FOURTEEN

Toward a Pedagogy of Possibility in the Teaching of English Internationally: People's English in South Africa

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The project of possibility requires an education rooted in a view of human freedom as the understanding of necessity and the transformation of necessity.

<div align="right">(Simon, 1987, p. 375)</div>

The phenomenal spread of the English language throughout the world is an uncontested fact: English is used by about 750 million people, only half of whom speak it as a mother tongue. More than half of the world's technical and scientific periodicals are in English, and English is the medium for 80% of the information stored in the world's computers. Three quarters of the world's mail, telexes, and cables are in English. As McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil (1986) state, "Whatever the total, English at the end of the twentieth century is more widely scattered, more widely spoken and written, than any other language has ever been. It has become the language of the planet, the first truly global language" (p. 19).

If English is indeed the first truly international language, it is also a subject of controversy. English has been recently described as both an "alchemy" (Kachru 1986) and a "Trojan horse" (Cooke 1988). For Kachru, "knowing

English is like possessing the fabled Aladdin's lamp, which permits one to open, as it were, the linguistic gates of international business, technology, science, and travel. In short, English provides linguistic power" (p. 1). For Cooke, on the other hand, English is a language of "cultural intrusion...in a very real way, English is a property of elites, expressing the interests of the dominant classes" (p. 59).

This debate is important for teachers of English internationally: If we are implicated in producing and perpetuating inequalities in the communities in which we teach, we are accountable for our actions. Clearly, as Judd (1983, 1987) and Walters (1989) argue, teachers of English should be aware that teaching is a political act. Judd argues that the teaching of English as a second or foreign language can (and should) raise moral dilemmas for teachers. Are we contributing to the demise of certain languages or linguistic communities? Does the teaching of ESL or EFL serve to entrench the power of an elite, privileged group of people who may have little interest in the welfare of the majority of the people in the country? Do teachers of ESL sometimes participate in a process that "nurtures illusion" (Judd 1983, p. 271)? Cooke (1988) is less tentative than Judd in his conclusions:

> Faced with the doubts that seem to me to characterize English as a world language, I would argue that as teachers of EFL we need to be very aware of the potential dangers of English, and take them into account in preparation and teaching. (p. 60)

Although the issues raised by Kachru, Cooke, Walters, and Judd are important ones, I believe there is another approach to the teaching of English that can contribute, in a qualitatively different way, to the debate on the international role of English teaching. I argue, drawing on the work of Simon (Giroux and Simon 1984; Simon 1987, 1988), that the teaching of English can be reconceptualized as a pedagogy that opens up possibilities for students and teachers of English, not only in terms of material advancement, but in terms of the way they perceive themselves, their role in society, and the potential for change in their society. Such a conceptualization will necessitate a theoretical framework different from that presupposed by Kachru and Cooke, for an understanding of what language is and how it functions in society. It will also necessitate a reconsideration of the prevailing methodologies in the teaching of English internationally.

Proceeding from a reconceptualization of language as "discourse," in the sense in which it is used in poststructuralist theories of language, I argue against the prevailing emphasis on communicative competence as an adequate formulation of principles on which to base the teaching of English. This assessment leads to a proposal for a pedagogy of possibility to complement prevailing methodologies in ESL. Finally, the current movement in South Africa for "People's English" is examined to illustrate how the teaching of English can indeed be undertaken as a pedagogy of possibility, an approach that challenges inequality in society rather than perpetuating it. The attempts of organizations opposed to apartheid to appropriate both the form and functions of English in the interests of freedom and possibility are described. This discussion is thus an exploratory response to Judd's persistent question of what is to be done in the teaching of English internationally.

