

Culture *in* language: comparing cultures through words in South Africa

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■ ABSTRACT ■

South Africa is a multiracial country where different cultures and languages coexist. Culture can be conveyed through language. Language conditioning is also social conditioning, and through words we make sense of our own and others' experience. In this paper I investigate the meaning of two culturally significant words: (English) *peace* and (African) *ubuntu*. Data findings will show how L2 speakers of English, when asked to define peace, promptly operate a process of transfer of the meaning from their mother-tongue Xhosa equivalent – *uxolo* - to its English equivalent. *Ubuntu*, an African word which encompasses traditional African values, has no counterpart in English. I will also argue how, in the ongoing process of globalisation, English is playing a predominant role in promoting cultural homogenization.

Key Words

culture, language, English, peace, ubuntu.

Introduction

The complex notion of culture has been a long-standing subject of debate. Contemporary anthropological theories try to avoid an all encompassing notion of culture in favour of a more context-specific and context dependent practices or forms of participation. Our social life depends predominantly on our use of a language which plays a fundamental role as the tool through which we interact and with which we classify or codify our experience. To have a language is more than having at our disposal an infinite repository of metaphors through which we make sense of our experience. As Harry Hoijer (quoted in Duranti, 2008) insisted, one should think of language *in* culture and not just of language *and* culture. Control over linguistic means often translates into control over our relationship with the world just as the acceptance of linguistic forms and the rules for their use forces us to accept and reproduce particular ways of being in the world (Duranti, 2008:49).

It is, nowadays, widely accepted, and agreed upon, that speakers of a language are social actors and that not only do words matter but their representation and connection to the (outside) world is never neutral. Words are constantly used to construct cultural affinities or differentiations (Duranti, 2008:5). “It is language that gives meaning to the categories and concepts we select to represent a particular view of human experience” (Halliday, quoted in Schäffner & Wenden, 2004: 216).

Linguistic influences, in the long term, condition people to act according to the dominant culture. The South African teenage students of my Case Study, will grow up to become (adult) social actors

highly influenced and conditioned in their social behaviour by the meaning of words through which they were taught to interact in the (restricted) community they live in. Outside their community, however, words may happen to have a different meaning, thus requiring speakers to adapt to a different socio-semantic reality.

In this paper I present the results of a study that I conducted in relation to my PhD project. The project, carried out by administering a nine-question questionnaire to 325 students from five high schools, investigated the meaning of *peace* in South African teenage students. Data was also compared with the data of a similar questionnaire administered to Italian teenage students. For present purposes this paper will concentrate on the analysis of just two of the nine questions: question one – “How would you define peace?”; and question nine – “Please provide a definition of *ubuntu*”. The questionnaire was administered to four secondary schools in Grahamstown, in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa and to one secondary school in the rural area of Transkei, in the same Province. In all these schools, English is the medium of instruction but the numerically and culturally predominant ethnic community is Xhosa. This paper investigates cultural differences and influences through the analysis of the meaning of two words: *peace* and *ubuntu*. *Peace* is an English abstract word (its Xhosa equivalent is *uxolo*) which played a major role in the process toward democracy in South Africa in the early ‘90s. *Ubuntu* is a traditional African word whose meaning and underlying cultural significance is frequently brought to the fore as the undisputable marker of the new process of African renaissance.

1. English in South Africa

South Africa represents the ideal terrain for an investigation into the interplay between languages and cultures as it is the only country in the world with eleven official languages and one (official) medium of instruction: English. The debate on how language influences people’s ideas and attitudes and on the conditioning of a western culture on the African traditional values is a hotly debated and highly controversial issue.

In South Africa, the Constitution recognizes the same official status to eleven languages. However, English is the language which has the widest and most general distribution of all languages countrywide (deKlerk, 2006), although only 4% of the population is (English) mother tongue (Horne & Heinemann, 2008). Evidence to date seems to indicate that, notwithstanding the fact that the South African Constitution recognizes equal status to the eleven official languages, it is English which is growing in social importance. There is a strong tendency to monopolize many areas of public administration along with many other multilingual contexts, such as business, schools and universities. English is used by government and in parliament (de Klerk, 2006).

English is far more widely used than the Constitution would seem to recommend or recognize. Government documents and other official notices usually appear in English only. Parliament debates are conducted in English. It is the most widely used additional language, making it a lingua franca within the country. It was the language of the liberation struggle and the only one, among the official eleven languages, to be used across borders, thus making international and diplomatic communications possible. There is, however, hostility to its use in some quarters. The enormous importance of English as a world language has many consequences both for those who speak it and for those who do not. Those whose primary language is English are at an advantage. Research confirms that many parents believe that if their children could read, write and speak English they would have benefits. Many

parents choose to send their children to schools where English is the medium of instruction from an early age (Horne & Hienemann, 2008).

