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TOWARDS AN EXPLANATION OF SOCIO-CULTURAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFERENCES WHICH HINDER COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ZULU AND ENGLISH SPEAKERS.

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INTRODUCTION

I would like to express my thanks to the third-year Zulu mother-tongue students at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg and my colleagues Adrian Koopman, Msawakhe Hlengwa, Ndela Ntshangase and Mary Gordon for discussions which have lead to the writing of this article.

Nessa Wolfson (1989:26) says:

> ... negative judgements based on the lack of understanding of cross-cultural variation in speech behaviour tends to be reciprocal in nature. That is, if native speakers form negative impressions of people from cultures different from their own, non-native speakers' judgements of native speakers are likely to be equally strong for the same reasons, and it is not uncommon for a foreigner to express anger or hurt toward an entire society on the basis of exactly this sort of misunderstanding.

Teaching a course on sociolinguistics over the past four years has made me realise that the frustrations suffered by students because they feel that members of another group are dirty, noisy, quiet, bad-mannered, undisciplined or merely intolerable are based on many misunderstandings as well as on various other premises. For the purpose of this article I will be looking at some of the criticisms put forward by students about members of the other groups.

Most people, even though they may not have realised the cause of it, have come up against examples of misunderstandings between different groups

which have been the product of a misinterpretation of actions or words across a socio-cultural boundary. Some of these misunderstandings are easily overcome but others need to be understood. In this article the terms "society" and "culture" will be used synonymously.

It is well known that meaning is often signalled by more than the mere words chosen for a message. People can use gestures, changes in word order or idiomatic language and the fact that the cultures of the speakers may differ can make these signals extremely difficult to interpret. When dealing with languages and cultures as different as Zulu and English the possibilities of misunderstandings are limitless.

Besides the word order, gestures and idioms mentioned above there are the social norms which people are brought up to think are sacrosanct and absolutely necessary for "good behaviour" and that any behaviour outside of this is unacceptable. Unluckily, when one learns one's social behaviour one is never taught that people from other cultures have different norms and that these are no more universally "correct" or "incorrect" than one's own.

Hudson (1980:84–85) says:

> To what extent do languages differ from one another? Are they all in some sense cut to the same mould, reflecting a common underlying "humanity", or do they differ arbitrarily and unrestrictedly from one another, reflecting the fact that different people live in very different intellectual and physical worlds? This is the question of RELATIVITY, which may be considered in relation *either to language, or to non-linguistic aspects of culture, or to the area of contact between language and non-language in culture.* (My emphasis AS)

Wolfson (1989:1) says of relativity:

> What sociolinguistic relativity means is that *each community has its own unique set of conventions, rules, and patterns for the conduct of communication* and that these must be understood in the context of *a general system which reflects the values and the structure of the society.* No two societies are quite alike in this respect, although some have more in common than others. The central point behind the notion of social relativity is that *no group has a monopoly on correct sociolinguistic behaviour,* for such judgements can be based only upon the rules one begins with. Lack of knowledge of the sociolinguistic rules which guide the interlocutor from a different cultural background can lead to serious breakdowns in communication. For this reason, it is of prime importance for language learners to be made aware, insofar as possible, of the rules

which obtain among native speakers of the target language. Where, as is most often the case, sociolinguistic rules have not yet been adequately analysed and described, *language learners and others who are involved in intercultural communication can at least be made sensitive of the fact that these patterns exist.* (My emphasis ASD)

The problem is that few people are aware of the norms of other societies and those involved in day-to-day communication with others fail to recognise the merits of those cultures.

Goodenough (1957) as quoted in Hudson (1980:74) says of culture:

> Possibly one of the major areas of annoyance between peoples of different cultures is the inability to recognise cultural differences in others.

De Kadt (1992:104) says:

> Politeness seems to be negotiated primarily by means of other, often non-verbal dimensions of the interaction, ... in Zulu ... the following aspects seem to be included: posture (subordinate should be seated, the avoidance of eye contact by subordinates, gesture (especially rubbing one's hands together when asking for something), pauses, the order of speaking, address terms, strategies (such as the role of hints), and vocabulary (*hlonipha* of language).

The criticisms dealt with in this article are from students – mainly mother-tongue Zulu-speaking – who did a section on sociolinguistics in their third-year course and were asked to write down their criticisms of people of other race/language groups.[1] It so happened that almost all of the criticisms were of English-speaking South Africans (normally referred to as "whites" in the text), not surprisingly because they are the majority of other students who are at the University of Natal.

The major subcategorization used here is between language-based and behaviour-based norms. It is not always easy to demarcate the difference between these two, and so the language category is used for anything in which language rather than pure behaviour is involved. The criticisms will be listed as given (indented and enclosed in inverted commas) and then there will be a discussion on the differences between the two cultures.

LANGUAGE-BASED CRITICISMS

These will be divided up into the following sub-categorizations:

- Greetings
- Manner of speaking
- Deference
- Appreciation

A. Greetings

The first two criticisms are related and will be dealt with together.

1. "Whites do not bother to greet people that they do not know".

2. "When a white comes across two people, one of whom he knows and the other not he will greet those he knows and leave the other/s out".

In Zulu culture one must greet people whether or not one knows them. It is considered rude not to do so. In English culture, on the other hand, although there is nothing to stop one from greeting a stranger, it is uncommon and might even be viewed with some suspicion by that stranger. If one were to greet a stranger, then often a smile would suffice for the greeting (see point 3 on smiling to greet).

Point 3 is not language based but as it also refers to a greeting it will be handled here.

3. "When greeting the whites give a 'grin' which fades very soon as if they regret ever having given it.[2] This is most annoying to Zulus."

Of this Wolfson (1989:104) says:

The most common nonverbal[3] greetings were found to be head gestures, mutual glances, and *smiles*. (My emphasis ASD)

To most peoples greetings are mere phatic communion (in Malinowsky's terms) to acknowledge the presence of the other. Whether this is done by using words or actions does not really matter as long as it is done. The problem for the Zulu speakers here is that they can use an action for greeting, that of holding both hands out with the palms pointing forwards and down, but they do not recognise that the smile, which English speakers use, carries the same message. They feel that a smile shows happiness and if the smile fades quickly it shows that it is insincere and that the person doing the smiling is not happy at all. The fact that it is an acknowledgement of the other person and not an indication of happiness has to be learned by non-English speakers.