Theories of language

Despite differences in their interpretation of the function and role of English internationally, a common feature of the work of both Kachru (1986) and Cooke (1988) is their underlying view of the nature of language and its role in society. Kachru and Cooke both perceive language, in this case, English, as a *neutral* object that has political ramifications only insofar as it can lead to material advancement for those who are fortunate enough to acquire it. Thus, Kachru argues that "English is associated with a small but elite group, but it is in their role that the *neutrality* [italics added] of a language becomes vital" (p. 9). Similarly, Cooke argues that "it is not, of course, the nature of English itself that permits such high status, but the social foundation on which it is based" (p. 59).

To begin an exploration of the theory of language that dominates English language teaching, I would like to turn to Kachru's (1986) defense of the use of English in India on the grounds of its perceived neutrality.

> English does have one clear advantage, attitudinally and linguistically: it has acquired a neutrality in a linguistic context where native languages, dialects, and styles sometimes have acquired undesirable connotations. Whereas native codes are functionally marked in terms of caste, religion, region, and so forth, English has no such "markers", at least in the nonnative context. (p. 9)

I would argue, however, that this analysis is theoretically inadequate. The "nonmarked" nature of English (as Kachru perceives it) is not a reflection of the "neutrality" of English within a particular context, but a reflection of the very political nature of English within this context. Clearly, the way English is used in Indian society (whether this is considered marked or unmarked) has important implications for the way people perceive themselves and their relationship to others in their society. Surely this role is not a neutral one.

What theoretical framework would adequately reflect the powerful role of language, not only as Saussure's (1959) "system of signs that *express* [italics added] ideas" (p. 16), but also as a system that is implicated in constituting the way we perceive ourselves and our society? I would argue that the poststructuralist theory of language as *discourse* is sufficiently powerful to explain why English is far from neutral in the context described by Kachru above. Since the notion of discourse is already entrenched in the literature on English language teaching, I would like to draw a distinction between the way the term is currently used and the way I believe its meaning can be usefully extended.

In sociolinguistics, *discourse* refers to "a continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence...at its most general, a discourse is a set of utterances which constitute any recognizable speech event e.g. a conversation, a joke, a sermon, an interview" (Crystal 1980, p. 114). Interest in discourse had led to a search for the sociolinguistic rules that determine the progress of discourse (Halliday 1973; Hymes 1979); investigation of the kind of discourse that takes place in classrooms (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975); research on how sentences are related in terms of cohesion and coherence (Widdowson 1978); and examination of how such a theory might influence the teaching of ESL (Brumfit and Johnson 1979; Widdowson 1978). It was within this set of theoretical positions that the field of ESL adopted a "communicative" approach to the teaching of English (Canale and Swain 1980).

This conception of discourse, although important and relevant to an understanding of language in use, should, I believe, extend beyond an exploration of units of language larger than the sentence if we are to understand why language in general, and English in particular, is not neutral. Discourses, in a poststructuralist theory of language, are the complexes of signs and practices that organize social existence and social reproduction. In this view, a discourse delimits the range of possible practices under its authority and organizes how these practices are realized in time and space: A discourse is thus a particular way of organizing meaning-making practices. The most powerful discourses in our society have established institutional bases in the law, in medicine, in social welfare, in education, and in the organization of the family and work. Different people can have different and unequal experiences of these discourses. The social meanings produced within these discourses are constituted in language and by language—hence the centrality of language to poststructuralist theory.

Although there are a range of positions that have been called poststructuralist, I am drawing specifically on the writings that reflect the relationship between language, power, and historical change (see Belsey 1980; Cherryholmes 1988; Foucault 1984; Terdiman 1985; Weedon 1987). In a poststructuralist theory of language, language is not only an abstract structure, but a practice that is socially constructed, produces change, and is changed in human life: "Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed" (Weedon 1987, p. 21).