Several studies have been carried out in South Africa to investigate language-attitude. Aziakpono (2007) provides an account of the findings of several studies conducted from as early as 1972 (Edelstein, 1972; Vorster and Proctor, 1976; Louw-Potgieter and Louw, 1989; Young et al., 1991; de Klerk and Bosch, 1994; Mhlanga, 1995; De Klerk, 1996, Chick, 1998; de Klerk, 2000; Bekker, 2002). As the studies indicate, South African students, and parents, have a positive attitude to English as a medium of instruction mainly for functional and instrumental reasons, i.e. higher opportunities for jobs. From the functional perspective, English is felt to serve the purpose of unifying people. The preference of an African language to English, the studies show, would increase division and create ethnic conflicts. Some studies also show that students would find it useful to have a bilingual education, English and their mother tongue at university as well. Interestingly, a study conducted by Barkhuizen in 2001 in the Eastern Cape shows that Xhosa students prefer English as the medium of instruction but not where biblical studies are concerned. In this specific case, the survey shows, mother tongue language is preferred (Aziakpono, 2007).

A further study conducted in 1996 by Smit in Grahamstown (reported in Aziakpono, 2007) shows that in regard to which variety of English should be used for teaching and learning, students prefer Standard English. In the same year, another survey conducted by deKlerk, confirms students' preference for English as medium of instruction at university. Another survey conducted in 1998 at the University of Cape Town shows similar results and reports students' preference of English as "the only option that would not cause conflict between the different language groups, because it has more potential to promote national unity than any other language" (Dyers 1999:81, quoted in Aziakpono, 2007).

More recent studies show that both parents and students prefer English as medium of instruction for instrumental reasons. Nosilela (quoted in Aziakpono, 2007) investigated the attitudes of students and parents in various primary and high schools in the Eastern Cape Province. Most students and parents have negative attitudes toward studying African languages or using them in education. These findings can be attributed to the diglossic situation that exists between English, a high-status language, and the African languages, low status languages (quoted in Aziakpono, 2007).

Parents' choice, Aziakpono (2007) argues, may be conditioned by other factors rather than by a conscious positive attitude to English.

A number of researchers have conducted research into the attitudes of African language speaking parents and pupils in relation to English in education. Vivian de Klerk, for example, has conducted research amongst Xhosa speaking parents who have chosen to send their children to English medium (former 'white') schools in the Eastern Cape. It was clear from many comments that part of the reason for choosing English schools was dissatisfaction with conditions at local Xhosa schools. While the legislation is in place to uplift and support Xhosa, no noticeable difference is evident in most formerly black state schools, where the legacy of apartheid lingers on, and inefficiency and incompetence exacerbate an already inadequate educational system. By the time institutional support for Xhosa is sufficiently impressive and reliable; the elite among this community will probably already have shifted allegiance to English completely (de Klerk, 2006).

English was, also, the language used by the liberation movement. English was the lingua franca chosen

both to defy the national Afrikaans language and also to act as a neutral medium. Ntshoes (2002) claims that the apartheid policy, which deliberately encouraged people to develop pride exclusively in one's own culture, ethnicity, history and language, had contributed to ethnic nationalism. Pre-colonial divisions among ethnic groups, reinforced by apartheid and re-emerged since 1994, find a fertile ground on linguistic issues.

This issue is also brought to the fore by those scholars who envisage the pervasive transmission of non-African cultural values through a non-African language. They claim that cultural values are instilled while learning another language. In South Africa if a child is taught in English s/he is encouraged to look on Europe as the centre of civilization. Learners' mental processes and values are thus conditioned. A loss of identity may follow. Language is inseparable from us as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history and relationship to the world. From this perspective, English would have the effect of disempowering the individual (Horne & Heinemann, 2008: 15-16).