4. "Whites greet you even if they have already seen you that day. This we find annoying as he is making a fool of you *(sic)*."

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As has been said, greetings are merely forms of "phatic communion" and as such they indicate acknowledgement of the other person's presence and that is really all. In Zulu a second meeting would entail a remark about the weather, the fact that one was busy, the state of the world or some such thing merely because it would be rude to go by without saying anything. In English, it would also be rude to ignore someone whom you had already seen, but the difference here is that it is not impolite to give a greeting similar to that given at the first meeting. It would also be possible to use a reference to the weather or other subject as in Zulu, but a greeting would do just as well and it is this discrepancy which bothers the Zulu speakers. I have heard Zulus whose children are at school with English speakers complaining that even their children now greet them each time they see them and that they have found this strange.

B. Manner of Speaking

5. "Whites speak too softly, which makes it difficult to understand them and it also seems when they speak to one another they may be gossiping and therefore not want others to hear what they are saying."

It is often true that English speakers do not want others to hear what they have to say. This is because they feel that what they are saying is private (of course this does enable them to gossip without being too obvious but that is not normally the case) and that they don't want to disturb others by making too much noise. Zulu speakers, on the other hand, speak out loudly to show that they are not saying anything which could offend anyone else, and that they are not ashamed of what they are saying. English speakers, and people from other cultures, can find this annoying because they feel that it disturbs them. It is considered to be an invasion of their privacy.

6. "The Whites use bad language (*i.e. swearing*) and this offends us"

    The Zulu word *-ethuka* is translated in the Doke and Vilakazi dictionary as:

    Utter abusive language, swear; abuse, insult

    and the Zulu word: *-funga*

    Take an oath, swear.

These two Zulu words, both being translated as *swear* in English, are very different and even they don't cover all the meanings of the English word.

"Swearing" is a word which can be used in three ways in English. Either (i) one can swear in anger, disgust or surprise; or (ii) one can swear at someone; or (iii) one can swear an oath.

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The use of certain words describing the sex act or bodily functions (swearing in one of its English meanings) is taboo in many languages. However, words of this type can now be used as interjections (expletives)[4] – in sense (i) above – to express pain or annoyance in English.

Cursing at people is probably not acceptable in most cultures, although the punishment for this is very different in different cultures. In English, the use of various words has changed radically over the last generation or so. Words such as "bloody", "bugger", "bastard" and the like have been used in polite company in certain contexts for the past forty or fifty years at least, and probably longer. On the other hand, words like "shit" and "fuck" (which are becoming more commonly used now in the English-speaking world) were completely taboo even twenty or thirty years ago in South African English society. Nowadays these words are heard on television and in movies and are read in books, and so are gaining acceptance very fast. It is difficult for children to be told that these are unsuitable for polite conversation when they hear them all the time on the media.

In Zulu swearing is very different in that there is not really an equivalent of the annoyance/ disgust type of swearing. Swearing (*-ethuka*) is normally used to curse people. Swearing (*-funga*) is to swear to truth or to swear falsely. There are various levels of (*-ethuka*). Some forms, like *udakiwe*, "you are drunk", can be used jokingly. Others, like *unyoko*, "your mother", can never be used other than with the intention of insulting. Such an insult might traditionally only be revenged by the death of the person using the language. This in itself goes some way to explain why the Zulus feel insulted when they hear English speakers swearing. First, they often regard it as being aimed at them because they are not familiar with the annoyance type swearing. Second, because the teaching of a language always changes far later than the actual language itself. Zulu speakers often do not recognise that the modern use of words which were taboo a generation ago are now acceptable in many instances.

The following tables may shed some light on this:

swear -ethuka	Zulu	English
Offensive; swearing at someone or insulting them:	-ethuka "*insult*" used when one swears at a person often using the word *unyoko* "*your mother*" in some or other way.	Swearing at: Calling someone a *fucking bastard* or words to that effect.

Inoffensive; expletive:	A Zulu person would say something like **"ush"** if hurt and would never *swear*.	An English speaker might well say **"shit"** or **"fuck"**. Although this is using a "swear word" it is not insulting or aimed at anyone. It is used to express annoyance much like the Zulu **"ush"** and should not be translated by -*ethuka*.
swear -funga	**Zulu**	**English**
To take an oath	*ukufunga iqiniso* "to swear to the truth"	To swear on the Holy Bible

7. "Whites don't tell you if they are upset with you. If they don't talk about it how can we know how to correct the wrong."

It appears to me that this depends on who the people in question are. For example, Zulu people will not tell their elders if they are upset with them, nor will the English. English speakers may well take this far further to where they seldom tell anyone if they are annoyed with them. This could be because they feel that it is impolite to do so, or that they want to avoid the unpleasantness or confrontation which may ensue if their displeasure is expressed verbally. Often the displeasure is expressed through the body language of the person concerned. This does not necessarily help the person causing the annoyance to know what exactly he or she is doing wrong.

8. The use of the term "maid" to refer to *umuntu olekelela ekhaya* is offensive.

This is a difficult criticism to comment on because the term "maid" is not derogatory in English.[5] Presumably it has taken on a disparaging connotation to Zulu speakers of English and it is probable that English speakers will have to use something like "domestic" in future if they wish to avoid giving offence.

9. "Whites ask if you want something to eat or drink instead of just bringing it."

In Zulu society when visitors arrive, the hostess brings out food or drink, or

both, and the guests are expected to eat or drink whatever is brought unless they have a good reason for not doing so. In English society, on the other hand, the host/hostess must ask the guests if they want something to eat or drink, and then say what is on offer so that the guests can decide whether they want to partake of it or not.

10.   "If a Zulu should hurt himself he expects to hear *Nxese* or 'sorry', and not to be asked if he is alright."

Here again we have a problem with the translation. In Zulu the word *Nxese* is an expression of empathy with the person who is hurt. In English, on the other hand, one uses "sorry" if one has caused the discomfiture. To express solidarity with the person hurt one must ask: "Are you alright?". This latter can still be used after "sorry" but the sorry always indicates culpability and so it cannot be used instead of "are you alright?"

