

SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN ENGLISH

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1. INTRODUCTION

South African Indian English (SAIE), is a variety of English which has received relatively little attention from linguists and other scholars of language. Bughwan (1970) concentrates mainly on the pronunciation of SAIE while Mesthri (1985) is concerned with the lexical aspects of SAIE.

This paper is also a lexical study of SAIE, but my focus is on the less formal variety. Most of the data presented here would be regarded as substandard or slang. My informants were students of the University of Durban-Westville and teachers in Indian schools in the Durban area. The examples given here are typical of the informal speech of the younger generation of Indians living in Natal for whom English is a first language. In SAIE there are of course many expressions which are common to all South African English (SAE) slang. These have been excluded from this study and I have tried to concentrate on those expressions which seem to be unique to SAIE.

There seem to be four main sources of SAIE slang:

- (i) Expressions borrowed from Afrikaans.
- (ii) Expressions borrowed from various Indian languages.
- (iii) Expressions borrowed from Zulu.
- (iv) Neologisms - expressions uniquely created by SAIE speakers.

2. AFRIKAANS

As in the case of other SAE slang, the influence of Afrikaans is clearly evident in SAIE slang, even in the outpost of Natal. A very common phenomenon is the adoption of the plural form of Afrikaans nouns to which a further English plural suffix is added, e.g. *skoenes*, *hares*, *kleres*. Another interesting phenomenon is the way in which Afrikaans loan words often undergo a semantic shift so that the meaning of the SAIE word seems to bear little relationship to the original meaning of the word. Consider the following expressions:

ORIGINAL AFRIKAANS	SAIE EXPRESSION	MEANING
slaan, slaat 'hit'	<i>I'm slaating this book</i>	'I'm selling this book'
skiet 'shoot'	<i>'Don't skiet my book</i> <i>He skat my book</i>	'Don't steal my book' 'He stole my book'
vloek 'swear'	<i>Don't vloek me</i> <i>I smaak to vloek that bokkie</i>	'Don't pick on me' 'I'd like to chat up that girl'
swaai 'swing'	<i>Let's swaai</i>	Let's dance'
woes 'wild'	<i>You must be woes</i>	'You must be alert'
naar 'unpleasant, sick'	<i>It's naaring</i> <i>My socks are naaring</i>	'It smells bad' 'My socks smell'
waarheid 'truth'	<i>Don't give me your waarheids</i>	'Don't give me your nonsense'
dik 'thick'	<i>I'm dik of your praatjies</i>	'I'm tired of your nonsense'
straf 'punish'	<i>I'm strafing</i>	'I'm struggling, having a hard time'
skraal 'thin'	<i>I'm skraal</i>	'I'm hungry'

draad 'wire, thread'	<i>Don't give me draad</i>	'Don't give me trouble, strife, up- hill'
	<i>You're coming out with vang draads</i>	'You're being diffi- cult'
	<i>Don't vang draad on that lightie</i>	'Don't pick on that small boy'
	<i>She's got no draad</i>	'She's got no style'
	<i>She's got some slim draads</i>	'She's got style, She's playing hard to get'

In some cases the semantic connection is fairly clear, for instance in the case of *naar*, but whereas the word is only used as an adjective in Afrikaans, it has been turned into a verb in SAIE. (The word has been forced to fit an English syntactic pattern. A similar case is *skiet* where irregular past tense *skat* has been created according to an English pattern.) In other cases the semantic connection is quite elusive, for instance *draad* which seems to have a number of shades of meaning, all totally unrelated to the original Afrikaans. By the way, there are a number of interesting synonymous SAIE expressions for *she's got no draad*, e.g. *she's got no beat*, *she's got no steam*.

3. INDIAN LANGUAGES

Numerous words from the Indian languages (Hindi, Gujarati, Urdu, Tamil, Telegu) occur in SAIE. The choice and frequency of these words depend largely on the background of the speaker, and it is difficult to determine which words are commonly used by most speakers of SAIE. Because many of the words of Indian origin are used in specific contexts, particularly those pertaining to religious and cultural activities of the various Indian communities, it is doubtful whether many of these words would be categorised as 'slang' (Mesthri 1985). For this reason only examples of some of the more common informal expressions have been given here. Terms referring to family relationships are commonly used, e.g. *ayah*, 'granny' and *bibi*, 'sister'. There are also a variety of terms referring to members of different social groups, sometimes with semi-derogatory connotations, e.g. *lahnee* and *mota* refer to wealthy people or people of standing. The word *lahnee* sometimes is used to refer to a 'white man' and it has been adopted into general SAE slang (*larney*) with the usual meaning of 'smart' or 'grand',

e.g. "I'm wearing my larney clothes", "You talk larney". Different ethnic groups are referred to by terms such as *char ou's*, 'Indians', *gora*, 'White man', and *roti ou* 'Hindi speaking person'. The latter expression is derived from the word *roti*, a type of thin wafer which is a characteristic food of the Hindi community. General terms of abuse around: a loud mouth or 'big deal' is usually called a *sarang* or *peri vai*. A fool can be referred to by any number of terms: *gar-rak*, *kabab*, *pookoo*, *skaberash*.

