, correct; *subtiel*, subtle; frail. As far as we know to-day it is probable that Afrikaans got one or two names of pears and peaches from the Huguenots, e.g. *bermotsersanpeer*, *sermynppeer*, *pawee-perske*; but even these are highly doubtful and may very well have come *via* the Netherlands. The only real language contribution of the Huguenots is the considerable number of surnames like *De Villiers*, *Du Plessis*, *Du Toit*, *Fouché*, *Hugo*, *Le Roux*, *Malan*, *Malherbe*, *Marais*, *Retief* and the French farm-names in the Western Province — especially in French Hoek and Drakenstein — like *Champagne*, *Dauphiné*, *La Motte*, *Lor-marins*, *Languedoc*, *Montpellier*.

The influence of the German settlers must have been very limited. They were practically all men, who married Netherlandish or South African wives. They came into the community at a very much later date, most of them only during the 18th century; very few came before 1691 — the first year in which the number of children born in the Colony exceeded the number of immigrants. As early as the year 1691 the nucleus of the future Afrikaans population was in the country; and after this date immigrants might of course still exercise influence on that nucleus, but they could hardly supersede it.

The dialect of these Germans was generally Low German (Niederdeutsch or Plattdeutsch), since they came from just across the boundary of the Netherlands; and their dialect was so like Netherlands, that there could hardly have been any question of two languages. Besides, they were all of the same Reformed faith. Probably they helped in selecting the vocabulary from competing dialects, and it is really remarkable that so many Afrikaans word forms show dialectal Netherlandish forms which are identical with those of Low German. The *er* instead of standard Netherlandish *aar* in words like *perd*, *kers*, *pers*, is a case in point. *Eke* instead of *ike* for the nominative pronoun of the first person singular is also very common in the country around Hanover. German words have been borrowed into Netherlandish since the 15th century; and one has accordingly to be careful not to ascribe to the colonists in South Africa what were really old borrowings. Words which look very German are the following: *blits*, lightning; *jaarbonderd*, century; *omsons*, in vain; *peits*, kind of whip; *sens*, scythe; *stewel*, boot; *uitwiks*, give a thrashing; *verfoes*, spoil; *ner-*

skaf, be active, fuss; but all these words are found in the older Netherlandish writings or in Netherlandish dialects. The only likely German words and expressions borrowed directly from the Germans in South Africa are the following: *dan en wan*, now and then; *laer*, lager; and *by my siks*, on my word. And there are of course numbers of German surnames like *Hauptfleisch*, *Krige*, *Neethling*, *Strauss*.

Of Hottentot influence there is very little evidence to be found in the Afrikaans vocabulary. *Arrie*, *eina*, *gang*, *soe*, *sies* are exclamations. *Abba*, carry pick-a-back, and *karos* are terms of typically Hottentot culture. There are some Hottentot names of plants and animals like *boegoe*, buchu; *dagga*, *ghaap*, kind of bulbous plant; *karee*, *koedoe*, *kwagga*, *oorbietjie*, oribi; but it will be difficult to find more than twelve or fifteen words that are at all generally known; and all such words have as a rule been borrowed into English as well — thus showing their usefulness. There are quite a few place names of Hottentot origin, e.g., *Aughrabies*, *Garies*, *Ghoup*, *Goudini*, *Gourits*, *Kakamas*, *Kareedouw*, *Karoo*, *Keimoes*, *Ookiep*, *Prieska*, *Tradouw Pass*, *Goodhouse*.

With the Bushmen the Europeans very seldom came into friendly contact, and there was no chance of learning anything from the Bushmen language.

The Bantus, again, came upon the scene only towards the end of the 18th century; and then Afrikaans had already assumed its modern form. There are quite a number of Bantu words in Afrikaans, like *impi*, *indoena*, *koekapan*, *mamba*, *gramadoelas*, *tsetse*, *impala*, *maroela*, *mopani*, *lobola*, *okapi*, *pitso*, *tollie*; but with one or two exceptions these are all found in English as well, and are generally words for trees and plants or for specifically Bantu cultural ideas.