While globalisation is often discussed along economic and technological axes, its cultural consequences represent some of the most profound challenges to democratic values in South Africa. Castells highlights the undeniable tendency of globalisation to polarise social structures. The flexibility of the global economy does not purport to link up everybody from everywhere, but rather to connect 'everything that is valuable according to dominant values and interests, while disconnecting everything that is not valuable, or [that] becomes devalued'. The dominant values of globalisation are the value-engines of global capitalism, namely materialism, individuality and competition. In the urban areas, where access to symbols and commodities of the global era are pervasive (through television and other forms of mass media), individuals are increasingly polarised along these lines. In their most simple form, these divisions mimic traditional class divisions. However, the commodified and competitive aspect of class divisions becomes exaggerated. Access to material commodities, combined with relations to reproduction and knowledge, becomes a driving force of cultural identity. (Porteus, 2002: 223)

2. Methodology

The questionnaire was administered to students, aged between 13 and 19, from five secondary schools in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Four schools were in Grahamstown and one in the rural area of Transkei. The arrangements with the principals and teachers of the schools who assisted me were taken without informing students, who, on the agreed date, were summoned in a classroom and asked to fill in the questionnaire. When presenting the questionnaire to the students I made the point that I was interested in their personal opinion, that being the questionnaire anonymous, they were free to express their opinions and no judgement or assessment would be made. While students were filling in the questionnaire I observed them and they all seemed to be seriously and consciously engaged in the task. In the focus groups I held after the questionnaire, students showed active participation and interest in the subject of *peace*, which, they claimed, they never discussed either at home, school or church. Only a few students reported having discussed *ubuntu* at home, those who did said that it was a word that their parents often repeated in relation to members of their family or their community.

Kingswood College and St. Andrews and Diocesan School for Girls (DSG) are private schools (St. Andrews and DSG are the same school, St. Andrew is a boys' school and DSG a girls' school). The majority of the students attending them are either English mother-tongue speakers or use English as their main language of communication both at school, at home and with friends. They all come from

wealthy families and students come from all over the country; some of the students come from neighbouring countries as well. Fees are very high.

Victoria Girls School (VG) is a model C school, that is, a government school supported by private funding from parents as well. Fees are not as high as at Kingswood College or St. Andrews/DSG. It is, however, regarded as the best semi-private school in the area and mainly attended by children of well-off Black South Africans who cannot afford private colleges. The medium of instruction is English throughout the curriculum.

Mary Waters High School is a township school, attended by children of the township area. The school has a bilingual medium of instruction, English and Afrikaans. The Black African students are Xhosa mother-tongue speakers. The Coloured students are mainly Afrikaans mother-tongue speakers. Some of them are Xhosa-Afrikaans bilingual speakers. Teachers are English-Afrikaans bilingual speakers.

Nqabara Senior Secondary School in the rural area of Transkei is a school exclusively attended by Xhosa speakers who do not use either English at home, at school or with relatives and friends. English is introduced as a second language in grade four and students are instructed in their mother tongue up to grade four and then they switch to English. None of the teachers are English mother-tongue speakers. Students in the rural area have little contact with the English language if not at school through their teachers.

The questionnaire was in English. I subsequently held focus groups with a sample of students (between 8 and 12) from each school to discuss the questions and their responses. In my meetings with the students I concentrated on the analysis of the meaning of *peace* and *ubuntu* in order to investigate the extent of cultural exchange and influence of one language over the other.

For the analysis of students' responses, I first grouped together the responses that shared the same, or similar, semantic or conceptual traits. Thus, for example, responses such as "no war, no fight, no violence" were grouped together under the same heading; the same was done for "calm, quiet, tranquillity and serenity"; "coming together and togetherness"; "happiness and joy". This arbitrary choice was made in order to facilitate data analysis and its interpretation. I recorded the students' individual responses in a table. Unanswered questions or "don't know, no idea" responses were grouped together under the heading "no response". Responses written in undecipherable handwriting and responses which were expressed in a manner not consistent with the question were classified as "unclear responses". Under the heading "other" I grouped all the responses that constituted singular instances.

3. Peace and Ubuntu

3.1 Peace

Peace has been a long-standing subject of study and debate. Many philosophers, linguists, sociologists, politicians, secular and religious leaders have, at one stage or another, dealt with the issue of peace. Both for the "specialists" and for the ordinary layperson, *peace* is an important issue. Whether debated in relation to a global or national scenario, or simply linked to everyday life, *peace* is everybody's concern and it affects our lives, whether at a domestic or at a more general level.

From a referential-semantic viewpoint, *peace* is generally defined as "the absence of, freedom from, war or conflict" (Oxford English Dictionary). This is the most generally accepted interpretation of *peace*,

both in the western world and in the philosophical tradition.

In *The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa*, (1989), *peace* is translated as *uxolo*:

Uxolo/Peace Interj.: Used when begging pardon: I beg your pardon; excuse, pardon me; I have done wrong.