4. ZULU

As would be expected in Natal where the Indian and Zulu speaking communities come into daily contact with one another, there are numerous examples of Zulu loan words in SAIE:

skotens 'thief, skelm, rascal'. Zulu: *usikotheni* 'thief'

This word has an interesting etymology. It is ultimately derived from the Zulu *isikhotha* 'grass'. From the locative of this word (*esikhoteni*) a personal noun *usikotheni* was formed, meaning a person who lives in the veld, hence a 'thief, an outcast, a vagabond', etc.

chinglaan 'security guard, night watchman'. Zulu: *umantshin-gelana* 'watchman'

The etymology of this word is obscure but it has been suggested that it is a corruption of the English phrase *marching in a line*, which makes good sense in this context.

the bophas 'the police'. Zulu: *bopha* 'to arrest'

(The Zulu word *poisa* 'police' is also often used in SAIE)

skatis 'time'. Zulu: *isikhathi* 'time'

e.g. *What's the skatis?*

ganes 'children'. Zulu: *izingana* 'children'.

skatools 'shoes'. Zulu: *izicathulo* 'shoes'.

khuza 'interfere with'. Zulu: *khuza* 'scold'.

Don't khuza me. 'Leave me alone, don't scold, or interfere with me'.

zonda 'hate'. Zulu: *zonda* 'hate'

I zonda her. 'I hate her'.

bhema 'dagga'. Zulu: *bhema* 'to smoke'

He's hitting the bhemas. 'He smokes dagga'.

teenta 'touch, interfere with'. Zulu: *tinta* 'to touch'

I'd like to teenta that girl. 'I'd like to touch, handle that girl'.

vukile 'alert, smart'. Zulu: *vuga* 'to wake up', *vugile* (past tense)

You must be vukile. 'You must be alert, wide awake, with it'.

Tegwini 'town'. Zulu *eTegwini* 'Durban'

I am going to Tegwini. 'I am going to town' (i.e. the central part of the city of Durban).

5. NEOLOGISMS

There are a number of very interesting SAIE expressions which do not seem to have their origin in any other SAE slang or in Afrikaans, Zulu or any of the Indian languages. They appear to be unique creations of SAIE speakers, the real heart beat of this speech community:

I vib/vibrate for him

'I'm scared of him'

I red for him

'I'm angry with him'

I huck the bussies

'I'm a regular bus commuter'

Don't parana here

'Don't show off, try to throw your weight around'

Don't play snakes with me

'Don't beat about the bush, try and bluff me'

Don't hang your snakes

'Don't bluff'

He's a luck

'He's easily taken in, a fool'

<i>She's a luck</i>	'She's easily imposed upon' (often with sexual connotations)
<i>There is with her</i>	'She is a beauty, very attractive'
<i>She's to do/does</i>	'She is a beauty, very attractive'
<i>Where the ice creams?</i>	'Where are the girls?'
<i>Where you jobbing?</i>	'Where do you work?'
<i>He is a mamba/a good thing/ a GT</i>	'He is very clever, outstanding in some way'
<i>Don't give me duck curry</i>	'Don't ignore me'
<i>You got cold ducks/ You got Fifth Avenued</i>	'You got ignored, lost out' (These expressions seem to refer to a brand of sparkling wine <i>Fifth Avenue Cold Duck</i> that was popular a few years ago, but the exact connection is not very clear.)

One very productive source of SAIE creations is to be found in place names. The Himalaya Hotel is often referred to as *The Mountains*. *The Greens* refers to the suburb of Greenwood Park and *The States* is another name for Clare Estate.

The sub-culture of the dagga smoker is also rich in colourful expressions, drawing words from a variety of languages. The following expressions all act as invitations to participation in dagga smoking:

Let's maal it.
Let's slaan a torpedo.
Let's hit the bhemas/the ghanjerries.
Let's have some kaitchee.

6. CONCLUSION

SAIE is a vibrant variety of English. It is constantly borrowing words from its neighbouring speech communities and adapting them to its own needs, and it is constantly creating new expressions from its own basic stock. Indian English is alive and well in South Africa.

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