The theory which still seems to be believed by some experts, especially in the Netherlands, is that Afrikaans is the result of a clash with the corrupted or broken Portuguese which was spoken by the slaves, and also used as the language of trade and commerce in the East. It was this broken Portuguese (often referred to as Malay-Portuguese, though as a matter of fact it included Ceylon-Portuguese, Indian-Portuguese, Angola-Portuguese and other varieties besides the Malay one) which the first colonists frequently heard spoken and often also spoke themselves to their slaves.

The originator of this so-called Malay-Portuguese theory was Professor D. C. Hesselning, of Leiden University, who in the year 1897 published an article in *De Gids*. Later, in 1899, he published the work *Het Afrikaans* (second edition 1923). He expounded his theory in a highly scientific manner, with ample citation of relevant passages from old travel books and other documents. The work was undoubtedly of great importance in drawing the attention of scholars to the distant and insignificant speech of Dutch South Africa.

In spite of all the learning and acute reasoning displayed in the various books and articles of Professor Hesselning and his followers, I have never been convinced of the correctness of this theory. Undoubtedly my knowledge of the history of the English language and of the closely parallel development of English prevented me from accepting any such rash simplification of the language position. Language is eminently a social phenomenon, and no linguistic change can be explained without a thorough understanding of the social conditions existing at the time.

I myself believe in the so-called 'spontaneous' or internal development theory, i.e., the theory which considers present-day Afrikaans as a modification or evolution due to internal causes in the language itself, and not to any sudden clash with any outside idiom.

The term 'spontaneous development' or 'internal development' requires some elucidation. It does not by any means imply that all influence by other languages is rigorously excluded; it merely considers such influence as secondary and of practically no effect on the general structure of the language. No one can, e.g., deny the fact that there are some 100, possibly even 200 words of Malay, Portuguese or broken Portuguese origin in Afrikaans, or that there are thousands of words of French origin in English; but that need not lead us to the conclusion that the language of the slaves is responsible for the loss of flexions in Afrikaans, or the language of the French-speaking Normans for the corresponding loss of flexions in English. There are literally hundreds, possibly thousands of English words and idioms used in Afrikaans today; but on the grammatical structure of Afrikaans English has had very little influence. In spite of 150 years of close association; in spite of the higher status of English during so many years in administration, in schools and in culture; and in

spite of the fact that the majority of Afrikaners have been bilingual for a long time, English has certainly not yet succeeded in making Afrikaans lose the inflexion of the attributive adjective, reject the prefix *ge* in its past participle, alter the formation of its plurals, or simplify its complicated word-order. If English could not produce these changes in 150 years, is it at all likely that the language of slaves and Hottentots could produce similar changes in a much shorter period of time? If parallels mean anything, we feel instinctively that there must be something wrong in the reasoning of the advocates of the Malay-Portuguese theory.

The internal development theory differs *in toto* from all theories requiring some sort of sudden clash with another form of speech, some *deus ex machina*, to produce a new form of speech without flexions. Such a clash, these theorists maintain, might have been brought about when the Netherlandish colonists found themselves suddenly confronted with the necessity of having to learn a new idiom in order to communicate with their slaves.

The best examples of languages originating from such clashes are to be found in the so-called 'Creole' tongues, which are really European languages used in a much simplified form by Asiatic, African and American natives — persons who are forced by circumstances to learn the languages of their masters or employers. Thus we find Negro-English in America and West Africa, Pidgin-English on the coasts of China and Japan, Beach-la-Mar-English in the Western Pacific, Creole-French in Mauritius, Negro-Dutch in the three West Indian islands of St Thomas, St John and St Croix, and the now practically extinct Malay-Portuguese and other corrupt varieties of Portuguese used in the East. In our own country we have good examples of Creole languages in the adapted Afrikaans and English used by Bantu speakers. These examples are all extreme ones, i.e., entirely creolised languages. The advocates of the Malay-Portuguese theory, however, maintain that Afrikaans is only partly creolised, and that it is a kind of Dutch that stopped halfway on the way to creolisation. But the principle is the same, and in several places Professor Hesselning also refers to the clash of the Netherlandish of the colonists with another language. Spontaneous or internal development means that the language grew as it were out of its own internal resources, as a result

of its own internal tendencies, in a longer or shorter time according to whether the conservative influences were stronger or weaker. A seed which grows to a tree is to me an example of spontaneous development, though this does not exclude the influence of all sorts of circumstances, like rain, sunshine, water, soil, manuring, pruning, etc., which may promote or hinder its growth; but if the little tree is sawn off and another foreign slip is grafted on to it, then there is no longer any spontaneous development.

