

H. P. Grebe (†)

Op die keper beskou: Oor die ontstaan van Afrikaans

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The thin volume under review is a posthumous miscellany of writings by Heinrich Philip Grebe (1950-2011), who was professor of Afrikaans and Dutch at the University of Pretoria until his untimely death in April of 2011. It is a pastiche of material drawn from the author's unpublished doctoral dissertation (Grebe 1997), previously published articles, and one original essay. The "Woord vooraf," parts of which are from Grebe (2010: 195, 196), lays out the themes that define the three sections of the work: (1) "Ontstaansteorieë oor Afrikaans krities beskou," (2) "Die Oosgrens-hipotese as teoretiese konstruk," and (3) "Standaardafrikaans en die konstruksie van identiteit." Each section begins with a short introduction that previews its contents.

The section on the formation and development of Afrikaans is a critical survey of "vroeë standpunte" (chapter one) – D. C. Hesseling, D. B. Bosman, G. S. Nienaber – and of what in Grebe's estimation are the significant "nuwer beskouinge" on the formation of Afrikaans (chapter two), namely, those of J. du Plessis Scholtz, Edith H. Raidt, F. A. Poneis, M. C. J. van Rensburg, Hans den Besten, and Ana Deumert. The division seems slightly arbitrary to my mind, for Scholtz (1900-1990) and Nienaber (1903-1994) were contemporaries. A number of the articles reprinted in Scholtz (1963) and (1965) are contemporaneous with Nienaber's doctoral thesis (1934) and his two-volume history of Afrikaans (1949-53). Scholtz's last important publication on the diachrony of Afrikaans (1980), on which Grebe bases much of his discussion, was written in 1966-67 and published in English as encyclopedia articles (Scholtz 1970a, 1970b). After publishing the Afrikaans versions as a *separatum*, Scholtz turned his scholarly attentions chiefly to art history. Nienaber brought out his final statements on Afrikaans (1994a, 1994b) at the end of his very long career, the focal point of which had become Khoikhoi linguistics and onomastics. That cavil aside, Grebe dedicates a subchapter to each of the scholars mentioned above. His discussion of

Deumert's work reprises Grebe (2006), the bibliographical reference to which is not given until the introduction to section three (Grebe 2012: 88) and is clearly misplaced there.

Here, as elsewhere, I come away with the impression that Grebe's reading of the literature is not as deep as it needed to be for a discussion of this kind. Nienaber came around to the idea that Afrikaans *nie-2* is ascribable to substrate (Khoikhoi) influence not in his doctoral dissertation (1934), as is suggested on p. 25 (similarly Grebe 2012: 109), but some two decades later (1955), a hypothesis that Den Besten (e.g., 1986) would of course develop in greater detail. While it is true that Scholtz was interested primarily in the development of linguistic systems and kept extralinguistic (social, speaker-oriented) factors at arm's length, it seems a stretch to infer from this that he understood language as a system of rules (Grebe 2012: 37, 38) vis-à-vis a system of elements. Scholtz's conception of language change is entirely traditional. Collection of linguistic data from our Cape Dutch corpora and their correlation with the empirical findings of Netherlandic dialectology are the foundations on which he sought to build an Afrikaans historical linguistics. His asocialism reflects a rigorous inductive approach that explicitly precludes unscientific, aprioristic "origin" theorizing (see Scholtz 1963: 274-75, 1980: 33-34, and especially 1985: 90-91 [written in 1930]). As Scholtz's pupil, Edith Raidt is most assuredly a "geesgenoot" whose own "beskouings oor die ontstaan van Afrikaans is nie wesenlik anders as dié van Scholtz nie" (Grebe 2012: 39). Yet, she was somewhat more receptive to the possibility of substrate influence than her promoter, as one can discern in her etymologies of the object particle *vir* and reduplication, which she derived from (respectively) Creole Portuguese and Malay (Raidt 1994: 116-60). But the main concern is that neither chapter is sufficiently nuanced to engage the informed reader.

Chapters three and four deal with the status of Eastern Cape Afrikaans as a historically unique variety. They were originally published as a single article in *LitNet Akademies* (Grebe 2010), the home page for which describes the forum as a refereed, accredited online journal. The print version of the study shows some light revisions, minor excisions, and reordering of some material.