C. Deference

11.   "In Zulu one would not address someone older than you by name (i.e. by first name) as it is considered disrespectful. One should use *Baba* or *Mama* before the name to show respect."

A "respect form" is common in languages of the world. French uses the pronouns *tu* and *vous*, the former which is informal and the latter formal. Afrikaans uses *jy* or *u*, and German *du* and *Sie* in the same way. The thing is that these forms can change for various reasons and these are not normally because the people in that culture lack any sort of respect. For example, as Hudson (1980:124) says:

> It was normal until quite recently for French children to call their fathers *vous*, in recognition of his greater power, but now it is usual for them to call him *tu* because of high solidarity. Similar changes have taken place in many Western European languages such as German and Italian ... and also in Russian.

In the first part of the twentieth century, British boys attending private schools would address their fathers as "Sir". The fact that this type of language has changed to the extent that young people now often call their elders by their first names does not signify a diminution in respect but merely a change in what Hudson calls "solidarity". Many older people in South African English society prefer to be called by their first names rather than Mr So-and-so or Uncle So-and-so, another form which was possible at one time in this country for children to call good friends of their parents.

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D. Appreciation

12. "Thanking. Whites do not do this, i.e. use both hands."

In Zulu society it is necessary to receive something in both hands, or at least, accept it with the right hand but hold the right wrist with the left hand. The only time that it is not necessary to do this is if one is already using one hand for something else. It would be common, but not necessary for the acceptance to be accompanied by *Ngiyabonga*, "Thank you". In English society one can accept with either hand and it would be unusual to use both hands unless the thing being handed over was either large or heavy. The important thing would be to say "thank you". That is necessary in almost all cases.

BEHAVIOURALLY BASED CRITICISMS

These will be divided up into the following sub-categories:

- interactions
- decency
- miscellaneous

A. Interactions

Invitations:

1. "We do not like the fact that one cannot go to, or bring a friend/s to a party without being invited."

2. "Whites live in their own houses and don't care who their neighbours are. Neighbours are not even necessarily invited to a party taking place next door to them."

In Zulu society a party is held so that people in the neighbourhood can socialise. This means that anyone is invited, even strangers who may be passing. Invitations do not need to be issued. It can be rude not to attend a party which one knows is being held. A great deal of food is prepared and many people may well have a hand in the preparation. In English society, on the other hand, where parties can be very small and consist of six to twelve people, or much larger for special occasions such as weddings or twenty-first birthday parties, the host and hostess issue invitations to people whom they wish to have and only those invited would be expected to attend. They will make sure that they have enough food for those invited without having too much left over at the end. The difference here may well be that the English

families tend to be of the nuclear type and so if there is too much food left over it goes to waste, whereas the Zulu families are of the more extended type where leftover food would be consumed by the members of the extended family. The different structures of the Zulu and English families probably also explain the different approaches to neighbours. Zulus are more used to large groups of family and friends and therefore have no problem enlarging the group even more, whereas the English families, being far smaller units, tend to keep out extraneous members, and may well live next door to someone they never really get to know and whom they certainly would not expect to attend any party to which they were not specifically invited.

Nessa Wolfson (1989:118) says of invitations (and this has a bearing on offering as well):

> The knowledge of how to give, interpret, and respond to invitations is an aspect of communicative competence which is critical to those who wish to interact socially.

Offering food or drink:

This criticism is language based but as it is closely allied to invitations, it will be dealt with here.

3. "If an English speaker offers something and you refuse they always say, "Are you sure?" as if you had not thought out your reply."

In different cultures there are different ways of accepting what is offered. In Zulu one merely answers with something like: "*Yebo*" "Yes" or "*Ngiyabonga*" "(No) Thank you" and that is the end of it. In English one can answer similarly, but if the answer is "No thank you" then the host is obliged to ask: "Are you sure?" If the last assurance is not sought, then the host might be considered to be impolite.

4. "Whites expressing of joy strange. *(sic.)* In graduation ceremonies the whites clap politely where the blacks get up and make a great deal of noise."

English upbringing stresses that one should be controlled at all times and that neither joy nor anguish should be displayed too obviously. If one looks at the behaviour of sports crowds, and even sportsmen and women, this could well be in a process of change among the English. Zulu people express their joy in no uncertain manner.

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5. "The use of eye-contact is annoying to Zulus but normal to the English."

Zulu children are taught not to make eye contact with their elders as a form of respect. In English society if one does not make eye contact, then one is considered to be trying to hide something and so one automatically looks others in the eye. Many English speakers get annoyed if the person they are speaking to does not look them in the eye.

6. "Hugging and kissing in public is embarrassing to us."

Zulus may not make use of terms of endearment or show affection in any way even to their spouses in front of anyone. English culture is in a state of change here, where it is now far more common than it was some years ago to use a hug, possibly accompanied with a kiss, as a greeting. This has no sexual connotations whatsoever. Zulu culture does seem to be changing here to a certain extent as well, as one does see students on occasion hugging one another.

7. "In Zulu you should not touch someone else in public, especially on the head. The English do this."

8. "White students brush or touch their hair whilst others are eating."

In English society there is no specific taboo on touching someone else other than if it is done in a sexual way. The face or head would be considered to be more intimate than, for example, the arm, but could be touched to remove a mark or leaf or such thing. There would be no more problem with touching the hair than any other part of the head and touching one's own head whilst others were eating would not normally be noticed. The fact that chefs and others working in kitchens traditionally wear some sort of headgear may be an indication that this touching of the hair around food is relatively new amongst English speakers. More research needs to be done on this. With Zulus, on the other hand, it is not permitted to touch another in public, and touching on the hair is to be avoided at all costs. Zulu speakers may not touch their hair near food.

9. "Use of personal space. Zulus feel that it is not right for an unmarried man and woman to stand close together."

English speakers may stand close to a member of the opposite sex without any sexual connotations being manifested. This is not so in Zulu society and, for members of the opposite sex to stand apart, probably links up with the next criticism wherein one does not admit to a liaison with one of the opposite sex.

10. "Referring to your girl- or boyfriend to people slightly older than you are is wrong to us."

To acknowledge having a boy- or girlfriend to one's parents or friends is normal in English society. The parents would even expect to be introduced to the person in question. Zulus consider this to be wrong culturally and must not admit this to anyone in an older age group. Even if the liaison is known about by the parents, neither the parents nor the children should admit to this. Standing close together may well be considered by Zulus to be an admission of some sort of involvement and therefore taboo.