Discourses thus have cultural and political corollaries and are implicated in the way we perceive ourselves and our role in society. The discourses of the classroom, the church, the family, and the corporation are implicated in relations of power within which participants take up different subject positions, positions that are constituted in and by language. Taking up a subject position implies that the subject—the person—is actively engaged in making meaning of his or her life, but is nevertheless constrained by the regulating norms of the discourse in question. When participants cannot find subject positions for themselves within a particular discourse, they may be silenced, or they may attempt to contest or challenge the dominant discourse. Thus, Terdiman (1985) argues that "no dominant discourse is ever fully protected from contestation...the counter-discourse always projects, just over its own horizon, the dream of victoriously replacing its antagonist" (p. 56).

English, like all other languages, is thus a site of struggle over meaning, access, and power. This struggle takes on different forms in different societies, communities, and organizations. Ndebele (1987), commenting on the future role of English in South Africa, states:

> I think we should not be critically complacent about the role and future of English in South Africa, for there are many reasons why it cannot be considered an innocent language. The problems of society will also be the problems of the predominant language of that society. It is the carrier of its perceptions, its attitudes, and its goals, for through it, the speakers absorb entrenched attitudes. The guilt of English must then be recognized and appreciated before its continued use can be advocated. (p. 11)

A poststructuralist theory of language helps to explain why English may be a tainted language for Ndebele and a neutral language for Kachru. Following Foucault (1984), I would argue that the discourse of which Ndebele is a part differs radically from that of Kachru, as a result of Ndebele's and Kachru's having taken up different subject positions vis-à-vis the discourse of English in their societies. In both cases, however, English is implicated in relations of power and dominance.

Pedagogical implications of a poststructuralist theory of language

How might the understanding of English as discourse affect the teaching of English internationally? I would argue that the teaching of English for communicative competence is in itself inadequate as a language-teaching goal if English teachers are interested in exploring how language shapes the subjectivities of their students and how it is implicated in power and dominance. What, then, are the limitations of a theory that has dominated English language teaching and research for the past 20 years? Hymes (1979), who first articulated this theory, argues (in response to Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance):

> We have to account for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner.... The engagement of language in social life has a positive, productive aspect. There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless. (p. 15)

Although it is important for the teacher and learner of English to know the "rules of use" of the language in a given society, I believe it is equally important for teachers and students to explore a second-order series of questions: Why do such rules exist? Whose interests do such rules serve? Have these rules been contested? Do these rules limit possibilities for our students? Are there other sets of rules that can expand possibilities?

If we teach students to use the English language in a way consistent with appropriate usage at a particular time and place, we may run the risk of limiting our students' perceptions of how English can be used in society. We may indeed be implicated in perpetuating inequalities in society. In South Africa, for example, it is still appropriate for black people within some communities to refer to white male supervisors as *master*. It might be appropriate in some societies for women to defer to men in social interaction.

Although students need to know how English is governed by certain rules of use within a society, they also need to explore how English can be used to challenge the very conditions on which these sociolinguistic rules are based. If we teach English in a way that promotes a student's uncritical integration into a society, students will lack the tools to question the predetermined roles established for them by that society. Conversely, if we teach our students that appropriate usage, although useful to acquire, is nevertheless historically and

materially constructed to support the interests of a dominant group within a given society, we can open up possibilities for our students in terms of how they perceive themselves, their role in society, and the possibilities for change and growth in their society.

Thus, the teaching of English internationally is a discourse — a discourse in which teachers and students take up different subject positions. The nature of the subject positions we take up as teachers will be determined by our perception of the nature of the discourse and our role within it. If we adopt the view that the discourse of English language teaching is implicated in power relations within the classroom, the community, and society at large, we need to reexamine the methodology we adopt in our English language classrooms, the content from which we draw our lessons, and the learning goals that we set for our students.

The teaching of English, like any other pedagogical act, can reinforce existing inequalities in a society, but it can also help to expose these inequalities and, more important, help students explore alternative possibilities for themselves and their societies. It follows that if we wish to be part of a discourse that opens up possibilities for our students, we need a more powerful theory than that of communicative competence to inform our teaching.

