

A Dictionary of English Usage in Southern Africa

1. SOME COMMENTS BY READERS

(a) Mr Stephen Bishop, Johannesburg:

There is another set of words consistently mispronounced in S.A. omitted from your excellent dictionary. The *mispronunciation* therefore *creates* a *situation* where new words occur, which need your *evaluation* and possible incorporation in the new issue. I *appreciate* that these are not really new words, but may merit your attention.

If you ask an Afrikaner to pronounce the italicised words you will find at the *ea*, *ia*, *ua* sounds generate an extra *h*. No less a personality than the Prime Minister is an aspirater.

(b) Mr. Stewart M. Murray, Grabouw:

I have looked through with great interest *A Dictionary of English Usage in Southern Africa* compiled by D.R. Beeton and Miss Helen Dorner, and wonder if you can give me some additional information.

With regard to colloquial names for areas or districts in the Cape we have 'Boland', 'Swartland' and 'Groenland', which are familiar and self-explanatory, but can you give me the derivation and meaning of 'Goup' for the area around Matjiesfontein and Laingsburg, and 'Koo' and 'Richtersveld', both also in the Western Cape?

Perhaps a small section of a future publication of your Dictionary could be devoted to the derivation of place names?

(The editors have approached Dr P.E. Raper of the South African Centre of Onomastic Sciences, Pretoria, for help in this regard.)

(c) Mr T.W. Steward, Pretoria:

In the course of a telephone conversation I had with Professor Beeton last month I mentioned that I had spent several profitable hours browsing through the above dictionary and that I had made a few notes of my own (most of which have been covered in the dictionary) on English usage in South Africa. He suggested I forward these plus my comments on the dictionary to you. I trust that they will be of interest and that they will provide at least some food for thought (excuse the pun on what I later have to say about the insertion 'cod'!).

(i) The dictionary

p. viii 'When two words comprise the term' ('constitute'?)

What about 'alternate director'? (in the sense of 'alternative').

One sees this in company reports.

29 and many other pages: The Metrication Department of the SABS is the official co-ordinating body for the implementation of the SI in South Africa. They say that in such a case (p. 29) the preferred unit is the millimetre. They also say, among other things, that there should be a space between the figure and the symbol, e.g. 2 m high (p. 42). Literature on metrication may be obtained by writing to the above department.

p. 51 'cod'! The following is a press release I wrote in February concerning 'correct' nomenclature:

A Cod by any other name is not a Kob

South Africans living in the Republic's coastal areas, especially fishermen, anglers and other fish experts, are all familiar with the kabeljou or kob, a tasty eating and prime angling fish that is found in our coastal waters. Most South Africans, however, are not familiar with the (mainly) European/North Atlantic *cod* which is a demersal trawl fish.

Unfortunately confusion exists in the Afrikaans nomenclature currently being used by the news media for these two wholly unrelated fishes. For example, we often read and hear in Afrikaans of the so-called 'kabeljou' war being 'waged' between Britain and Iceland whereas in fact it is a '*cod war*'

and not a 'kob war'. The confusion in the Afrikaans nomenclature is the result of the confusion between the words 'kob' and 'cod' and also the fact that the Dutch and German equivalent of 'cod' is 'kabeljou', although spelt differently.

In order to eliminate this confusion in future, especially with regard to the administration of the relevant South African Bureau of Standards compulsory specifications, it was agreed between the Division of Sea Fisheries of the Department of Industries and the SABS that the following nomenclature for the fishes concerned will from now on be used.

The names kob/kabeljou/salmon bass will be the local English names for the fish of the family *Sciaenidae*, species *A. hololepidotus* of the genus *Argyrosomus*, whilst their Afrikaans equivalent will be 'kabeljou' or 'Suid-Afrikaanse kabeljou' or 'Boerkabeljou'. In the unlikely event of this fish being exported in processed form the labelling will have to be in accordance with the importing country's regulations, with the proviso though that the fish may not be labelled either 'cod' or 'salmon'.

The true 'cod' (family *Gadidae*), if imported into South Africa, will be required to be labelled 'cod' (unqualified) or, preferably, 'X cod', 'X' designating the oceanic region or area where the fish was caught, e.g. 'North Atlantic cod'. The equivalent Afrikaans name will be 'X kabeljou', the 'X' also designating the oceanic region or area, e.g. 'Noord-atlantiese kabeljou', 'Europese kabeljou' or 'Groenland-kabeljou' etc. The use of the qualification 'diepsee' in conjunction with 'kabeljou' in these Afrikaans equivalents will further assist to obviate confusion.

The above names will in future be regarded as constituting a 'true description' of these two fishes in terms of the compulsory standard specifications administered by the South African Bureau of Standards.

p. 110 'kilogramme': 'kilogram' is the spelling taught at schools.

(ii) **Examples of English usage in S.A. (and elsewhere):**

'... the same as what I do' (inclusion of 'what')
'house doctor' (family doctor)

'I shall speak to doctor about it' (omission of article)
 'I'm only sorry' (I'm very sorry)
 '...in a meeting' (... at a meeting?)
 'She burned sore' (She was badly burned)
 'sportman' (sportsman)
 'He is unreal' (He defies description — negative connotation)
 'I'll give her a bel.' (I'll telephone her.)
 'fantastic' (an over-used word by young S.A. English speakers)
 'We are going to Transvaal for a holiday' (omission of article — incidentally I believe that the definite article should *not* be used with 'Transkei').