According to Van Rensburg (e.g., 1983, 1985, 1989, 1990: 68-85, 1994), the vernacular of the Dutch rank and file in the Cape Colony reflected nonstandard dialects spoken in the Low Countries and in the Dutch colonies. Gradually, a koine crystalized through the reduction of inherent variation and generalization of metropolitan variable rules. Eastern Cape or Eastern Frontier Afrikaans (*Oosgrens-Afrikaans*, *Oostelike Afrikaans*) is the variety of white settlers who established themselves along the eastern frontier from the last quarter of the eighteenth century. It spread to the former Transvaal and the Free State with the Great Trek (1835-1848). Standard Afrikaans is based on the Eastern Cape Afrikaans that took root in the Transvaal, with influences from Dutch (*vernederlandsing*) as the elaboration of the vernacular progressed (1870-1930). Cape Afrikaans (*Kaapse Afrikaans*, *Suidwestelike Afrikaans*) is based on the varieties of the early slave and Khoikhoi communities in the Western Cape. Orange River Afrikaans (*Oranjerivier-Afrikaans*, *Noordwestelike Afrikaans*) represents a form of Afrikaans that shows a greater influence of Khoikhoi languages and is spoken by people of color in the northwestern Cape, in Namibia, and in the southern Free State (with isolated offshoots). Both Cape Afrikaans and Orange River Afrikaans bear

the imprint of interlanguage restructuring (creolization) on the part of earlier generations of untutored L2-users of Cape Dutch.

This historical dialect division has enjoyed wide acceptance in Afrikaans linguistics, but Grebe finds that Van Rensburg's history is not without problems. The view that Standard Afrikaans represents a straight-line continuation of an Eastern Cape Afrikaans is simplistic and based on insufficient empirical research (Grebe 2012: 50-52, 67, 94, 103). A restrictive definition of *Oosgrens-Afrikaans* would designate a regional variety that formed between 1770 and 1840 in an area bounded by the Great Brak River (George and vicinity) and the Great Fish River. From a geographical point of view, this delimitation of the dialectal base of Standard Afrikaans is too narrow, for it takes no account of a large swath of territory between the limits of Cape Afrikaans (from Cape Town and the Cape Peninsula to the first chain of mountains in the Boland) and extending to the frontiers of the Cape Colony. The existence of such a variety of Afrikaans that was distinct from that of settlers in the transition zone (the northern Boland, Sandveld, Swartland, Overberg, and Little Karoo) is highly unlikely. Indeed, there is good reason, according to Grebe, to conceptualize the dialectal base of Standard Afrikaans not in terms of a "geolect" that is Eastern Cape Afrikaans but rather as a sociolect, specifically that of the *burgerbevolking* in the interior of the Colony. To my mind, it is this revision of received opinion that is Grebe's signature contribution to the history of Afrikaans.¹

The third section of the book begins with a slightly reworked version of an article that was originally published in Dutch (Grebe 2004b). This chapter proceeds from the historical model of Den Besten (1989). Accordingly, what we know today as Afrikaans represents a convergence of two linguistic streams, namely, the creolized varieties that arose out of the Afro-Asian substratum ("Proto-Afrikaans I") and an extraterritorial variety of Dutch that had developed within the European caste ("Proto-Afrikaans II"). We may speak of an Afrikaans koine with dialectal differentiation from about the middle of the nineteenth century.

Proto-Afrikaans II (i.e., "Kaaps-Hollands") is represented by the diary fragment of the prosperous Cape Town resident, Johanna Duminy (née Nöthling) from 1797. The language of this document is somewhat removed from metropolitan Dutch in morphology (e.g., loss of gender and personal agreement in verb inflection) and in the use of many local lexical items. With regard to other features, however, the Duminy diary remains reasonably close to Dutch. She consistently maintains the opposition between finite and nonfinite forms of the verb and the use of both *hebben* (Afrikaans *het*) and *zijn* (Afrikaans *is*) as perfect auxiliaries (the latter with mutative intransitives), the preterite (imperfect) tense, and verbal ablaut. A living vestige of the Afrikaans koine is the usage of elderly natives of Swellendam (age 75 and up, third-generation or more), whom Grebe interviewed in 1987. These informants, whose early models for L1-acquisition would have been persons born around 1870, tended to retain — albeit variably — the use of 'have' and 'be' as perfect auxiliaries as well as the finite/nonfinite opposition in a subcategory of verbs (*gaan*, *staan*,

¹ In a pleasantly readable popular history of Afrikaans, Van Rensburg (2012: III) has revised his dialectal divisions somewhat.

sien, slaan, doen). These features are remnants of Proto-Afrikaans II that survived the convergence process in the formation of the Afrikaans koine, which constituted the actual dialectal base for Standard Afrikaans. With standardization Afrikaans completely divested itself of the Netherlandic split auxiliary system and the finite/nonfinite opposition.