Toward a pedagogy of possibility

The kind of methodology that can be adopted to explore the rules of English in use and to examine critically the conditions that give rise to these rules is what Simon (1987, 1988) calls a pedagogy of possibility. Because this pedagogy is central to an understanding of what teachers of English might do in their classrooms, let us explore these concepts in some detail.

It is significant that Simon (1988) draws a distinction between teaching and pedagogy:

> There is an important distinction to be made between the notions "teaching" and "pedagogy". Usually, talk about teaching refers to specific strategies and techniques to use in order to meet predefined, given objectives...however, it is an insufficient basis for constituting a practice whose aim is the enhancement of human possibility. What is required is a discourse about practice that references not only what we as educators might actually do; but as well, the social visions such practices would support....Pedagogy is simultaneously about the details of what students and others might do together *and* the cultural politics such practices support. Thus, to propose a pedagogy is to propose a political vision. (p. 2)

In essence, Simon is arguing that teaching, like language, is not a neutral practice. Teachers, whether consciously or not, help to organize the way students perceive themselves and the world. Thus, teachers of English are involved in a pedagogical practice of "cultural politics." The appeal of Simon's philosophy, however, is that such a situation, far from limiting the practice of what goes on in classrooms, offers many possibilities for growth among both teachers and students within a pedagogy of "empowerment":

> To empower is to enable those who have been silenced to speak. It is to enable the self-affirming expression of experiences mediated by one's history, language

and traditions. It is to enable those who have been marginalized economically and culturally to claim in both respects a status as full participating members of a community. (Simon 1987, p. 374)

Empowerment is a term that has little currency in the teaching of English. We are, however, familiar with the notions of "self-directed learning" (Dickinson 1987). Both approaches adopt the position that learners should take greater responsibility for their own learning: "Self-instruction is concerned with responsibility in learning. Individuals who are involved in self-instruction (as learners) have undertaken some additional responsibility for their own learning which in other circumstances would be held on their behalf by a teacher" (Dickinson 1987, p. 8).

What, then, is the distinction between empowerment and self-directed learning? It can be argued that whereas the self-directed learner is encouraged to take greater responsibility for success in learning, the empowered learner is encouraged to take greater responsibility for success in life. *Success* here is defined not only in terms of material advancement, but in terms of the learner's greater understanding and critical appreciation of his or her own subjectivity and relationship to the wider society. In particular, the empowered learner seeks to address the contradictions that might exist between the capacities that teachers encourage and the forms a society provides for these capacities to be realized.

As ESL teachers, we need to address the persistent question of whether our concern with communicative competence and self-directed learning limits the possibilities for growth in our students by emphasizing what is appropriate as opposed to empowering students by encouraging them to explore what might be desirable. Thus, a project of possibility empowers students "to critically appropriate forms of knowledge outside of their immediate experience, to envisage versions of a world which is 'not yet' in order to alter the grounds on which life is lived" (Simon 1988, p. 2).

Adopting a pedagogy of possibility is a bold venture. And it is not unreasonable to ask for examples of how such a pedagogy might operate in a particular place at a given time. For this I turn to South Africa, where teachers, parents, and students have indeed been sufficiently bold to attempt to develop a blueprint for what might constitute a pedagogy of possibility in the teaching of English in South Africa: People's English.

People's English in South Africa

The History of People's English

Language teaching is a site of struggle in South Africa (Janks in press). In a population of 30 million people, only 5 million people speak one of the two official languages of English and Afrikaans. The majority of the people, black South Africans, speak one, and frequently more than one, of a number of languages such as Sotho, Zulu, and Xhosa. The Soweto riots of 1976 were sparked off by the attempt to enforce Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools (Peirce 1987). In a society in which inequality and the unequal sharing of resources are entrenched in the laws of the land, school unrest among the disenfranchised is marked only by differing degrees of intensity.