11. "A child must be close to an adult if being spoken to by the adult. The child must approach the adult. The English children do not do this." (i.e. they do not automatically approach the adults. ASD).

Children need only approach adults when being spoken to by them if told to do so in English society, otherwise they may stay where they are. This does not necessarily indicate a lack of respect but is merely part of convention. Zulu convention, on the other hand, demands that the child approach the adult.

12. "Whites do not come in or sit down until told to do so."

A Zulu person must sit down immediately on entering a room. Even if there is not a chair then he must sit or squat on the floor until one is brought. The English, on the other hand, must wait to be invited to sit. If the invitation is not forthcoming, then one must remain standing. Another case of the two cultures expecting diametrically opposed behaviour.

B. Decency

13. "The wearing of slacks or shorts by English women can give offence to us."

This is something which is changing in Zulu society where one sees female students wearing both shorts and slacks. However, point 14 below probably has a lot to do with the more traditional use of this sort of dress amongst English-speaking females.

14. "White women sit with their legs crossed. Black women must sit with their legs pressed tightly together."

15. "Zulu girls are taught not to sit with their legs up. The whites do this."

As stated above, this probably pertains to the common wearing of slacks and

shorts rather than skirts. The latter can be rather more revealing if the wearer doesn't sit carefully. There is also the problem that Zulu women are not supposed to show their thighs and feel that it is indecent for English speakers to show theirs. The English, on the other hand, feel that it is indecent to show off their breasts (although this is changing now on beaches), where the Zulus find nothing wrong with this.

16. "The English smoke and drink in front of their parents. In Zulu society you never do this even if you are a parent yourself."

17. "Smoking of women or children annoys Zulus." *(Sic.)*

Smoking in public is probably becoming less acceptable in many societies, but it has never been a taboo for the English to smoke or drink in front of their parents, or anybody else for that matter, unless under age. One wonders what the new smoking laws will do in this area.

18. "White males like to go naked and this offends the blacks, whereas white girls merely find it funny."

The habit of "streaking" has been around for some time now. In some way young white males (not only English speaking) seem to think that it is daring and that they can prove something by running naked in front of crowds or women's residences. This is normally only done by young males who have quite possibly had too much to drink.

C. Miscellaneous

19. "A man must not cook, look after children or do other domestic work."

In English society there is no stigma attached to any of these tasks and a man may be involved in any of them. From the reaction of some of the women in the class to this criticism, some Zulu males may well find themselves in the same position in a few years time. Certainly with the attempt to get more equality for women this would appear to be a threatened area of Zulu culture.

20. "To Zulus it is odd to take a dog into a room where there are people present, especially when it is allowed to sleep in that room. A Zulu who sleeps inside with a dog, can be accused of being a witch because the dog's place is outside" (sic.)

There is a great deal of difference between the way in which the Zulus and the English regard pets in general and dogs in particular. One has only to look at the abstract noun *ubunja* "bestiality, inhumanity" formed from the stem *-nja*

"dog" in Zulu to see the extent of this difference. The English regard the dog as a loving friend whom they play with, stroke and pat, and who can be with them at all times, whereas the Zulus feel that it is something which will protect their houses but must remain outside.

The differences between Zulu and English culture obviously go way beyond the few examples addressed in this article. The various criticisms dealt with above are classified largely into those which are language based and those which are behaviourally based. Some, which have been handled in one or other of the sections, straddle both, (i.e. language and behaviour) but all of these and many more must necessarily be understood by the people concerned if there is to be meaningful communication between them.

The examples given above are a start, but only that towards clearing up some of the misconceptions about the "bad behaviour" or "lack of manners", as it is sometimes expressed, of people from across the Zulu/English cultural border. This needs to be taken further and to be extended to all of the other groups in the country to be of any real benefit. It is only by learning something of the cultures of other groups that we will ever be able to accept differences in behaviour which are so often thought to be rudeness or at least inconsiderateness on the part of others and to realise that what we take to be "correct" behaviour may well be unacceptable to people brought up in another culture.

ENDNOTES

1 They were collected between 1994 and 1997.
2 The majority of the students who had this complaint identified this as a grin which they differentiated from a smile. The first they felt was insincere.
3 This was taken from a laboratory study of greetings by Krivonos and Knapp of college-age men in the United States.
4 The word "expletive" is glossed as: *an exclamation or swearword; an oath or sound expressing emotion rather than meaning* in *Collins concise English dictionary.*
5 It is glossed as *a female servant* in the *Collins concise English dictionary.*

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THE FUTURE OF THE STANDARD AFRICAN LANGUAGES IN THE MULTILINGUAL SOUTH AFRICAN CLASSROOM

Sarah Slabbert/Rosalie Finlayson

INTRODUCTION

As we leave the second and enter the third millennium, we will be further exposed to forces and developments not envisaged except in science fiction projections. Information technology continues to outstrip the ability of the hardware and software industries to keep pace with its development. How this is likely to impact on the field of language and communication is difficult to predict. However, with the increasing rate of urbanization coupled with the inadequacies of South Africa's historical legacy at all levels of education, we are already confronted with changes rapidly appearing in the use of the so-called standard forms of language. This situation is further exacerbated by the in-migration of foreign nationals in search of employment and a better way of life.

The aim of this chapter is to describe the processes that have been and still are eroding the standard South African African languages, with specific reference to the implications of the teaching of the standard forms:

- the colonial and neo-colonial history of the standardization process itself
- the lack of function and status of the standard languages
- the development of high status non-standard varieties in the urban centres.

With regard to the non-standard urban varieties, empirically derived data from a selected sample group of classroom test cases have been used to investigate the following issues:

- Do the attitudes of learners in the sample area concerning the speakers and

functions of the standard and non-standard varieties conform to the normal pattern of attitudes associated with the standard variety?
- Are learners able to recognise standard forms as such and produce such standard forms?
- Is a single urban variety in Pretoria used as a lingua franca?
- How do the linguistic devices employed in the accommodation process relate to contact phenomena in general?

