

Out of a blind alley? – trudging towards a history of South African English

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Although several inquiries into the origins and evolution of South African English exist, it still remains one of the less thoroughly studied extraterritorial Englishes. In order to outline a feasible direction of historical investigation, the presentation seeks to answer some basic questions as to why attempts at a coherent description of this variety have fallen through. One of the proposed explanations is the ideological bias against English in the apartheid era. The other, a more critical one, is of a methodological nature. In line with the latter account, pathways to a structural history of South African English are all but direct while a reconstruction of its origins becomes a methodologically dubious task. As an alternative to the existing approaches, the presentation argues for a historical pragmatic perspective on the topic. Even though such an approach cannot address the issues of structural development directly, it is likely to facilitate research of the latter nature by providing a discourse and context-based description of the relevant primary sources. Thus, it is concluded, fascinating and challenging as it may be, a neat structuralist study into the history of South African English would better be postponed as it calls for a more solid ground on which it may safely rest sometime in the future.