During the recent series of protests in South Africa, a National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) was established in an attempt to address the continuing crisis in black education. The theme of the first national conference, held in December 1985, was "People's Education for People's Power" (Muller 1987). Some of the resolutions passed at this conference include the following:

People's Education is education that:

- enables the oppressed to understand the evils of the Apartheid system and prepares them for participation in a non-racial, democratic system
- eliminates illiteracy, ignorance and exploitation of any person by another
- allows students, parents, teachers and workers to be mobilised into appropriate organizational structures which enable them to enhance the struggle for people's power and to participate actively in the initiation and management of people's education in all its forms (*SASPU* [South African Students Press Union] *National*, 1986/1987, p. 29)

At the second national conference, held in March 1986, a decision was made to establish two education commissions that would address the issue of what curricula and syllabuses would support the spirit of People's Education. It is significant that the first two commissions established were a People's History Commission and a People's English Commission. Clearly, the political nature of both these subjects was a focus of attention of members of the NECC. The struggle for People's English in South Africa must therefore be located within the struggle for People's Education because the proposals of the People's English Commission are informed by the resolutions of the National Education Crisis Committee.

A press statement issued by the NECC on November 27, 1986, contained the proposals of the People's English Commission and also called for a third national conference of the NECC to meet on November 29–30, 1986. Muller (1987) argues that it was at this stage—when People's Education began to take on a more explicit form within the guidelines proposed by the People's English and the People's History Commissions—that the NECC felt the full might of the state. Not only was the third national conference banned, but the state invoked the Public Safety Act of 1953, which provides for the prohibition of all nonapproved syllabuses, courses, books, and pamphlets. There was simultaneously a major crackdown on the leaders and activities of the NECC, which at the time of this writing (March 1989) was still in effect.

What was it that the state found so threatening in People's English? My argument is this: Because the People's English Commission made no claim to neutrality and paid little heed to linguistic rules of use in South Africa, People's English represents a pedagogy of possibility for the majority of South Africans and consequently a threat to minority rule.

People's English as a pedagogy of possibility

Gardiner (1987) captures the spirit of People's English in the following words:

People's English cannot construct itself upon the implementation of the English as a Second/Foreign Language principles generated so industriously and marketed so assiduously by British universities, publishers and agents of its Foreign

Office. That would be tantamount to changing the names of the actors but retaining the same old play. Not only should future syllabi be reconceptualised; they must proceed from different principles. (p. 60)

Gardiner's words explicitly challenge the principles on which the teaching of English internationally is based, principles that conform to rules of use within a given society and determine the communicative competence of second language speakers of English in that society. On what alternative principles, then, did the People's English Commission proceed?

1. *The recognition of the political nature of language.* Of crucial importance to an understanding of People's English is an understanding of the social vision embraced by members of the Commission. As a preamble, the Commission states that the proposals for People's English aim to assist all learners, among other things, to understand the evils of apartheid and to think and speak in nonracist, nonsexist, and nonelitist ways; to determine their own destinies and to free themselves from oppression; to use English effectively for their own purposes; to express and consider the issues and questions of their time (National Education Crisis Committee, 1986/1987).

    Implicit in these aims is the view that language, and English in particular, is not a neutral practice. It plays a constitutive role in determining how people think, speak, and act. In a society in which racism, sexism, and elitism are considered appropriate in many communities, the teaching of rules of use in these communities would simply perpetuate inequality. It takes a pedagogy of possibility rather than a communicative approach to enable these students of English to "free themselves from oppression."

2. A *reconceptualization of the meaning of* language competence. For the Commission, language competence extends *beyond* an understanding of the rules that govern the English language and the appropriate use of English within South African society. People's English redefines language competence to include the ability to say and write what one means; to hear what is said and what is hidden; to defend one's point of view; to argue, to persuade, to negotiate; to create, to reflect, to invent; to explore relationships, personal, structural, political; to speak, read, and write with confidence; to make one's voice heard; to read print and resist it where necessary (National Education Crisis Committee, 1986/1987). Language competence is thus redefined to include an understanding of language as socially and historically constructed, but at the same time open to dispute.