The chapter will conclude with an argument on whether the use of this non-standard or so-called diluted variety is either a reversal in the development of the African languages or intrinsic to their further promotion and growth. The question may also be asked as to whether the urban variety may be regarded as a stage in the continuum towards creolization.

In addressing the complex issue of standard language in post-colonial Africa we would like to pay tribute to the substantial contribution that J.A. Louw made not only to the standardization process, but in particular to the issue of the conjunctive orthography in the Nguni languages, especially with reference to Xhosa.

History of the standard African languages

No comprehensive study has yet been undertaken of the history of the standardization process of the African languages in South Africa. While the missionaries did the pioneering work in the early transcription of the African languages, not everybody is as positive of their attempts at standardization, referring to them as "clumsy procedures ... each working to their own agenda, often basing their orthographies on those of their own languages ..." (Bill 1990:108). After the Nationalist government came into power in 1948 so-called "Bantu Education" was centralized and the standardization process became formal. Seven departmental committees, later called the language boards, were instituted to standardize spelling, as well as the settling of still outstanding differences of orthographic opinion, and the creation of new words in an effort to modernize these languages and enable them to express the many concepts needed in the new educational syllabuses, broadcasting services and technical training (Van Wyk 1970:102). These language boards also made recommendations about the highly influential and profitable market of prescribed books for schools, acting as guardian angels over language purity. As instruments of the government, their recommendations were expected to screen out any protest literature, with the result that published works in the African languages were restricted to "traditional" themes. Because of the association with apartheid structures, the standardization process therefore

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unfortunately lacked legitimacy. The standard languages are consistently viewed (Calteaux 1995:36) as a result of historical accident and a direct and deliberate intervention by society.

Function and status of the standard African languages

South Africa in the past had no single national standard language. English and Dutch, the latter replaced by Afrikaans in 1925, were the official languages of the country from 1910 to 1994. English is the colonial language, whereas Afrikaans, although developed from the colonial Dutch, can be regarded as indigenous. However, during the apartheid years Afrikaans functioned as a neocolonial language.

In 1963 the government amended the language clauses of the constitution so that the newly formed self-governing states, the infamous homelands, could legislate themselves on the status of the African language of the region. This gave the African languages the first chance to gain some official status, for example the Transkei homeland chose Xhosa as one of its official languages.

The 1996 Constitution of South Africa declared all 11 major South African languages national official languages. This declaration, which was also part of the Interim Constitution of 1994, gave for the first time in the history of South Africa national official status to the nine African languages. Appropriate and accepted standard forms of the African languages are requirements for the effective use of these languages in higher functions. Despite the formal declaration of the official status of the African languages, their use in practice is very limited and often restricted to political gestures, such as their inclusion in letterheads and single phrases in advertisements.

History of the urban varieties

The urban varieties of the South African African languages have developed as a result of mainly two factors:

- In the townships speakers from the spectrum of South African Bantu languages, as well as the Bantu languages of neighbouring countries, adapt their languages to facilitate communication in a multilingual context where accommodation is a central communicative norm.
- The linguistic influence of English and Afrikaans as a result of the colonial history, neocolonial apartheid and modernization in general has impacted dramatically on these languages.

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The typology of urban varieties has been described by various researchers and a range of variety types have been identified. Schuring (1985), for example, identifies a lingua franca for the townships of Pretoria, which he defines as a koine (Pretoria-Sotho) which is comparable with Town Bemba (Kashoki 1972 & Richardson 1963). According to Schuring, Pretoria-Sotho is based on the Kgatla dialect of Tswana, with elements of the other Sotho languages, English and Afrikaans, as well as a low percentage from non-Sotho languages. As a koine it is characterized by contractions and abbreviations, phonetic and morphological simplification or "levelling" as well as slang words.

Calteaux (1994), using material from Tembisa, another urban area in Gauteng Province, distinguishes what she calls the Black Urban Vernacular (BUV), which she regards as similar in function and structure to Pretoria Sotho. She notes (1994:194) that it "is not a discrete variety, but represents a wide spectrum of variation ... the languages which dominate in Mixed Language are Zulu and English ... Adopted words are often Africanised ... (and there is) semantic shift (as well as) code-mixing and borrowing". She further maintains that the BUV can be compared with Town Bemba with regard to the following features: "the nuances and finer points of the classical idiom have lost their relevance under urban conditions. Epstein suspects considerable changes in the phonetic structure and pronunciation as well, and mentions the most obvious changes are the innovations in words and phrases. A large number of English words have been adopted into Bemba ... new words, often short-lived, are constantly being coined." The languages featuring most prominently in BUV differ from area to area. Calteaux (1994:199) states further that "the process of convergence appears to be similar to the process of levelling", which Schuring has also decribed for Pretoria Sotho.

A similar typology is also found in the work of the other researchers who took part in the Human Sciences Research Council's Stanon (Standard and Non-standard Languages) project although a distinction is made between BUV and what are called urban varieties. To quote from the Stanon report (1995:52) BUV has an accommodating function and "also functions as a mark of urbanization and to indicate that the speaker is "city-wise"," whereas urban varieties such as of Tsonga and Xhosa "differ from the standard varieties of these languages due to modernization and contact with other languages and varieties."

Standard African languages differ substantially from the language varieties that are spoken in the multilingual urban centres. The standards are generally regarded as linguistically the closest to the rural varieties. Calteaux (1995:37) confirms this in saying that "in South Africa the standard forms of the African languages are based on regional dialects which are spoken in the rural areas."

Calteaux (1995:38) states that "typically, non-standard dialects are not *socially* equal to the standard dialect, i.e. speaking the standard dialect is associated with high socio-economic prestige." She goes on (1995:50) to add "that standard languages are used for the higher functions of language, such as in the domains of education, religion, and formal meetings." However, while the standard languages have enjoyed this higher status, Calteaux (1995:50) acknowledges that "this viewpoint seems to be changing, however, as the younger generation no longer hold the standard language in awe."

Impact of the situation in the classroom

All of the points raised so far have a profound impact on the urban classroom situation. Recent research (Eltic 1997) has shown that although stakeholders in education generally welcome the official status of the African languages, their practical value in education and the market-place is not held in high esteem. For example, the feeling is that if you can speak it why should you learn it? Parents would prefer learners to learn something useful and new such as English rather than a Bantu language. New language regulations in the schools do not require that you take your home language as a subject. The general expectation is that African parents will choose languages other than their own.