As the above descriptions of the meaning of *peace* show, for Xhosa speakers, *uxolo* has a different meaning and its use reflects a different extra-linguistic reality. No reference to war or conflict is made and *uxolo* is rather used as an apology for doing wrong rather than the absence of war. Thus, on the one hand we have a word *uxolo* which bears no referential equivalence with (English) *peace*. On the other hand, *uxolo* is also translated as *peace*, which in turn, is not translatable as “begging pardon”. Lack of clarity in a dictionary definition, moreover, is a breach of the rule of providing readers with an understandable and clear definition (Landau, 2000).

That the lexicons of different languages suggest, and reflect, different conceptual universes is not surprising. The values of a society can also affect the language. The vocabulary of a language reflects the relationship between the language and the culture (Kaschula, 1995: 17). That direct lexical correspondence between languages is not always possible and translators find it hard, sometimes, to provide exact equivalents, is also a well-known fact. Not everything that can be said in one language can be said, without additions and subtractions, in another language (Wierzbicka, 1992: 20).

That the first Xhosa/English dictionary was compiled by a European missionary, and that he tried his best to write a reference book that could increase communication with the local people is another fact. That, in the more recent and updated dictionaries *uxolo* is still translated as *peace* with no explanation of what is the meaning of *peace*, as it clearly is not the equivalent of asking for pardon, is, again, another fact.

As regards the referential meaning of *peace* in English/Xhosa bilingual dictionaries it seems clear that, across the years, its meaning as an apology has not changed at all. It was, and still is, used regularly in everyday conversation as an interjection.

3.1.1. Peace in South Africa

South Africa was never officially or internationally regarded as a country at war. No official declaration was ever made, nor was a declaration of cease-fire ever signed. The violence that spread in the country was mainly a structural violence, from the apartheid regime, and a response to it, from the liberation movement. Up to 1961 the liberation struggle had mainly been conducted on non-violent terms, with the Defiance Campaign, demonstrations, and stay-home actions and so on. With the Sharpeville massacre (March 21st, 1960 – the police opened fire on demonstrators, killed 69 people and wounded 180) the strategy of the liberation movement changed. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recognized as a form of declaration of war the announcement made in 1961 by the African National Congress (ANC) to resort to violence as a form of opposition to apartheid. (du Toit, 2001). The fact that the government did not acknowledge the ANC declaration meant that at international level and according to international laws, South Africa could not be listed among the countries at war. The internal conflict was viewed as a dispute between the state and an armed wing. The ANC justified their new strategy on the grounds that having non-violent means failed, with the Sharpeville massacre where civilian demonstrators were killed, the only possible alternative to pursue human rights was to resort to violence. The violence became the “people’s war”.

On September 14th, 1991 the National Peace Accord (NPA) was signed. It sanctioned the end of violence as a means of confrontation (Dressel & Neumann, 2001). The NPA was signed by 29 parties and it represented the beginning of the peace process for a new South Africa. The Accord had been promoted by church leaders and businessmen (Lötter, 1997: 104).

3.2 Ubuntu

It is not uncommon, nowadays, to come across the expression “the spirit of ubuntu”. Many are the academics and scholars who provide a reading of South Africa in terms of the revival of the spirit of *ubuntu*¹⁾ and its true African ethics.

In his book *No Future Without Forgiveness* (2000: 31), Tutu explains that:

Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, “*Yu, u nobuntu*”; “Hey, so-and-so has *ubuntu*”. Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. We belong in a bundle of life. We say, “A person is a person through other persons.” It is not, “I think therefore I am.” It says rather: “I am human because I belong. I participate, I share.” A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able or good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or threatened as if they were one. It is to say, “My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in what is yours”.

In post-apartheid South Africa, the notion of *ubuntu* is re-emerging as the foundation of an ethics which stresses the understanding of human nature, its capacities and its needs. It must not be forgotten, however, that the social context of South Africa, is no longer that in which traditional African thought developed, but one dominated and formed by European science and technology (Nicolson, 2008).

In a rapidly changing world, characterized by technological communication, internet, faxes, mobile phones and television networks have unifying effects which, however, also reveal the diversity of the world. One of the defining features of this age is the interplay of unity and diversity. In this globalized perspective, Africa must find its identity and ethical guidelines. South Africa, in particular, represents the ideal setting for this dialogue. The idea of human freedom, in which individual and social freedom are necessarily interconnected, can provide the ethical standards for the conduct of this process. In each sectors of human life – family, language, gender, education, work, recreation, government, and religion – efforts must be critically made to enhance personal growth and community practices. *Ubuntu* captures the understanding of morality or ethics as an indispensable part of personhood. To be a full person one needs to belong, but belonging implies accepting the rules of *ubuntu*. This is not a personal or abstract individualistic characteristic, but one that is based on social relationships and practices (Shutte, 2008).