3. *An understanding of language education as process.* Process is understood to involve

    > exploration through language. It involves discussion and revision, and an understanding of how parts are eventually related to the whole. Process values the contributions of all the learners and makes every member of the group responsible for the learning experience. The teacher's role is to make this possible. (National Education Crisis Committee, 1986/1987, p. 38)

Although an emphasis on process in the learning of language is receiving a great deal of attention in the ESL literature, this emphasis in the South

African context is especially significant. In a society in which national school-leaving examinations play a large role in determining the future of most South Africans, product-oriented teaching and learning receive an inordinate amount of attention in schools. The state assumes the responsibility for determining what material is to be mastered, and the teacher has the responsibility for passing on this information to students. In such an environment, it is difficult for a teacher to engage in "pedagogy" as defined by Simon above. This is particularly true for black teachers, one of whom observed:

> The syllabuses are very full. They have so much in them we can never finish them. If we keep to the syllabus, we have no time at all to teach anything else. The Department makes sure of that! Packing the syllabus is one way of controlling what we can teach in schools. (cited in Christie, 1985, p. 149)

4. *The importance of consultation in the language learning and teaching process.* The People's English proposals were drafted as suggestions, not as a fixed set of objectives for a well-defined curriculum. The document (National Education Crisis Committee, 1986/1987) is punctuated throughout with questions such as the following:

> Do you support these aims? (p. 38)
>
> Do you agree with the specific proposals which follow? (p. 38)
>
> The committee needs your response to these specific suggestions about method, content and language competence. (p. 38)

Clearly, the proponents of People's English see themselves within the tradition of consultation that characterizes much of the literature and debate over People's Education (Alexander 1987) and that is consistent with the principles of a pedagogy of possibility. This approach stands in stark contrast to the authoritarian nature of schooling in South Africa, in which the state controls departments of education, departments control inspectors, inspectors control teachers, and teachers control students. As one black teacher said of the school inspectors:

> They're always visiting us and checking up on what we're doing! Every second week they're there. They make sure that we stick to the syllabus. They listen to our lessons. They look at the tests we set. They're there to control us, man, not to help us. With all this inspection, there's no time left for real education—only for drilling students. (cited in Christie 1985, p. 149)

Simon's (1987) views on what constitutes a "project of possibility" provide a theoretical framework for understanding the principles outlined above.

> A project of possibility...constitutes an agenda well beyond conventional notions of equal opportunity. Equal opportunity is defined in reference to an individual's position within given state or market-regulated social forms. Within a given form it means equal access to comparable opportunities provided within that form, be it a job, education, housing, protection, etc. A project of possibility on the other hand would require that we expand the range of both

capacities and forms within our communities. The agenda is to create practices that encourage, make possible, and enable the realization of differentiated human capacities. (p. 374)

It is clear that proponents of People's English do not view it as one of the "New Englishes" such as Indian English, Nigerian English, or Singaporean English (Kachru 1986, p. 121). People's English is not distinguished syntactically, semantically, or phonetically from the spectrum of English usage currently found in South Africa. Thus, it does not operate within a sociolinguistic frame of reference. If it did, it might have been referred to as South African English or Azanian English. The intention, however, is not to distinguish People's English from British English or American English, but People's English from Apartheid English.

The issues at stake here are *not* the linguistic features of English spoken in South Africa, but the central political issues of how English is to be taught in the schools; who has access to the language; how English is implicated in the power relations dominant in South Africa; and the effect of English on the way speakers of the language perceive themselves, their society, and the possibilities for change in that society. Thus, in South Africa, where language is an ongoing site of struggle, People's English is best understood as a counterdiscourse to the dominant discourse in which the English language is implicated in the current power relations in the country.