In the first instance I wish to point out that when people speak of the process of creolising in connection with Afrikaans, something totally different is intended from what we mean when we use the term in connection with the usual Creole languages. A Creole idiom like Pidgin-English is a European language creolised in the speech of a native of Africa, Asia or America; but in the case of Afrikaans nobody can seriously maintain that it is a language that originated among slaves or Hottentots, and that the white colonists then exchanged their own speech for this idiom. All history flatly contradicts such a view, and even such a convinced supporter of the Malay-Portuguese theory as the late Dr P. J. du Toit (*Afrikaansche Studies*, p. 32) has to admit that not a single case is known where a colonist was not able to understand and speak his own language; and he adds that the colonists always used their own language to one another and in their own family circles, no matter how far their language came to deviate from the Netherlandish of the mother country under the influence of Malay-Portuguese.

By creolisation in the case of Afrikaans we accordingly have to understand only the change of Netherlandish by Netherlandish speakers who are being strongly influenced by the Creole language, Malay-Portuguese. This difference between Netherlandish spoken by Netherlanders under Creole influence and really creolised languages like Pidgin-English or Creole-French is most important, although it is not often realised by Malay-Portuguese theorists, thus causing considerable loose thinking and confusion of ideas. A really Creole language adopts practically its whole vocabulary from the European original, while it employs the very simplest grammatical means; whereas a language that is being influenced by another idiom, because of the fact that the speakers became bilingual, in the first instance

borrowed words, and in a much lesser degree, also sounds, flexions and turns of speech, but retains its own native element in a commanding position. When one language is influenced by another the cultural levels of the two sets of speakers also become of paramount importance, for it is a well-known fact that people learning to speak a second language will be much more eager to borrow words and phrases from that second language if it belongs to speakers who possess a higher culture. It is especially in such circumstances that the famous dictum of the philologist Windisch applies:

Not the acquired foreign language but the native tongue of a people becomes a mixed language under the influence of the foreign language.

(Nicht die erlernte fremde Sprache, sondern die eigene Sprache eines Volkes wird unter dem Einfluss der fremden Sprache zur Mischsprache).

I consider the Malay-Portuguese theory untenable because:

1. It does not take sufficient account of the tremendous difference in the social status of masters and slaves.
2. It forgets the fact that Afrikaans was originally a peasant dialect.
3. It exaggerates and misinterprets the rapidity of the change from Netherlandish to Afrikaans.
4. It fixes too early a date for the change of Netherlandish to Afrikaans and so exaggerates the rapidity of the change.
5. It adduces the French of Canada as a contrast, but does not realise the great difference in the social conditions of early Canada and early South Africa.

Let us briefly look at each of these objections:

1. *The Difference in Social Status.* The defenders of the Malay-Portuguese theory take great pains to prove to us that the conditions in the early days of the settlement were very different from those obtaining today in South Africa. They adduce all possible cases of intercourse between female slaves and white men, and forget that these irregularities were always the exception; and they invariably forget to distinguish between the continually changing, sea-faring population of Cape Town and the more settled farming population. The information we glean from the official writings in the Cape Archives and the old travellers' books by no means justifies the conclusion that any large body of colonists ever considered the slaves as their equals

or mixed at all freely with them. The first free burghers had all to be married; and marriages with slaves were the exception. In Colenbrander's work, *De Afkomst der Boeren*, I find before the year 1750 only two cases mentioned of marriages between Europeans and slaves; there may have been a few more, but numerous such cases certainly were not. It may, of course, be said that such intercourse with female slaves might have been illicit. But in that case, if we could prove intercourse on any appreciable scale, we should not forget the role of the Dutch women. It was their children that came to form the white Dutch population; and not the offspring of illicit intercourse with female slaves. Such offspring almost invariably fell to the lower strata of Cape Society — the strata in which Afrikaans most certainly did not originate.

