

Soggot: Is your concern not so much the restructure of the word "black" in the world of linguistics so much as to alter the response of black people to their own blackness?

Biko: It is certainly directed at man, at the black man.

Soggot: And I think you were talking about your understanding of the black man's own sense of inferiority and self-hatred and all that?

Biko: Yes.

Soggot: In the world of language, how does the black man figure, how does he feel? have experienced. We have a society here in South Africa which recognises in the main two languages, English and Afrikaans as official languages. These are languages that you have to use at school, at university I mean, or in pursuit of any discipline when you are studying as a black man. Unfortunately the books you read are in English, English is a second language to you; you have probably been taught in a vernacular especially during these days of Bantu education up to Standard 6; you grapple with the language to JC and **matric, 18** and before you conquer it you must apply it now to learn discipline at university. As a result you never quite catch everything that is in a book; you certainly understand the paragraph, (I mean I am talking about the average man now, I am not talking about exceptional cases) you understand the paragraph but you are not quite adept at reproducing an argument that was in a particular book, precisely because of your failure to understand certain words in the book. This makes you less articulate as a black man generally, and this makes you more inward-looking; you feel things rather than say them, and this applies to Afrikaans as well---much more to English than to Afrikaans; Afrikaans is essentially a language that has developed here, and I think in many instances in it's idiom, it relates much better to African languages; but English is completely foreign, and therefore people find it difficult to move beyond a certain point in their comprehension of the language.

Soggot: And how does this relate to the black man or in particular to the black students as inferiority?

Biko: An example of this for instance was again during the old days of NUSAS where students would be something that you as a black man have experienced in your day to day life, but your powers of articulation are not as good as theirs; also you have amongst the white students a number of students doing M.A., doing Honours, you know, in particular quarters, highly articulate, very intelligent. You may be intelligent but not as articulate, you are forced into a subservient role of having to say yes to what they are saying, talking about what you have experienced, which they have not experienced, because you cannot express it so well. This in a sense inculcates also in numerous students a sense of inadequacy. You tend to think that it is not just a matter of language, you tend to tie it up also with intelligence in a sense, you tend to feel that that guy is better equipped than you mentally.

Judge Boshoff: But why do you say that? Isn't English the official language of SASO?

Biko: Yes, it is.

Judge Boshoff: Well now, but your complaint is against the language but it is just the very language that you are using?

Biko: No, no, I am not complaining against the language, I am merely explaining how language can help in the development of an inferiority complex. I am not complaining against the language, the point in issue is that we have something like ten languages, we cannot speak all ten languages at one meeting, we have got to choose a common language. But unfortunately in the learning process this is really what happens, you do not grasp enough and therefore you cannot be articulate enough, and when you play side by side with people who are more articulate than you, you tend to think that it is because they are more intelligent than you, that they can say these things better than you.

Judge Boshoff: But your language is very idiomatic; well is it not easier for you people to speak Afrikaans because Afrikaans is like your language, it is very idiomatic?

Biko: This is true, actually, unfortunately again Afrikaans has got certain connotations historically that do provoke a rejection from the black man, and these are political connotations. I am not arguing for or against, but they are there.

Soggot: But your point as I understand it is that the black man feels a little bit of a foreigner in the linguistic field?

Biko: Right.