The urban varieties themselves seem to be threatening the future of the standard languages. Some comments in this regard show how teachers are caught between pillar and post: they appreciate the possible role of the urban varieties in popularizing African languages, yet they fear for the demise of the standard form. They include the urban varieties to popularize their teaching because,

> We identify an educated person with English. Once you see a person reading Zulu, you think that person is not educated. The kids are even very embarrassed, shy to read the setbook in public, because people will think they are not educated.

On the demise of the standard languages, comments such as the following were expressed:

> I think the youngsters must be taught the pure languages so that they can know their culture.

While another said:

> The children don't speak standard Zulu. It is a serious problem. These languages kill Zulu. Do you want to kill Zulu? We are to enforce and

maintain the standards. I am as a Zulu teacher totally against it. If these languages are successful, Zulu writers will be regarded as outdated.

and further,

It disturbs them (the students in the learning of the standards). When they go out of the classroom it is the end of the standard language.

These opinions of the teachers are echoed in research on African languages in the classroom. For example, Malimabe (1990:19) acknowledges that many words from the standard forms are anglicized in class but she is of the opinion that "codeswitching should be discouraged in the classroom, especially where it interferes with the purity of the standard language." This has led to tensions in teaching standard African languages as first-language subjects to multilingual urban African children. These tensions also have very definite implications for future language policies in education.

Research design

In order to test the status of both the standard and non-standard languages, two hypotheses were formulated:

- The attitudes of black high school children in Gauteng concerning the standard and non-standard/urban varieties of their home languages undermine the definition of the standard variety.
- Black high-school children in Gauteng have trouble in understanding and producing the standard speech forms of their home languages.

The research comprised four focus groups from Tsako Thabo High School in Mamelodi township in the Greater Pretoria Metropolitan area. The school has 1 330 learners from a variety of language backgrounds. For each group, eight Grade 10 learners, gender more or less equally distributed, were selected. Two of the groups had learners with Northern Sotho as home language and the other two groups had Zulu as home language. For each group there were two sessions planned, with different varieties planned for each session.

Table 1

	Group 1	Group 2
Session A	Standard	Urban
Session B	Urban	Standard

The discussion guide consisted of:

- Playing a tape recording to respondents of a person speaking in the standard or urban variety. The task then was for respondents to select from a set of pictures, faces, clothes, jobs, houses, activities associated with areas such as church, shebeen, soccer field, means of transport, etc., those characteristics which most closely depicted the person speaking on the tape. They were subsequently asked to discuss why they had made such a choice.
- Identifying the language the person was speaking, where one would associate such a person and, with the pictures as a guide, which functions would be associated with the variety spoken.
- Filling in missing words from a given passage.
- Answering questions from a given passage.

Research results

(a) The matched guise test has confirmed the result of a similar test for the adult black population in South Africa which was done in 1993 (Slabbert & Van den Berg). The attitudes of pupils in Mamelodi about the speakers and functions of the standard and non-standard varieties do not conform to the normal pattern of attitudes associated with the standard. The standard languages have become more closely associated with those people who express traditional and more conservative values. The non-standard urban varieties on the other hand embody the modernity and relative affluence of the urban centres. Compare examples 1a and 1b:

[1a] *Ke e kwa ko kgorong ge banna ba bolela ba rera tsa mosate goba melato.*
(It (standard form) is from the chief's court when men speak at the chief's kraal when they discuss cases.)

[1b] **Ungumama - ungu**MISTRESS, **uyafundisa.** MOSTLY **abotishelekazi nabotishela bathanda impahla ezinhle** AND THEN **lesi ngibona ukuthi impilo yakhe ne**FAMILY **yakhe inhle. Nabantwana bakhe ubaphethe kahle, ngoba abotishelekazi indlu zabo zinhle, inwele zakhe ngethemba ukuthi zinhle ngoba abotishelekazi bathanda into ezinhle.**
(It's a female [speaking on the tape] – a lady teacher, who teaches. Most lady and male teachers like lovely clothes and here I believe her life is good and her life with that of her family is good. She looks well after her children, she has a beautiful house because lady teachers have beautiful houses. I believe her hair is lovely because lady teachers like nice things.)
(Zulu bold, Sotho italics, English caps)

What should be clear from the above is that the South African situation places a question mark behind the relevance of the concept of standard language in all situations. Van Wyk at a seminar on the non-standard

African language varieties commented on the concept as follows: "Standard language is a typically vague sociolingiustic concept in that it is impossible to define it in such a way that it will mean the same thing for every possible situation." He then goes on to say: "I would favour the view, by no means original, that standard languages, at least in our situation, are *superordinate language varieties representing in one way or another correct or prestigious linguistic usage*" (1992:24–25, our emphasis). If the prestige of standards is so seriously undermined by a system that it becomes non-existent, the relevance of the standards is then brought into question.

(b) The Mamelodi learners showed a sensitivity with regard to the difference between the standard and non-standard varieties. For example, they attempted to answer in the standard language itself questions on a passage in the standard, and questions on a passage in the non-standard in the non-standard. The language variety they used in the discussion on their choice of pictures to suit the audio example of the standard was significantly closer to the standard than that of the discussion on the non-standard audio example.

This result was reaffirmed when the learners were required to do a very simplified production exercise, i.e. they attempted to fill in standard forms within a standard text and while not consistent in their responses, some non-standard forms were offered in a text depicting a non-standard variety. They had very few problems in filling in missing words in both a standard and a non-standard text. The standard Northern Sotho passage for example contained 123 lexical items of which 13 were omitted for the test. The non-standard Zulu passage contained 87 lexical items of which 16 were omitted. The disjunctive convention of writing for Sotho versus the conjunctive for Nguni would explain the difference in the number of lexical items. See example 2 in this regard:

[2] Sentence 1 from the standard Northern Sotho test passage:

La mathomoge a phaphama e be e le iri ya lesomepedi (1 bošegogare), mme ka go lemoga gore ga sešo (2 a gogoge) a ipoelela borokong.

Although a variety of answers were given for the omitted relative construction (*a gogoge*), learners with the exception of a few idiosyncratic deviations, consistently produced grammatically correct forms.

