In many situations, the presence of English outside England is the result of the British or American colonial expansion. Owing to historical reasons the presence of English alongside with complex forms of multilingualism and multiculturalism derives from long-time coexistence with populations that were far away from any ‘western’ model.

The peculiar case of present day South Africa – apart from the obvious contact with native languages - also shows the unique coexistence of English with another European language – Afrikaans - whose presence has accompanied the history of the nation since the earliest Dutch settlements in the late XVIIth century. This coexistence has shaped the South African variety of English since the first contacts in the late XVIIIth-early XIXth centuries and is retraceable not only in vocabulary, but also at the phonological and socio-linguistic levels. The presence of the two ‘European’ languages alongside with native languages has of course raised questions of identity, codification, awareness, and belonging for a long time, ending up with the 1996 Constitution recognizing that “All [11] official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably.”

The scope of this paper is to retrace the influences of Afrikaans in the formation of the South African variety, starting from an empirical study of the presence of Afrikaans loanwords (or calques on Afrikaans) as indicated in the OED, in order to show the interaction between the two languages, sharing a common Germanic origin but long divided by political, social, economic issues.

References


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