It follows that People's English is not conceived of as an English for nonnative speakers of English alone (M. Gardiner, personal communication, July 11, 1988). It is an English for all those people who support the principles and methods of People's English, whether black or white, rich or poor, male or female, native speaker of English or native speaker of Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, or Afrikaans. What pedagogical tools, then, would proponents of People's English advocate? What content would best express the spirit of People's English?

The comic book as a pedagogical tool of People's English

An example of how an antiapartheid organization, the South African Council of Higher Education (SACHED), has given expression to a pedagogy of possibility in the teaching of English was the production and publication in June 1988 of *Down Second Avenue: The Comic*, which is based on the novel of the same name by esteemed South African writer Ezekial Mphahlele. It describes in pictorial form the experiences of the writer growing up under apartheid and his decision to go into exile in Nigeria. The first half of the comic book contains the pictorial story itself, and the second half of the book contains many interesting exercises that help readers to engage with the text as well as to develop their own writing and reading skills in imaginative and interactive ways. At the end of the comic book is a suggested bibliography of books for readers at different levels.

The organization that published the comic is unequivocal in its social vision. It describes itself on the inside cover of the comic as follows:

> The SACHED Trust is an educational organization which aims to counter the imbalance created by the apartheid education system. The Trust is committed

to establishing participatory, non-discriminatory and non-authoritarian learning processes. It seeks to transfer skills and resources in such a way that organisations, communities and individuals are empowered to take charge of their own projects.

The imaginative exercises and tasks set out in the second half of the comic provide many opportunities for exploration through language. Readers are encouraged to "work with a friend" in order to develop the skills of reading, writing, and critical thinking. The exercises draw on the visual representations in the comic, and multiple readings of the text are validated. Consider the following instructions:

> Look carefully at the following pictures. How much information can you get from them? Answer the questions about each one....Compare your answer with a friend's. Pictures can be interpreted in different ways and so your ideas may differ. That is why we have not given you any answers to refer to. (South African Council of Higher Education, 1988, p. 15)

In addition, the text is punctuated with requests for readers to respond: "Did you find this comic interesting and enjoyable? Do you think we should produce more comics like this one? Please send us your comments. You may know of other stories which would make exciting comics. Write to..." (inside cover).

The kind of language competence encouraged in the comic, the methods used to enhance this competence, and the content covered in the comic are consistent with the spirit of People's English. The exercises in the comic enable students to "hear what is said and what is hidden; to create; to explore relationships; to read and write with confidence" (National Education Crisis Committee, 1986/1987, p. 39). In addition, they encourage the sharing and pooling of ideas, the collecting and recording of community-based experiences. It is significant that the comic draws attention to the young Mphahlele's developing consciousness: "At first political debates were just a jumble of words to me. Gradually as I listened I began to put in their proper place the scattered experiences of my life in Pretoria. Poverty, police raids, the curfew bell, humiliation..." (South African Council of Higher Education, 1988, p. 5).

The content covered in the comic differs markedly from the kind of content available in state-run English language classrooms. To quote the concerns of a Soweto English teacher:

> The reading books are all about white middle class children in England. This bears no relation to the culture of black children in Soweto—never mind the rural areas. It has nothing to do with the world they experience outside of school. These kinds of books do nothing to instil a love of reading in black children. (cited in Christie 1985, p. 149)

The form within which the content is presented is significant. It makes the writings of a respected black writer accessible to a wide audience, and it does so by utilizing the medium of the comic—an artifact of popular culture. Whereas a literary novel has a limited readership of highly literate people and is generally mediated by the interpretation given it within state-run institutions such as schools and universities, a comic book is far more easily accessible to the general

public, is cheaper to buy, and needs no mediation by an external "expert." It becomes part of a popular cultural discourse in which many South Africans can take up subject positions that are outside the control of the state.

