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UCT PhD thesis investigates social change and class formation through language

'There is no unified 'Model C' accent amongst young black South Africans'

University of Cape Town doctoral student Kirsten Morreira takes an interesting look into *Social change, class formation and English* in her PhD thesis subtitled 'a study of young black South Africans with "Model C" school backgrounds'.

Morreira's research examines accents in English, and attitudes towards the use of English versus home language, among young black South Africans, educated within the former white (ex "Model C") school system. Morreira said: "Although there is variation in the attitudes of the speakers, there are also many commonalities like commitment to South Africa and the intention to bring up future children as bilingual."

She further argued that "there is a sense of identification with an 'ethnic' identity based on the young people's own home language, even where proficiency in that language is low". Using an acoustic analysis of speakers' vowel systems in English, Morreira finds that there are some correspondences between the attitudes, upbringing and education of speakers with particular vowel variants.

For example, Morreira's findings indicated that a fronted (this refers to the front of the mouth and tongue being used to produce the sound) variant of the so-called "Goose vowel" in words like "you", "who", and "two" was more common in speakers with earlier exposure to "White South African English" (WSAE), particularly those living in a suburb rather than in a township and going to "white schools" from a very

young age. On the other hand "backer Goose vowels" (this refers to the back of the mouth and tongue being used to produce the sound) are traditionally part of "Black South African English" (BSAE). BSAE speakers have more similar vowels in "food" and "fool" than WSAE speakers do, because the "white/Model C" vowel variant in "food" is a fronted vowel. All of these different variants and ways of pronouncing words, is a result of the way one's tongue moves when speaking.

Morreira concludes that there is no readily discernible means to predict correspondence between speakers' accents and their attitudinal and biographical characteristics; nor is there a unified "Model C" accent amongst these young people.

Morreira will receive her PhD in Linguistics at the Faculty of Humanities graduation ceremony at 15h00 on 12 December at Jameson Hall, UCT.

ENDS

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