South Africa’s greatest asset, apart from its rich cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, is the ethos of its people. It is this ethos, underpinned by a tolerance and generosity of spirit (*ubuntu*), which has

1) South African Dictionary on Historical Principles, ubuntu: Xhosa and Zulu “humanity”, “goodness”; formed on the noun stem -ntu, used to form words related to humans. a Human-heartedness, compassion; the qualities embodying the values and virtues of essential humanity, or of Africanness. 1996.

brought South Africa to where it is now (Battersby, 2002).

In any field, education, politics, economics, religion and so on, scholars, academics, politicians, secular and religious leaders appeal to *ubuntu* (and focus on the interplay between its values and society) by emphasizing its essential role in any strategies or policies concerning national or individual issues.

Ubuntu is not, however, free from criticism either: du Toit (2001: 97) argues that “the concept of *ubuntu* refers to a supposedly traditional African humanism, which has an exceedingly vague and highly contested meaning, with virtually no status in democratic constitutionalism, and is therefore ambiguous in the extreme”. For Wim van Binsbergen (quoted in Richardson, 2008), it is in the hands of academic philosophers that *ubuntu* evokes unadulterated forms of African social life which (for academics) should constitute the inspiring blue-print for future social, economic and political life in South Africa. The reality is that globalization is taking over, and with it its western values.

4. Data analysis

4.1 Question: How would you define *peace*?

By asking students to define *peace* I aimed to investigate whether students’ understanding of the concept of *peace* was similar to, or different from, a likely (generally agreed) shared meaning. In the focus groups students remarked that out of the nine questions the most difficult question was number one.

Table 1

Question 1: Definition of <i>peace</i>	Kingswood	St An, DSG, VG	Mary Waters	Nqabara
No war/conflict/ violence	35%	30%	25%	8%
Coming together, getting along	5%	15%	2%	10%
Agreement	8%			
Harmony	13%	9%		
Calm, quiet	9%	8%	8%	2%
Happiness	3%	15%	3%	
Equality	3%			
Love	4%	8%	17%	17%
Forgiveness		1%	8%	11%
Apology			2%	11%
A small thing(piece)				4%
Others	20%	8%	12%	11%
Unclear response			20%	26%
No response		6%	3%	
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%

As Table 1 above shows, the meaning of *peace* varies according to culture. For English mother-tongue speakers, or students who are exposed to the language from early childhood, *peace* maintains the traditional lexicographic (western) meaning. Absence of war or conflict receives a higher percentage of responses from these students. Students from Mary Waters, living in the English speaking social context of Grahamstown, even if not mother-tongue speakers, already show the extent of the English culture conditioning on their understanding of *peace* by associating *peace* to the absence of conflict (25%).

These students are those who live between two cultures as their responses clearly indicate. On the one hand they define *peace* in the traditional western definition (absence of war/calm, tranquillity - with similar percentages as the English speaking students); on the other, like their peers from the rural areas, they identify in *peace* the typical defining features (*love, forgiveness, apology*) characteristic of their own mother-tongue conceptual equivalent word. Where English culture has not yet fully conditioned peoples' understanding of the meaning of *peace* is in the rural area where students live in their Xhosa community and use English only occasionally. For them, *peace* has the equivalent meaning of their own mother-tongue *uxolo*, and thus transfer, in the meaning, concepts traditionally representative of their own culture. For them, *uxolo* is not predominantly the absence of conflict, it is love (a clear reference to God and religion, not surprising in a country where nearly 80% of the population is Christian, and where religion plays a major role in the life of people) or *forgiveness* and *apology*, the two defining features of *uxolo*. None of the English dictionaries or thesauri I consulted ever described *peace* in terms of *apology* or *forgiveness* or included these two lexical items within a broader lexical or conceptual map.

4.2 Question: Please provide a definition of *ubuntu*

“South Africa has shown the spirit of *ubuntu* to the world” was the slogan that was broadcast on national television after the World Cup in July 2010 to celebrate the success of the event. The World Cup was a major challenge for South Africa, and South Africans felt extremely proud of the positive outcome. So proud was the government that they sponsored the commercials to thank the country and attributed the success to the spirit of *ubuntu*.

