


Vernacular Afrikaans: descriptions and attitudes

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When it comes to research on language attitudes towards Afrikaans, there are only a few recent studies keeping track of this social phenomenon which do not focus on Afrikaans-in-education¹ (see Álvarez-Mosquera & Marín-Gutiérrez 2018; Coetzee-Van Rooy & Peters 2021; Neethling 2023)². This is especially true for language attitudes towards specific vernacular varieties of Afrikaans.

Studying language attitudes has an important role to play in language planning and policy making. Respondents can rate either their own variety or other varieties, providing important information in terms of understanding the different social standings of the relevant varieties.

This need for more language attitude research relates to a larger research gap: the lack of sufficient recent descriptive information on Afrikaans vernacular varieties³. Without comprehensive research on these varieties, applied sociolinguistic studies, such as those undertaken in language attitude research, are often left to work with “informal” assumptions. In a *Festschrift* to Andries Coetzee, it is appropriate to highlight the importance of descriptive work on Afrikaans and other languages in complementing language attitude research.

Take for example the Afrikaans variety primarily associated with Gauteng and its northern regions (Wissing 2006), also sometimes called “Transvaal Afrikaans” due to its apparent geographic distribution⁴. Although this variety seems to be well known on an informal level⁵, much remains to be discovered (see Wissing 2019:171). To the best of the author’s knowledge, most research on this variety has been and is being⁶ conducted on its phonetic and phonological features (Du Plessis 1983; Louw 1981; Wissing 2006; Wissing 2019). In this regard, the two main features associated with this variety are /a/-rounding and /ɛ/-lowering.

¹ Afrikaans language attitude studies in education and in other applied domains also seem limited (see Saal & Maritz 2022: 708).

²See De Klerk and Bosch (1994) and Verhoef (1995) for older studies.

³ There has only recently been a formal call for more research on Afrikaans varieties. Consider the project: ProVARIA. <https://viva-afrikaans.org/lees-luister/blog/item/1427-provaria-vind-n-tuiste-in-viva-se-nuwe-variasieportaal>

⁴ Some studies suggest that this variety is also present in areas of Kwa-Zulu Natal and the Free State (see Louw 1981:263;265).

⁵As evidence see, for example, the Polka advertisement. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKBL657jq-Q> (Accessed 11 November 2021).

⁶Consider research that currently falls under the LaPASC project. <https://lapasc.co.za/>

However, little formal evidence exists about its true recent distribution, its lexical properties, and whether this variety, which is stereotypically attributed to young white females (Wissing 2006; 2019), is also used by young white males from the same regions. Formal language attitude research on this variety is close to non-existent (see Neethling 2023). In Wissing's (2006) study of /a/-rounding as a prominent feature in this variety, he briefly refers to language attitudes towards it. According to him, many people find this feature strange, even disturbing and reprehensible (Wissing 2006:88). This observation and these impressions are of course useful, but yet to be confirmed by a formal study.

Furthermore, the link between regional variation and language attitudes can also be explored through variables such as ethnicity. It would be useful, therefore, to compare Afrikaans varieties, as used by certain ethnic groups across different regions, as well as language attitudes towards these varieties. For example, how Afrikaans is used in Eersterust or Claremont (in Gauteng), which are both mainly inhabited by coloured⁷ speakers of Afrikaans; and, in turn, how this compares to, for example, Eersterivier, or even Bishop Lavis, in Cape Town. Also, how do these speakers' attitudes towards their own and other varieties of Afrikaans compare?

Although applied linguistic studies, such as language attitude research, can still be conducted without wide-ranging descriptive information on Afrikaans vernacular varieties, more descriptive information will greatly contribute to the validity of these applied studies.

This *Festschrift* celebrates Andries Coetzee's important and continuous engagement with descriptive work in languages such as Afrikaans, which is of great importance when used in tandem with more applied approaches, such as language attitude research.

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⁷ Unfortunately, this term might carry a negative connotation to some due to its association with the apartheid regime.

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