Aphasia in Afrikaans: A preliminary analysis

Claire Penn*, Analou Venter°, Dale Ogilvy°

*University of the Witwatersrand °University of Cape Town

Abstract—The language of a group of mildly impaired aphasic subjects speaking Cape Afrikaans in South Africa was compared with a group of matched controls. A narrative task was used to elicit samples and analysis methods included productivity, syntax and coherence measures, as well as ethnic, stylistic and pragmatic variables. The strongly bilingual tradition of this group became apparent in the results. Syntactic and productivity measures differentiated the groups to some extent, particularly in relation to the mechanism of verb movement. More marked differences were noted in aspects of coherence. Features such as code-switching, word order changes and stylistic intensification are interpreted as providing a robust compensatory and scaffolding structure for some of the primary aphasic deficits in this sample.

Key words: Aphasia, Afrikaans, Narrative, Bilingual, Verb, Coherence.

South Africa is a country with a wide diversity of cultures and languages, earning its epithet of "the rainbow nation." Most of its inhabitants speak at least two languages, if not several. Eleven of these languages have been afforded official status but many more exist. Further, there is wide dialectal and regional variation.

One of the languages unique to South Africa which has a relatively short history, yet ironically is one of the most comprehensively documented, is Afrikaans. It has existed much in today's form from about 1850, and was given legal recognition in 1925 when it became the language of the church and government. It is a language that is diverse in terms of region, dialect and social class, originating from not only the Dutch used by the 17th century settlers in South Africa, but also having features of Malay, Portuguese, Khoekhoe, French and German as well as English (Combrink, 1978; Roberge, 1995).

This language is the home language of a large number of people in South Africa (seven million) and until very recently was the medium of education for a number of non first language speakers (Kroes, 1978). Viewed as the "language of the oppressor" for many years, it has been the topic of extensive debate among politicians and educationalists and in the formulation of the language policy of the new South African government (Herbert, 1992; Alexander, 1996).

Structure of Afrikaans

The structure of Afrikaans has been described in detail by authors such as Combrink (1978), Donaldson (1993), Raidt (1994) and Oosthuizen (1996). Because of a relative

paucity of early documentation, there remain debates about the issues such as its exact genesis and its status as a partially creolized language. However, among points of note for the aphasiologist are the following:

- Afrikaans has been classified both as an SVO and an SOV language because both patterns are seen (McCormick, 1995). However, like Dutch, it is probably best described as an SVOV language, meaning that the base generated position of the verb is after the object and that the auxiliary is in the verb second position.
- It lacks verb inflections in the present indicative and has no inflectional endings for number or person, attributed by Combrink (1978) to early contact situations between Germanic dialects.
- It has a regular orthography.
- There is reduplication (hypothesized to be of Malay origin) of all major categories such adjectives, adverbs, nouns, verbs and numbers – intensifying the meaning of the message e.g. Hy het staan-staan die koffie gedrink and toe gery.
  He drank the coffee while standing (standing-standing), and then he rode away. (Combrink, 1978)
- There is a reduplication of the negative marker. If the VP of a sentence consists of a single verb, the negative *nie* is placed directly after the verb. If the VP is more complex two *nies* are used, one after the verb and one at the end. Complicators include Object NPs, additional verbs, adverbials, adjectives or subordination. This double *nie* was inherited from 17th century Dutch though it has been noted that the second *nie* is dropped in modern forms of Afrikaans (Oosthuizen, 2000).
- There is a high proportion of compound words.
- There is a marked use of loan words primarily from English, present particularly in colloquial speech and somewhat frowned upon by the early purists (Donaldson, 1995).
- The preposition *vir* (for) is frequently used before a human indirect object (hypothesized to be of Portuguese origin) e.g. gee dit vir hom *give it to him* (Donaldson,1995:343)
- There is a retention of some Dutch forms, some of which are present in older, less mobile users of the language e.g. *gaat/gaan* (go), *slaat/slaan* (hit).

Cape Afrikaans

One group, for whom a distinctive dialectal version of Afrikaans has developed, is a group of mixed racial heritage, the so-called 'Coloured' group, largely resident in the Cape Province. This community developed through events of Dutch colonization in the seventeenth century and the interaction between the settlers and the indigenous people of the Cape. There are estimated to be more than 3 million users of Cape Afrikaans, which differs from the language of standard Afrikaans speakers in a number of different ways. These have been highlighted by van Rensburg (1997), McCormick (1989;1995), Kotze (1993), van der Reede (1983) and others, and include differences in phonology, lexicon, syntax and stylistic variables. Code-switching and code-mixing is another aspect which has been documented extensively in this dialect and which reflects