Jacobeth:	*ya ba nako yago tsogo*
Patience:	*e be nako*
Moses R:	*o boa*
Jacob:	*a apa*

Steve	*gose*
Jonas	*a robala*
Moses M:	*go sa*

Sentence 2 from the non-standard Zulu passage:

Uyabona, labomama abasebenza amabhunwini (6 uma) ungabheka kahle nje vele abantwana babo (7 bazamile) ukuthi baye ezikoleni noma (8 bangafundanga) bona, abazali laba abasebenza (9 emapulazeni) wamabhunu benzile ukuthi abantwana (10 babo) baye ezikoleni.

In the case of a locative (no. 9) for example being omitted, learners generally also produced a locative, the grammatically correct form.

Philistus:	**emakhishini**
Fortune:	**emakhishini**
Phyllis:	**ezindlini**
Veronica:	**emahovisini**
Patricia:	**umsebenzi**
Phineas:	**emakhishini**

Our conclusion is that although these learners might predominantly speak a non-standard variety, even at home, they are still able to position themselves on a continuum closer or further removed from the standard, which would be determined by specific communication variables. Despite both teachers' and Africanists' concerns that learners no longer know the standard varieties, we find them definitely able to differentiate between an urban and standard variety and able to shift towards the standard.

(c)   The comprehension tests did not give conclusive results since learners fared extremely poorly for both the standard and non-standard passages. A number of reasons could be given for this: one of the markers commented that the non-standard version did not adequately eliminate what she regarded as difficult items. How factors such as locality, context, subject matter, grammatical complexity, and dialectal diversity or a combination thereof impact on comprehension has not been fully researched for the standard languages. Further, it appeared as if the skill necessary to answer a comprehension test could have been a factor.

Road to the future

We would conclude that the standard African languages as have been discussed are in many ways dysfunctional. Unless the functions of the African languages are extended in practice, the need for a standard variety as such is seriously in question. If, however, there is a functional need for a standard, then the issue would be to retain the standards as they have currently been defined and to

actively promote them in order to at least bring their status on a par with the urban varieties. The other option would be to open up the standards to include the urban varieties. To make a decision as to whether the non-standard varieties are indeed a diluted or watered-down version of the standard and as such a reversal in the development of the African languages or whether they should be regarded as intrinsic to their promotion and development is a highly debatable issue. The implications of the latter choice could be either allowing a process to go its natural course, which could lead to the demise of the African languages, or to try and intervene.

Linguistic descriptions of the urban varieties in South Africa have focused on codeswitching (Stanon researchers, Kamwangamalu, Finlayson and Slabbert et al) as well as the phonetic, morphological and syntactic aspects of English and Afrikaans adoptives in the Bantu languages (Koopman et al). These descriptions do not make any projections as to where issues such as incremental codeswitching (CS) and adoptives can be seen as against a broader picture in the lifecycle of a language. Even taken against a brief historical perspective of some 20 years, the shift of the African languages has been characterized by a merging process and at the same time they have been dramatically incorporating the high prestige target language, English. The speakers see CS as enhancing the merging process.

Attempts at formulating a typology of the urban varieties have already been mentioned. However, the transcript of the learners' discussions, as well as their own interpretations of the accommodation process, have confirmed the conclusion that we came to in two recent papers (1997a, 1997b). Instead of a single BUV or koine for a specific urban area that functions as a lingua franca, non-standard varieties of all the African languages have developed in the urban areas as a result of the accommodation process and are used to accommodate. We acknowledge, however, that not all of them are equally relevant in a specific urban area and that their relevance would be determined further by the home languages of the interlocutors of a particular conversation.

Preliminary findings on certain linguistic devices that characterize the urban speech and that can be regarded as part of the accommodation process include (i) phonological truncations, (ii) morpheme elision, (iii) levelling of lexical items to a common denominator, including CS, and (iv) the use of specific patterns of CS, such as the use of the English and Afrikaans conjunctions and adverbs to simplify the verbal structure. Each of these is discussed below.

(i) Phonological adaptations

The phonological characteristics of the urban varieties have been studied in some detail (Stanon report), however, as has already been mentioned,

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with the emphasis on adoptives. One of the exceptions is Childs' article on Iscamtho (1995), an in-group urban variety with Bantu (mostly Zulu) as matrix language. He maintains (1995:11) "That the erosive processes at work on Zulu words are most heartily operant at word edges, *ukuthi* 'that', for example, becomes truncated to *kuthi* or even *kthi* [kt^{h}i]. This may signify that the rich morphological system of Zulu may be at peril." The transcript of the learners' discussions revealed similar truncations, e.g.:

ngolosithathu (cf. ngolwesithathu) "on Wednesday"
ma (cf. uma) "if"
a ye (cf. *ga e*) "but if"
ge ke ye (cf. *ga ke e*) "when I (it)"
(Zulu bold, Sotho italics)

(ii) Missing morphemes

As has been described in a previous paper (Finlayson & Slabbert 1997b:85) "missing constituents could either be regarded as indications of a convergence or a simplification process. Both possibilities were expressed by the speakers, on the one hand recognising their speech variety as a new language and on the other hand using the description "diluted" to refer to it." This was indeed also found to be the case with the research findings from Mamelodi where the simplification process of omitting morphemes similarly took place. These are exemplified in [3] (Zulu) and [4] (Northern Sotho) below, where the non-standard may be compared with the standard. The missing morphemes are underlined in the standard versions.

[3] **Eze sonto OR amaCHORAL CHOIR - umculo okahle NOT ezamaCOMRADE amaCOMMUNISi.**

cf:

Ezasesontweni noma umculo wamakhwaya - umculo omuhle nje hhayi ngamakhomreyidi noma amakhomanisi.
(Church music or choral choir-music that is just ok, not music sung by comrades or communists.)

[4] *Nna a ke so CHOOSEe SPORT se ke se ratang ke sa SEARCHa. Ke* **dlala** *se seng le se seng se ka INTRODUCEiwang. Ke tla bona gore AT THE END ke tla FITa kae.*

cf.

Nna ga ke ešo ke kgethe moraloko wo ke o ratago, ke sa nyaka. Ke raloka se sengwe le sengwe seo se ka tlišwago. Ke tla bona gore mafelelong ke tla tsena kae.