Significantly, Giroux and Simon (1988) posit a fundamental similarity between pedagogy and popular culture:

> Both exist as subordinate discourses. For both liberals and radicals, pedagogy is often theorized as what is left after curriculum content is determined.... popular culture is still largely defined in the dominant discourse as the cultural residue which remains when high culture is subtracted from the overall totality of cultural practices. (p. 11)

For SACHED, as for Giroux and Simon, the fundamental issue is how a pedagogy of possibility can incorporate aspects of students' lived culture into pedagogical work without depicting the students as exotic or marginal, as an "other" within the dominant hegemonic culture.

The comic book had only just been published when it was banned from distribution. As stated in *Upbeat* magazine (1988):

> If you want a copy of the comic Down Second Avenue you can't have it. The government banned it in July....One reason given by the government for banning this comic was that: "with its bright cover and easily readable contents, this book will be read by thousands of scholars." (p. 3)

Why did the state choose to ban a comic based on a novel that had not only been available to the South African public since 1959 (*Down Second Avenue*, by Ezekial Mphahlele, Faber and Faber, London 1959), but had also appeared in the comic section of *Upbeat* magazine in 1981? It is likely that the state saw the comic book as a threat to its control over what is to be read, by whom, where, and for what purposes. If "thousands of scholars" had access to such a counter-discourse, the South African state's authority would certainly be challenged.

However, attempts by the state to stifle People's Education and People's English may be successful only insofar as they may drive the movement underground or curtail its activities. The state may be less successful in stifling a vision of a world that is "not yet." In the words of Alexander (1987):

> We have in the eighties in South Africa the great opportunity provided by the historic crisis into which the education particularly of the black people and their children has been catapulted to generate not only a new vision but also the means by which that vision can be realised. I have no doubt that our educators, our students and our parents will be willing and able to rise to the occasion. (p. 15)

In this section I have argued that People's English represents a pedagogy of possibility in the teaching of English in South Africa. The production of *Down Second Avenue: The Comic* provides an exciting example of how a text can be used to promote such a pedagogy of possibility in the South African context. Teachers of English in other parts of the world who are interested in opening up possibilities for their students could usefully draw on the South African experience: They could ask themselves the same kinds of questions that led the

People's English Commission to develop a blueprint for the pedagogical practice of English in South Africa. They could extend their students' focus on communicative competence and the prevailing linguistic rules of use to include the ability to "hear what is said and what is hidden," to deconstruct prevailing discourses in their societies and create new possibilities for themselves and their people.

In the South African context, a pedagogy of possibility in the teaching of English is predicated on the principles of process and consultation, with a view to the enrichment and expansion of human potential—albeit in the face of oppression and struggle. Its implementation is enhanced by a creative and critical use of language in a cooperative setting in which student and community experiences are validated. Teachers of English in other international settings would need to define the characteristics of the People's English that might prevail in their societies.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude on a note of reflection, one alluded to in Widdowson's (1980) research on discourse:

> All movements which attempt to set up a new scheme of values, whether these be political or pedagogic or whatever, are subject to distortion and excess. Practical action requires the consolidation of ideas into simple versions which can be widely understood and applied....The problem of application is: how can we consolidate without misrepresentation? How can we prevent our simple versions from being misleadingly simplistic? (p. 234)

In my attempt to locate People's English within the framework of a pedagogy of possibility, I hope I have not been guilty of misrepresentation. Equally, I hope that my attempt to give concrete expression to the principles of a pedagogy of possibility has not been misleadingly simplistic.

Clearly, a pedagogy of possibility will take on different forms at different times and in different places, and it must be understood with reference to the historical discourse within which it is located. But because a project of possibility addresses the relationship between language and the enhancement of human possibility, it has relevance to pedagogy in general and to the teaching of English in particular. A pedagogy of possibility allows for a reassessment and reconceptualization of the nature of language and of the role of communicative competence in the teaching of English internationally as well as providing a theoretical framework in which to analyze a dynamic counterdiscourse in South Africa—a counterdiscourse that may well extend beyond the borders of the country. It has indeed informed my practice as an ESL teacher, and in my view it opens up possibilities for the role of English internationally.

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