We should also bear in mind that the vast majority of the slaves were males. In 1679, e.g., there were 133 male slaves and 38 female slaves; in 1687 there were 230 male slaves and 44 female slaves. In 1691 the figures were respectively 285 and 57. The free burgher Adam Tas, of Stellenbosch, had 14 male slaves, 1 female slave and 3 slave girls. In 1717 five-sixths of the slaves were males. If the testimony of such 18th century travellers and authors as Kolbe, Beekman, Mentzel, Sparrman and Le Vaillant is to be trusted, most cases of illicit intercourse between whites and female slaves occurred in Cape Town, where it was the soldiers and sailors who were the guilty males. Even in the 17th century we find Commissary van Rheeде making special mention of the soldiers and sailors as giving clothes belonging to the Company to female slaves.

Already in the year 1685 the majority of the free burghers lived in Stellenbosch. At that date there were, according to the Instructions of Commissary van Rheeде, 33 families living in the Table Valley, but 99 at Stellenbosch.

Socially there was a big gulf between master and slave. As early as 1682 we find the authorities legislating against the indiscriminate liberating of slaves without making proper provision for their future support, since experience had even then taught that they easily squandered their possessions and became a burden on the community. In 1685 white children and slave children were no longer allowed to visit the same school; and we read repeatedly in the old documents

of the objectionable manner in which the male and female slaves lived in the Government slave lodge at Cape Town. In 1691 there were some 50 free Asiatics and Negroes in the Colony, together with their wives and 60 or 70 children. They enjoyed the same political rights as the whites. 'In social life, however,' says the historian Theal, 'they formed an inferior class, for between them and the Europeans in thought and conduct there was a great gulf which political equality could not bridge'.

Again, the Malay-Portuguese theorists make a great deal of the fact that in 1658 there were 166 whites and 194 slaves in the settlement - - and we are made to believe that this superiority of the slaves in numbers lasted throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. But what are the facts? In 1679 there were 289 whites and 191 slaves; and the whites continued to be in the majority up to the year 1754. Sir Charles Lucas, writing in Vol. IV of the *Historical Geography of the British Colonies*, published by the Oxford University Press, says:

It was for years an open question whether slavery would take root at the Cape . . . It was not until the eighteenth century was well advanced that the Cape became a distinctively slave-owning colony, and as late as the year 1754, when a new slave code was passed, the number of slaves hardly exceeded that of the free colonists.

Towards the end of the Dutch East India Company's rule, in 1791, there were only 16,000 slaves against 14,000 or 15,000 whites. We know from the old documents that the white colonists talked the Portuguese *lingua franca* with their slaves, especially when these were fresh arrivals; but they used it as a mere makeshift, fully conscious that it was the language of slaves and subordinates — exactly as so many whites are to-day using a Bantu language or even Kitchen Kaffir with their servants. Such use does not imply the corruption of one's own European language; in fact many Transvalers and Free Staters claim that it actually keeps their Afrikaans or English uncorrupted, since this is only spoken by Europeans and not creolised by Africans. In any case it is an interesting fact to note that a Netherlandish scholar, Dr Prick van Wely, uses the very same argument, when he states in his work *Neerlands Taal in 't Verre Oosten* that this very same Malay-Portuguese, which is supposed to have worked such tremendous changes in South Africa, actually prevented the cor-

ruption of Netherlandish in the East, because the use of that *lingua franca* by both Europeans and natives, when communicating with each other, never gave the natives the chance of creolising the European language. Well, we cannot have it both ways. Either Hesseling is right, or Van Wely is right. And I believe Van Wely is right.

2. *Afrikaans a Peasant Dialect.* Afrikaans undoubtedly originated in the districts of Stellenbosch, Paarl and Malmesbury. The German soldier and clerk Otto Frederick Mentzel, who was at the Cape from 1733 to 1741, tells us in his famous *Description of the Cape* that the farmers in the country districts were as far from speaking a pure Dutch dialect as the German farmers from speaking a pure German dialect. Evidently then the farmers spoke a distinct dialect in Mentzel's time; but whether it was still a Dutch dialect or already Afrikaans, we do not know. We know from various sources that the language of Cape Town was much more conservative, no doubt because the town dwellers were still regularly in touch with Netherlanders from Europe. Even as late as 1850 the Netherlandish of Cape Town was nearer the language of the original mother country. We also know that even in Adam Tas's time there was not much social intercourse between Cape Town and the country districts; and some seventy years later the French traveller François Le Vaillant informs us that the colonists who lived within five or six miles of Cape Town had no intercourse with the farmers living further away — in fact, that they hated each other. And Lady Anne Barnard, who was at the Cape during the first British occupation, writes of 'the Boers or real Dutch settlers — the people of Cape Town being scarcely to be named as such'; and she says that those Boers were of a better character than the inhabitants of Cape Town.