My questionnaire was administered before the 2010 World Cup but the focus groups were held after it and after the broadcasting of the government's commercials. Table 9 below shows students' responses to the request to provide a definition of *ubuntu*.

A high percentage of White South African students (40% at Kingswood and 46% at St. Andrews/DSG) say they do not know the meaning of *ubuntu*. In the focus groups I asked students to give me a definition of *ubuntu*, naively relying on the fact that they had seen the commercials on TV and enquired about its meaning. Students admitted having seen the commercials but said they did not bother to find out what the *spirit of ubuntu* meant or referred to. They said they heard about *ubuntu* but were not interested in it.

At Mary Waters, the Afrikaner students interviewed in the focus groups admitted not knowing the meaning of *ubuntu*, whereas their Xhosa peers knew it well. These students explained to me that it was an African concept (I had asked them to explain it to me, an Italian woman who lives in a totally different reality and had problems in fully grasping its meaning) that only Africans could understand. They said that at home their parents often use the word *ubuntu* in ordinary conversation or in their daily activities. They also added, however, that they were not really prepared to fully live the values implicit in the *spirit of ubuntu*. These same students, when I asked them how they saw their future and what was important in life, replied that they wanted well-paid jobs and enough money to buy, or have access to, all the available modern technology and commercial goods: internet, microwaves, cars, and so on. When I provoked them and asked if they would part with some of their money to help those in need, they promptly replied “no”.

As Table 9 below shows, those students living in the rural areas, and less influenced by the contact with the western globalized world and culture, still retain (in their memory and cognizance) markers

of their African identity permeated by the concept of *ubuntu*. 54% of these students define *ubuntu* in terms of *love, care, support* and *kindness*, that is, in its traditional meaning of *humanity*. 20% of the students define *ubuntu* in terms of its related concepts of *togetherness, peace*, and *I am because you are* (Tutu's words). The 13% of "Unclear responses" are responses which were illegible.

Students at Mary Waters, too, show in their responses their African cultural roots; 40% of them define *ubuntu* in terms of *love, care, support* and *kindness*. 35% of students define *ubuntu* in terms of its related concepts of *togetherness, peace*, and *I am because you are*.

White South African students generally define *ubuntu* in terms of *togetherness* and *unity*. Only a very small percentage of them define *ubuntu* in relation to *love* and *care*.

In his article, *Reflections on Reconciliation and Ubuntu*, Richardson (2008: 82) remarks that:

Both reconciliation and *ubuntu* have played significant roles in the development of the new South African society. Reconciliation has its roots in Christian faith. *Ubuntu* has its roots in African tradition. Both have their proper place and meaning in respect of particular communities. Like other moral concepts, they are community-referential and arguably, have little clarity or usefulness as universal, abstract concepts.

Question 9 seems to confirm Richardson's statement.

Table 2

Question 9: Ubuntu	Kingswood	St. A/DSG, VG	Mary Waters	Nqabara
Togetherness, uniting	26%	26%	10%	7%
Brotherhood	5%			
Love, care, support, kindness	11%	6%	40%	54%
<i>Peace</i>	5%	2%	15%	9%
I am because you are		5%	10%	4%
Others	13%	15%	14%	9%
Unclear responses				13%
No idea	40%	46%	11%	4%
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%

Conclusion

The South African teenagers of my investigation are the first-born democracy generation. Despite a troublesome past, their main inheritance is the hope for a better future. It is up to them to build a society whose members not only must peacefully overcome past conflicts and racial divisions but must also walk along the same path with the only aim of unity in diversity. Unity, however, can be reached if differences are recognized as enriching factors in the understanding of each other's culture. Whatever definition may one attribute to culture in any society, language is the primary tool of communication and interaction among people. Recognizing and acknowledging the importance of the meaning of some cultural key words is a step toward understanding and integration. Sharing meaning of words is essential in an effective communicative act. When the same word has two culturally different meaning, as in the case of *peace* and *uxolo*, their mingling together should produce a new meaning englobing the different perspective thus resulting in a new more representative and enriched concept. Prevarication

on a meaning over the other, the less dominant one, may result in a cultural conditioning which may bring to cultural assimilation rather than integration. The lack of understanding of the value-laden importance of *ubuntu* may result in a loss of identity. As Pennycook (1994: 25) argues, the point is not so much putting British culture under scrutiny or trial as questioning certain western habits of thinking infused in the language.

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