

THE HISTORY OF THE COLONIZATION OF SOUTH AFRICA
AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE EMERGENCE
OF SOUTH AFRICAN ENGLISH

The first Europeans to settle on the African continent were the Dutch. In 1652 they established a settlement at the present site of Cape Town. The initial purpose of it was to provide a rest stop and supply station for trading vessels making their journey from Europe to India. The first settlers started to establish farms and work for themselves in the Dutch Cape Colony. Those were the first farmers who eventually came to be known as the Boers. Thus, Dutch (later Afrikaans) became the main language spoken in the colony.

During the 18th century white expansion was widely promoted both by the arrivals from Holland and Britain. In 1806 the British occupied the Cape Colony as a result of a second invasion. With that, the spread of English on the African continent began. It was exercised through the recruitment of schoolmasters from Britain. Already in 1822, English was declared the sole official language of the Cape Colony.

Being dissatisfied with British rule, Boers trekked inland to obtain greater independence. They began to colonize new lands and established the republics of Natal, the Transvaal or the South African Republic, and the Orange Free State. The discovery of gold and diamonds on the territory of these colonies intensified the aggressive ambitions of England. In 1895 the Anglo-Boer War began which ended in the victory for the British who eventually established full control of the territory.

On 31 May 1910 the Union of South Africa was created by joining the former Boer republics with the Cape Colony. At first, the Union formally remained a British territory gaining independence only in 1931. On the formation of the Union English and Dutch became the official languages. Afrikaans replaced Dutch only in 1925. English served as lingua franca and was the language of social elite.

In 1948 the situation changed. South Africa's National Party, which represented Dutch-descended Afrikaners, came to power. It implemented a policy of racial discrimination directed against the African Blacks traditionally known

as *apartheid*. Afrikaans became the openly-favoured language. Administration and business were conducted almost exclusively in Afrikaans. The status of English was lowered while the African languages were officially ignored. However, the African National Congress and other liberation organizations saw English as an acceptable language of liberation and black unity. The Blacks protested against teaching in Afrikaans at schools and perceived English as an acceptable window on to the free world.

After the first democratic elections held in 1994 the African National Congress came to power. This meant an end to apartheid and changes in official legislation. English became one of the eleven languages that held official status under the Constitution of 1996. Since then English has retained its status as the language of government and parliament, and a major promoter of business and higher education in South Africa. Many black parents see it as a crucial instrument for the advancement of their offsprings. While the government espouses multilingualism, in practice South African English is dominant in public life for reasons of practicality and cost-efficiency.