In any case, there cannot be the slightest doubt that the Afrikaans population of South Africa and consequently the Afrikaans language originated in the country districts. This fact is completely forgotten by Malay-Portuguese theorists, who eagerly adduce what happened in the polyglot harbour and slave-lodge of Cape Town even as late as in the traveller Sparrman's time (1772-6).

3. *The Speedy Transformation of Netherlandish into Afrikaans.* This is as a rule grossly exaggerated; and people talk and write as if the

change of English from Anglo-Saxon took, if not all the centuries from the 11th to the 20th, then at least some 300 or 400 years between 1100 and 1500. But let us hear what Professor Henry Bradley, one of the very greatest authorities on the history of English, says on this point. He writes in the first volume of the *Cambridge History of English Literature* (1907):

Owing partly to the fact that the twelfth century was an age of exceptionally rapid linguistic change, and partly to other causes hereafter to be explained, it is quite true that, while the literary remains of the first half of the [twelfth] century exhibit a form of the language not strikingly different from that of preceding centuries, those of the latter half present such an amount of novelty in spelling and grammatical features as to make the most superficial observation sufficient to show that a new period has begun.

A language can indeed alter a great deal in two or three generations. Everything depends on the presence or absence of conserving influences. The great English philologist, Henry Sweet, is of opinion that changes in language are greatly promoted by changes in the speakers' habits of living, by remoteness from cognate languages or dialects, and especially by the absence of conserving influences like schools, churches, learned and aristocratic circles, and literature. Contact with foreign languages also promotes change, but mostly only indirectly, because it generally means the limiting or removing of conservative influences and the weakening of the example of the traditional tongue or of cognate tongues.

In other words, the cause of all changes in language should in the first instance be sought in the changed conditions of life of the speakers. A conservative people like the Bedouins of Arabia, invariably keep their language unchanged; and the Eskimos of Greenland can still understand the Eskimos of Labrador, in spite of at least 1,000 years of separation.

The Netherlandish colonists of South Africa came to a totally different sort of country, where the kind of farming practised was unknown in the Netherlands. At an early date the agricultural and pastoral populations moved into the interior and got isolated not only from the European mother country but also from the South African mother city. Postal communication was extremely limited, roads were in a poor condition up to the 19th century, and com-

munication with Cape Town was very limited. Conserving influences were few and far between. Only the Bible and a few religious books were read, and before 1750 there were only two schools and four churches in the country districts.

Is it then surprising to find that the language of the colonists changed very rapidly? Besides, it should be remembered that the dropping of the flexions can be regularly explained, as in English, by the unchecked working of analogy and a few sound laws which were already to some extent found in the dialects of the Netherlands and Low Germany, and which were brought to South Africa. It should never be forgotten that Afrikaans did not start from the modern standard Netherlandish, but from the popular dialects of the provinces of Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht. In fact the standard written Netherlandish as we know it to-day did not yet exist as a uniform language in the 17th century. Analogy and the sound laws or sound tendencies could work without the restraint of any school training or educational drill.

4. *The Date when Afrikaans Originated.* About what date did the language of the Colony assume its Afrikaans form?

Dr W. J. Viljoen says, 'before any contact with England' (*vor jeder Berührung mit England*); Professor Jan te Winkel says about 1720, and refers us to Kolbe's *Description of the Cape*, thus presumably taking the very corrupt Hottentot-Dutch sentences quoted by Kolbe as Afrikaans, which indeed they are not; while Professor Hesselning considers the period 1658-85 as the critical time for the language, and believes that Netherlandish took the real turn towards Afrikaans before the end of the 17th century.