Chapter six likewise recycles an essay that first appeared in Dutch (Grebe 2009). As we now know, Standard Afrikaans is not the elevation of a preexisting regional vernacular that had stabilized by the end of the eighteenth century. Rather, it is the outcome of great deal of deliberate selection and promotion. Drawing on Deumert (2004), Grebe walks the reader through the general process of standardization, with reference to sociolinguistic conditions in the Cape Colony during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Negation with *nie-2* emerged as a particularly salient index of “die eerlike Afrikaanse boer en landvolk” (Grebe 2012: 110) in the vernacular literature of the era, and its use was prescribed in later codifications of Standard Afrikaans grammar. Also striking is the replacement of the diminutive suffix [-tʃi] (which happens to have a good South Hollandic pedigree, as per Den Besten 1989: 210), with the northern variant [-ki] in the standard dialect, by which time the spelling *-tjie* was firmly entrenched. Grebe suggests that in the context of Afrikaner nationalism, with its emphasis on racial purity, palatalization — a strong marker of Cape Afrikaans — acquired so great a stigma that it tainted the variant [-tʃi]. Curiously, he makes no mention of Deumert (2005), which is a sophisticated analysis of the socio-symbolic appropriation of language resources in standardization, with particular attention to Afrikaans and *nie-2*. Nonetheless, Grebe does offer an instructive insight regarding the disconnect between a feature’s origin (of which speakers are usually unaware) and its changing social valuation (Grebe 2012: 113).

Chapter seven, “Die preekbundel as getuigenis: Standaardafrikaans in die vroeg twintigste eeu,” examines the language of a collection of handwritten Afrikaans sermons composed by the author’s grandfather (1887-1951), a minister in the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk. A group of older texts, written between the years 1907 and 1920, show a striking presence of Dutch features, even though the author’s intention was to write Afrikaans. A younger group of texts, from 1940, are rather more consistent with the norms of Standard Afrikaans and show far less variability. Quantitative analysis of three linguistic variables from Deumert’s (2004) inventory, viz. attributive adjective inflection, negation, and infinitival complementation, underpins these general observations. The witness of these sermons lends support to Deumert’s hypothesis that Standard Afrikaans did not spring forth from a given dialect that was ripe for elaboration and standardization, but is rather the product of conscious human activity — the linguistic creation of “language entrepreneurs.” Grammatical fixity was not fully achieved until well into the twentieth century.

The eighth and final chapter is a reprint of Grebe (2001), the original introduction to which has been somewhat abridged. What we find here is a transcription of one of the thirty recorded interviews that Grebe made in Swellendam in 1987 (*supra*), “om die leser ‘n kyk te gee op die taalgebruik van ‘n bejaarde Overberger [the informant is a 92-year-old woman] wat in bepaalde opsigte ‘n refleksie is van die taalbeeld aldaar van ongeveer 1870” (Grebe 2012: 130). A dozen features are supposed to be “tiperend vir Oosgrensafrikaans”

(Grebe 2012: 129, 139), though I count only nine on p. 129. For whatever reason, it appears that “die voorkoms van die wisselvorm *ken vir kan*,” “die voorkoms van gepalataliseerde variante van [k] en [x],” and “die voorkoms van die gerotaseerde [r] uit onderliggende /d/” (2001: 93) have been dropped from the list. Be that as it may, the Swellendam data correspond closely to the profile of Eastern Cape Afrikaans that one finds in the literature, save for some details involving the raising of /e:/ and /o:/ and ignoring the hallmark Overberg “bry-r.” The take-home point is that Standard Afrikaans cannot stem from a specific, localizable regional dialect but rather from a relatively homogenous but variable social variety of Cape Dutch that crystalized among freehold farmers and frontier settlers in the Overberg and areas north and west of the Boland and expanded deeper into the interior with the advance of European settlement (cf. Grebe 2002).

