

# Tailpiece

## THE LANGUAGE OF TSOTSISM

[This extract from Paul C. Venter's book, *Soweto, Shadow City*, is reprinted with the permission of Perskor Publishers, P.O. Box 845, Johannesburg.]

It would seem as if most of Soweto's tsotsis belong to the Zulu tribe. Since the Nguni – in which tribes like the Zulu, the Swazi and the Xhosa are historically and traditionally welded together – form the largest ethnic group in the townships, this does not prove that one tribe is more violent than another.

The language they speak is definitely not Zulu. Their tsotsi jargon was bred in the townships, and is as urban as the people who live there. It reflects all the linguistic influences that the urban African has been exposed to; from a base of Bantu tongues, the tsotsi language has grown with Afrikaans, English and even Yiddish limbs. It is ironic that Afrikaans, the language most despised by urban youths, has become the jargon's very backbone.

What makes it even more difficult to follow tsotsis when they talk, is the dialectal differences that exist between townships. But a stranger to the tsotsi's dangerous world could still save his throat if he has some knowledge of basic words and phrases:

*Atshitshi* – marijuana, also known as dagga

*Bra* – brother

*Beste koek* – best liquor

*Batas* – good shoes

*Die gattes* – the police

*Dindel* – to attack someone

*Djudju* – honest work

*Ek wil diet* – I want to eat

*Fuse* – cigarette

*A guluva* – a hardened criminal

*A galpil darkey* – a useless black

*Judge die jampas* – check the time

*Kuzak* – cash money

*King-size ezzies* – big buttocks

*Kom's line* – let's get out of here

*Lanie* – white man

*A mugu* – an idiot

*Magageba* – money  
*Notch djou* – see you later  
*Ouma* – wise old woman  
*Pasa met 'n gonnie* – to stab with a knife  
*Phata-phata* – sex  
*Roerie* – okay  
*Straw hut wife* – a widow  
*Stinkas* – reference books  
*Sterk man* – tough leader  
*Sy line met die rawurawu* – she goes out with thugs  
*A skarapafet* – prostitute  
*Sheila* – a tsotsi's girlfriend  
*Toy telephone* – the Urban Bantu Council

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