On what evidence do these investigators base these early dates? On three documentary facts which, in my opinion, do not justify the conclusions - namely, a communication of Commissary Van Rheede in 1685, the examples of Hottentot-Dutch found in early travellers like Willem ten Rhyne and Peter Kolbe before 1720, and the documents connected with the rebellion of the Frenchman Etienne Barbier in 1745.

Let us briefly examine these pieces of evidence one by one.

Talking of the Hottentots, Commissary Van Rheede writes in the year 1685:

It is a custom among all our people that, when these natives learn the Netherlandish speech and speak it in their way in a very crooked and almost unintelligible manner, our Netherlanders imitate them, indeed yes in such a way that if the children of our Netherlanders also accustom themselves to it, a broken language will be established which it will be impossible to overcome afterwards.

(Hier is een gewoonten onder al ons volk dat lerende dese inlanders de Nederduytsche spraek en dat deselve die op haer manieren seer krom en bij nae onverstandelijck spreken, soo volgen de onze baer daer in nae, ja soodanigh de kinderen van onze Netherlanders baer dat mede aenwendende en gebroken spraek gefondeert werd die onmogelijck sal wesen nae de hand te verwinnen.)

If we rely on evidence of this nature, it is quite simple to prove that the English of whites in Natal or Rhodesia became creolised before the year 1900. The crooked and unintelligible language of the Hottentots and colonists referred to by Van Rhee de is surely not Afrikaans but creolised Netherlandish in the mouths of the Hottentots and a similarly simplified form of language in the mouths of the colonists. It seems to be a common practice everywhere, when you are dealing with foreigners speaking your language, that you also address them in simplified or broken form of this language. It was this broken Netherlandish that Van Rhee de, who was only three months in South Africa, heard when the colonists spoke to Hottentots. We can hear similar forms of Afrikaans and English everywhere when whites communicate with Bantu, Griquas and other native or mixed tribes. It is remarkable that this reference to the creolised Netherlandish of the Hottentots is actually adduced by such an astute observer as Professor Hesseling as proof that Netherlandish became corrupted about this date under the influence of the creolised Malay-Portuguese, *not of the Hottentots*, but of the slaves.

The specimens of Hottentot-Afrikaans that we find in Peter Kolbe, Willem ten Rhyne and others, are equally unconvincing. They are purely Hottentot-Netherlandish and prove nothing whatever for the early date or for an Afrikaans that arose under *slave* influence. It is also absolutely different from the Afrikaans we know to-day. Kolbe has some thirty examples. Here is a specimen:

Kobes, ik jou ja 'khemme versprooken, ik zoo lang sal by u blywen tot jou. Husing de dubbeltjies betaalt! Gy 'khemme een oorfyg gemme, is dat braa? Wagtom, als gy de dubbeltjes betaalt hemme, ik ja strakjes voort loopum zoo.

The word-order is un-Afrikaans, the flexions are still clearly

Netherlandish, and the sentences are as unintelligible to an Afrikaner as to a Netherlander. But let me point out a very interesting fact about Kolbe's evidence. He gives us several samples not only of Hottentot-Dutch, but also of slave Dutch. Now the remarkable thing is that his slave Dutch sentences are in *perfect Netherlandish*. Kolbe's original work, published at Nuremberg in 1719, is written in *German* characters; when, however, he makes Hottentots or slaves speak, he prints their direct speech in Roman type. The advocates of the Malay-Portuguese theory used the Dutch translation of Kolbe's work, published in 1727, in which everything is printed in ordinary Roman type. So these theorists never tumbled to it that the slaves themselves were still, according to Kolbe, using correct Netherlandish in Kolbe's time (1705-13), though their own creolised Malay-Portuguese had corrupted the language of the whites. Here is an example of Kolbe's slave Netherlandish:

Wat u wilt gy doen? Gy moet sterven; wilt gy bidden, zoo maakt het kort, wy hebben niet lang tyd.

The documents of Etienne Barbier (1739) are equally unconvincing. They are written in a form that we can see every day when the writer does not know much of the language he is writing. And from Mentzel we know definitely that Barbier knew Netherlandish very imperfectly.

Als ein gebobrner Franzos (sprach) er noch sehr gebrochen Hollaendisch.