(I have not chosen a sport which I like, I'm still searching. I play each and every sport that is introduced. I'll see at the end where I fit in.)

(iii) Levelling of lexical items to a common denominator (including CS)

This comes about as a result of a process of convergence in an attempt to suppress localisms in favour of features which are simply more common, better known (Samarin 1971:134 as quoted by Siegel 1985:364). For example, the Sotho languages have different words for "play", namely *bapala, raloka* (Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho), *tshameka* (Tswana), but the Nguni **dlala** as well as the non-standard form *tshanoka* (cf. 5 & 6 below) are becoming commonly used in all Sotho languages in the urban areas.

[5] *Ke* **dlala** *se seng le se seng se ka* INTRODUCE*iwang. Ke tla bona gore* AT THE END *ke* FIT*a kae. Ke* **dlala** SOCCER *yanong e n*KEEP*a* FIT.
(I play each and every sport that is introduced. I will see at the end where I fit in. At present I play soccer, it keeps me fit.)

So also with the following example:

[6] **Ngithanda ibholo** *MAAR* **ukukhuluma isiZulu ngihluleka** -SO **ngizokhuluma isiSotho** ONCE. *Nna ke rata go* **dlala** *bolo* SO *ke nyaka re* DEVELOP*e - la bona* TEAM *ya* SOUTH AFRICA - *e yang re tlo* REACH*a* STANDARD *seo le rena* MAYBE *re tla tshanokela* SOUTH AFRICA.
(I love football but speaking Zulu is difficult so I'll speak Sotho. I like playing football so I want us to develop – you can see the South African team – how it is we can reach their standard and maybe we will play for South Africa.)

The Sotho languages also have three forms for the English equivalent of "but", i.e. *fela, empša* (Northern Sotho), *empa* (Southern Sotho) and *mme* (Tswana). This might similarly explain the common use of the Afrikaans conjunction "maar" as in examples 6 and 7.

[7] *Ne ke ya ye rata bolo,* MAAR *go na le bothata o* KRY*a re* **dlala** *bolo* MAAR *go se na batho ba re fang* SUPPORT.

cf.

Ke be ke e rata kgwele fela *go na le bothata o humana re raloka kgwele* empša *go se na batho bao ba re fago thekgo.*
(I like it, but the problem is you find us playing soccer, but there is no one to give us support.)

(iv) Specific patterns of CS

Specific patterns of CS, such as the use of the English and Afrikaans

conjunctions and adverbs including examples such as "but", "if", "maar", "besides", "so", "eintlik" and "mostly" are also devices which may be used to simplify the verbal structure. As demonstrated in example 1a above, the English adverb "mostly" is used instead of the Zulu auxiliary **mana**. Similarly "and then" replaces the use of the narrative or subjunctive mood. In example 6 the translation of the second "so" as well as "maybe" would also require the subjunctive.

The use of the Afrikaans "maar" (but) as in examples 6 and 7 is extremely common in the urban varieties. Contrary to the previous examples, though, both Nguni and Sotho equivalents would require the use of the indicative. However, it is interesting to note that the syntactic structure of the ensuing clause conforms more to English, i.e. in this case "maar" allows for greater syntactic flexibility.

A further simplification process may be exemplified by the repetitive use of "that is why" in example 8. In Zulu each of these contexts would have required a different construction.

[8]   THAT IS WHY, **mina ngibona isiZulu kuyi**LANGUAGE *e* **abantu bayizwisisa masinya,** THAT IS WHY **sikhona ukuyikhuluma nabeSuthu** – THAT IS WHY **siyikhuluma - njengabantu abaphuma ngaphandle, amakwerekwere, bakhona ukukhuluma isiZulu bafika bakhulume isiZulu, hayi isiSuthu.**

cf:

Yingakho-ke mina ngibona isiZulu kuwulimi abantu abaluzwisisa masinya, ngakho-ke singakhuluma sona uma sikhuluma nabeSuthu - yikho-ke sikhuluma sona - njengabantu abavela ngaphandle kwaleli zwe bayasazi isiZulu futhi bakhuluma sona nxa befika, hhayi isiSuthu.
(That is why, I see that Zulu is a language which people can understand quickly, that is why we can speak it with the Sothos – that is why we speak it – just like people who come from outside, the foreigners, they can speak Zulu when they arrive they speak Zulu, not Sotho.)

Although the findings are preliminary, all of the above (i–iv) point towards various degrees of levelling and/or simplification as a result of language contact. Both the linguistic composition and the social context in which they function are extremely complex and defy a singular label. Not only are linguistic subsystems of various levels involved (different dialects or varieties of the same language, as well as mutually intelligible languages of the same language family), but also languages of other Bantu language families, as well as the colonial high-prestige target language English and the neocolonial Afrikaans. This would mean that the parameters defining a koinization

process, i.e. "the mixing of linguistic subsystems ... characterized by a mixture of features of these varieties and most often by reduction or simplification in comparison" (Siegel 1985:363), as well as those defining a creolization process, i.e. speakers from different ethnic groups in contact with a high-prestige target language (Arends, Muysken & Smith 1994, chapter 1) are simultaneously operational. Evidence from quantitative as well as qualitative studies (Slabbert & Van den Berg 1993; Calteaux 1994) indicates that nativization is taking place, but it would not seem as if the urban varieties have yet stabilized. Whether the outcome will be resembling koinization or creolization is difficult to predict at this stage.

CONCLUSIONS

Over the past twenty years the African languages have literally been "gobbled up" by the colonial languages in the urban centres. However, the devastating effect of glottophagia will be very difficult to counter in a situation where the esteem and function customarily associated with a standard form is lacking, as has been exemplified by the attitudes of learners in Mamelodi. If the speakers of the African languages would want this process of glottophagia to be countered at all and thereby to retain their linguistic identity, both the learners and the teachers should recognize a need for the use of these languages. In other words, it is essential that functions for the African languages should be created. Empty sentimental gestures towards the retention and use of the African languages serve no purpose. Rather functions that make business and political sense should be created for the African languages.

On the other hand, a standard form that relentlessly clings to a language version that cannot accommodate a modern environment undermines its own functionality. Some compromise will have to be found to take the African languages of South Africa into the third millenium as vibrant, modern, yet distinctly African in nature.

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