Following the body of the work are tributes to the memory of Heinrich Philip Grebe: poems by friend and poet Lina Spies and former student Shaun de Jager, alongside obituaries and memorials penned by colleagues Nerina Bosman, Annette Jordaan, Hein Willemse, and Renée Marais. Their sense of loss is palpable.

Although Grebe did apparently receive a preprint of the book shortly before his death, it is clear from Nerina Bosman’s concluding note (Grebe 2012: 163) that the author was no longer in a position to address some “problematiese aspekte” in the text and respond to suggestions from referees. One can appreciate how the nonspecialist colleagues who saw to the final publication details would be chary of attempting to make substantive revisions or deal with the author’s stylistic idiosyncrasies. The text is generally free of ordinary misprints, though one does encounter the occasional editorial glitch (e.g., *meul/meul* for *meul/meule*, Grebe 2012: 71); Dutch “by *de* werkwoorde,” “*een* relatief uniforme vernakulêr/koine” for Afrikaans “by *die* werkwoorde,” “‘*n* relatief uniforme vernakulêr/koine,” Grebe 2012: 95, 103) and some crude errors in the rendering of names: “Francken 1972” (read: Franken 1927, Grebe 2012: 93, 164), “Göschel, P. Ivić” (read: “Göschel, J., Ivić, P.,” Grebe 2012: 141, 143), “Robberts” (read: “Robbers,” Grebe 2012: 125, 146), and “Woudbrugge” (read: “Woubrugge,” Grebe 2012: 155). The biographical blurb on the back cover states that Grebe earned his doctoral degree in 1995, though Nerina Bosman gives the year as 1998 (Grebe 2012: 155). The references to this author’s dissertation are uniformly given as 1997 in the body of the work.

In sum, the volume under review has the feel of an unfinished rough cut that straddles two text types. On the one hand, it does not stand on its own as a monograph. True, there are cross-references here and there from one chapter to another, but not always. In chapters six and seven “Grebe 2004” (Grebe 2012: 110, 119) refers the reader to the original Dutch article (2004b, *infra*), not to the Afrikaans version that precedes by just a few pages as chapter five. There are some redundancies in the discussion of the research programs of Van Rensburg (chapters two and three) and Deumert (chapters two, six, and seven) that would seem gratuitous for a monographic study. The graphic illustrating Den Besten’s convergence model, which, incidentally, is from Den Besten (1989: 226), not Den Besten (1986), would have been more effectively placed in chapter two, where the model is first discussed, rather than in chapter five (Grebe 2012: 90). More tellingly, though, one looks in vain for a unifying thesis or claim(s) to be argued. The construction of a new language

(the Cape Dutch Vernacular) and its underlying mechanisms, focusing as a societal act of identity, and standardization (whence Afrikaans) as an entrepreneurial activity are conceptually separate phenomena. The work, as a whole, might have told a coherent story if these facets of the *ontstaan van Afrikaans* could have been systematically integrated and explicated. On the other hand, it might have been wiser to anthologize Grebe's essays on topics related to the problem of *Oosgrens-Afrikaans* and standardization (chapters 3-8 plus some selection from Grebe 1999a, 1999b, 2002, 2004a, 2004c, 2006) as just that, essays, in the tradition of collected writings established by Franken (1953), Smith (1962), Scholtz (1963, 1965), Le Roux (1964), Raidt (1994), and Den Besten (2012).

Post scriptum. Despite a cluster of scholarly activity at the turn of the twenty-first century (surveyed in Roberge 2009), Afrikaans historical linguistics has been in a parlous state in South Africa: "It has vanishingly few practitioners and receives precious little attention in the curriculum, especially at the undergraduate level... For some decades, indigenous scholars made significant contributions, but this momentum has run out" (Ponelis 2002: 100). Of the prominent scholars who have reached retirement age since I wrote my 2009 article, some have remained active, while others are now fully retired. The ranks of practitioners in our field have been culled yet again by the lamentable passing of Fritz Ponelis (1942-2009), Hans den Besten (1948-2010), and now Hein Grebe. Whether *Op die keper beskou: Oor die ontstaan van Afrikaans* represents the closing act to an area of scholarly inquiry in South Africa remains to be seen. But I am not sanguine about its future prospects.

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