The first person who really gives us some reliable information about the language of the farming population was Otto Mentzel, who was at the Cape during the years 1733-41. He says the farming population are as far from speaking pure Netherlandish as the German farmers from speaking pure German. Mentzel tells us further that *ons* is used instead of *ny*; but gives no more details.

The journal of the Swede Hendrik Jacob Wikar, who wandered some four years (1775-9) amongst the farmers of the interior, is composed in a language which clearly reflects the Afrikaans he picked up there. He neglects, e.g., word-gender, uses diminutives like those in Afrikaans and is hopelessly mixed in his conjugations.

The Netherlandish of the colonists as we see them in the reports

of the various field-cornets in the Archives or in the private letters and documents of the time, clearly shows that the colonists could no longer write Netherlandish, and that their Afrikaans in its spoken form was as it were peeping out everywhere. Dating from 1795, we have a *Lied ter Eere van de Swellendamsch en Diverse Andere Helden bij de bloedige actie aan Muisenburg*, which is in practically pure Afrikaans. Heinrich Lichtenstein, who was at the Cape during the years 1803-6 refers to the short and naïve peasant language, and Wm. Burchell, who travelled in the Cape Colony in 1810-1, mentions the 'Cape Dutch dialect'. From all these facts it is evident that by the year 1800 Afrikaans was well established as a separate form of language; and judging from the nature of the earlier writings I think we may safely say that by the year 1750 Afrikaans had reached its modern form.

This was just two generations from the year 1691, the first year in which the number of white children born in the Colony exceeded the number of immigrants. In 1697 42 per cent., in 1708 54 per cent. of the population were children. So in the space of about 100 years Afrikaans underwent much the same sort of change as English did during the 11th century.

5. *The Contrast with Canadian French.* The very conservative French of French Canada has repeatedly been adduced by Dr. Hesseling as a proof that the language of the colony is as a rule even more conservative than that of the mother country. Professor Hesseling writes:

The circumstances (in French Canada) were, with one very important exception, remarkably like those under which the Netherlanders lived in South Africa. That exception is that in Canada there was no sudden contact with a sharply divergent idiom, spoken by and also with members of the family.

(De omstandigheden waren hier, met een belangryke uitzondering, opmerkelijk gelykend op die waaronder de Netherlanders in Zuid-Afrika leefden. Die uitzondering is dat in Canada geen plotselinge aanraking plaats vond met een sterk afwykend idioom, gesproken door en ook wel met huisgenoten).

But Professor Hesseling is entirely wrong when he maintains that there is only one important difference between the conditions in Canada and those in South Africa.

Let me enumerate the chief differences:

(a) Firstly, Quebec, founded by Champlain in 1608, meant much more to the French Canadian society than Cape Town ever did to the

farming colonists of South Africa (Sulte, Fryer & David, *History of Quebec*, 1908, I, p. 293). In 1765 Quebec possessed a library of at least 60,000 volumes. In South Africa on the other hand there were only one or two book-readers like Adam Tas, of Stellenbosch, or book-collectors like Nicolaas Joachim von Dessin, who left 3,800 books and manuscripts in 1761 to the Government.

(b) Secondly, the Canadian colonists were largely educated people. Elliott, in the *American Journal of Philology*, Vol. VII, describes them as 'representing the cream of their society (in France), just as their leaders, spiritual and temporal, represented the bluest blood that France had to offer in those days'. P. J. O. Chauvreau, for eighteen years Head of the Department of Public Education in Lower Canada and the Province of Quebec, and himself an influential writer, says the first colonists were largely educated people (*Un très grand nombre, les premiers colons étaient instruits*) and again 'the education of the first colonists was excellent, and it is this education which, handed down from age to age, has gained for their descendants the title of "peuple gentilhomme"'. (*L'éducation de ces premiers colons était excellente et c'est elle qui, transmise d'âge en âge, a valu à leurs descendants le titre de 'peuple gentilhomme'*). How different were the conditions at the Cape in 1658; seven out of fourteen names on a petition to the Government were indicated by a mark.

(c) Thirdly, Elliott tells us that Canada had aristocratic literary circles towards the end of the 18th century, and Quebec had a library of at least 60,000 volumes in 1765.

In South Africa, on the other hand, the children of the farming population learned very little more than reading and writing and the answers to the Catechism. Schools in the country numbered only two, and the education of the young was mostly entrusted to a retired soldier or sailor, who was himself very often but poorly educated. The subjects taught in the first school of Stellenbosch in the year 1683 included only reading, writing, the elements of arithmetic and the Heidelberg Catechism. The historian Theal tells us how uneducated most of the farming children grew up: as a rule they went no further than reading the Bible and the rhymed version of the Psalms. Many colonists could not write.

(d) Fourthly, except during the period 1675-1710, Canada received

a steady stream of immigrants from France up to the year 1760 — i.e. three years before the country was conquered by England (Sulte, Fryer and David, *History of Quebec*, I, p. 294).

Contrast with this the conditions in South Africa. After the coming of the Huguenots (1688-90) there was no more direct immigration of any importance. It is true, a few families still settled in South Africa up to the year 1711, but from June, 1688, the Dutch East India Company no longer took any interest in immigration into the country. Henceforth it was only individual servants of the Company who asked for permission to settle in South Africa.

(e) Fifthly, amongst the Canadian settlers there were very few strangers. In South Africa, however, we find that there were from the very foundation of the settlement numbers of foreigners, Germans and French Huguenots; and according to the calculations of Theal, Colenbrander and Bosman the proportion of foreign blood between the years 1657-1807 was not much less than 50 per cent.

(f) Sixthly, the whole Canadian society rests on a Catholic basis, the priests and nuns having great influence not only on the religion, but also on the education and the language of the youth. In South Africa, before 1743, there were only two churches and two ministers in the country districts (Stellenbosch and Paarl). Theal writes: 'At each of these places (Stellenbosch and Paarl) there were schools, but everywhere else the education of the children was greatly neglected, being in most instances entrusted to no more competent a teacher than a soldier engaged for a short term. There were over 400 leasehold farms or cattle runs, some of which were three or four days' journey from the nearest church, so that attendance at public worship was frequently neglected for long periods.'

(g) Seventhly, the French system of landholding had been transplanted to Canada; but the relations between the seigneur and his subordinates were much closer in Canada than in the homeland. In South Africa there was no such system of landholding.

(h) Eighthly, the seigneurs belonged to the highest aristocracy in France, and so did the governors and the State officials. Noble women founded and patronised the first religious institutions in Canada. The first Bishop of Quebec had noble blood in his veins.

'It is not strange, therefore,' writes Elliott in the *American Journal*

of Philology, Vol. VII, 'considering these circumstances, that the effects of association with persons of the best culture should have remained in the manners of the habitant up to this day. He had both from the side of the clergy and from that of his rulers, a marked advantage over his brother at home, and his speech bears especial traces of this influence in its near approach, in word-supply and construction, to the literary language of that age.'

Need it then cause us any surprise that French in Canada showed no such change as does Afrikaans in South Africa? Even an investigator like Professor D. B. Bosman, who goes a very long way in accepting the internal-development theory, is perturbed by the difference between Canadian French and Afrikaans; and therefore he leaves a loophole for foreigner-Netherlandish to explain the rapid change in South Africa. But the influence of this foreigner-Netherlandish we need not take very seriously. It varied with each group of speakers; and all the objections that can be raised against the view that French, German, Hottentot or Malay-Portuguese was the main factor in changing Netherlandish to Afrikaans, also apply to the foreign-Netherlandish of French and Germans or the creolised Netherlandish of Hottentots and slaves.

The unchecked working of the sound laws and analogy explain most completely the present structure of Afrikaans.

A very interesting parallel to the evolution of Afrikaans is to be found in English. No scholar of note to-day believes that Norman-French is responsible for the changed structure of English. It was only indirectly so. As Logan Pearsall Smith says:

Their domination, by interrupting the tradition of the language, by destroying its literature and culture, by reducing it to the speech of uneducated peasants, simply removed the conservative influence of education, and allowed the forces which had been long at work to act unchecked; and English, being no longer spoken by the cultivated classes or taught in the schools, developed as a popular spoken language with great rapidity.

Like causes, like effects — whether it be in England or in South Africa.

7 September 1948.