I have heard English-speaking South Africans use these expressions/speak in this way — largely as the result of the influence of Afrikaans. I think that you will agree that English has not benefited. On the other hand it is perhaps a pity that an excellent all-purpose word such as 'middel' cannot somehow be incorporated into English.

(d) Miss M.G. van der Merwe, Pretoria:

With reference to: 'Further entries for the dictionary', in your September 1976 issue, p. 33, I wish to comment as follows:

houtkop

In Afrikaans the word seldom implies that an African is dull-witted, but it is used in good humour as a synonym for the word *Bantu*.

oorskiets

This plural form is unknown to me and to everyone from whom I enquired.

skoffel

Add the meaning: 'dance'.

pantihose

A common word used in Southern African English that refers to one-piece underwear and stockings/hose worn by women.

(e) Mr P.H.L. Hart, Cape Town:

- (i) I had great fun reading your *Dictionary of English Usage in Southern Africa* — the only time I have ever read through a dictionary. I enclose a list of suggested additions and amendments.

I should perhaps declare my background: born in England 1933, emigrated to Rhodesia 1964 and moved to South Africa 1968. I have no special qualifications for poking my nose into English usage: I am merely an interested observer.

There are many examples of incorrect or special usage which are common to both South Africa and the U.K. Here is one such example which I would like to see somewhere between the covers of your dictionary:

Intrusive apostrophe in plurals: e.g. a recent bill included 'extra's'. This is even to be seen displayed on vans and lorries: SMITH & JONES, BUILDER'S; or in illuminated shop signs: CHEMIST'S. Cf. your article *pros & cons*.

- (ii) A = addition to dictionary

A *at places/in places*

The SABC weather bulletins use both phrases — sometimes in the same bulletin! Perhaps a ruling could be made as to which is preferable?

A *bergie*

Term common in Cape Town for a person who lives (in a cave) on the slopes of Table Mountain or Lion's Head.

A *Bougainvillaea*

Mispronounced Bōgainvillaea by most South Africans.

by

The COD disagrees that 'come and sit by me' is x: an example given in the COD is 'come here by me'.

caboodle

= lot, not 'the whole lot'. Cf. COD.

café

The English meaning is 'coffee-house, restaurant' (COD). But a South African 'café', means a quite different sort of establishment: a shop selling bread, milk etc. Some South African 'cafés' do also serve meals, but most do not even have tables.

City of Gold, the

To be quite realistic, *has* Johannesburg ever been referred to as the City of Gold, except by Francis Brett Young? I have once seen ‘the golden city’ (referring to Johannesburg) in print in a magazine article, but have never heard nor seen ‘City of Gold’. The same applies to the ‘Jacaranda City’: I am convinced that the only time this phrase is used is in guidebooks etc. which say, ‘Pretoria is often referred to as “the Jacaranda City”’. Such phrases, I suggest, are spurious.

comprise/constitute

My students habitually write ‘comprise of’, and it would be a good thing if this could be nailed as incorrect.

contact

The COD does not agree with your ruling that ‘to contact someone’ is x.

cool drink and coolie

There seems to be some confusion as to whether or not ‘cool drink’ is hyphenated.

cottage

‘S Afr home at the coast’: surely this is too specific?

A *crochet/crocheting*

Mispronounced ‘croucher’ and ‘crouchering’ by many S Afr — or is this common throughout the English-speaking world?

drostdy and landdros

If drostdy and drosdy are alternative spellings, this should be made clear.

A *e.g.*

Means ‘for example’, so it is incorrect to write ‘for e.g.’.

face cloth

I think this is now the usual term in England, too, though I do remember ‘flannel’ appearing on school clothing lists in the 1940s.

guti

The ‘see also’ reference to chiperone is unhelpful as there is no further information at chiperone. Perhaps ‘alt chiperone’ might be better.

A hang of a
similar to helluva, q.v. Possibly more common in Rhodesia than S Afr.

A hard
hord x, e.g. 'he worked hord' x.

A *in the bush/in the sticks*
In the bushveld. Very common phrases in Rhodesia.

jacaranda
See 'City of Gold', above.

A *Joburg*
Although Nicholas Monsarrat (*The Pillow-fight*, p. 1) says that Johannesburg is never called Joburg, the facts are against him, and it might be helpful to a foreigner to record this colloquialism.

just now
The OED says the phrase denotes present, past or future:

- 7a Exactly at this point of time
- b Only a very short time ago
- c Directly, immediately, very soon, presently.

OED gives an example of (c) from Trollope's *Thackeray*: 'I will give you one or two instance just now', and I also came across this use in one of the Barchester novels, but can't remember which. This use of the phrase may have died out in the UK, but it has taken root and survived in S Afr.

lay-by
One sometimes reads in shop windows: 'lay-byes accepted'; perhaps this spelling (also found in the UK) should be recorded as x.

A *madala*(Zulu)
(Respectful mode of address for) an old man, commonly used in Rhodesia. I can't find it in any dictionary, but -dala = old.

man
I was once addressed as 'man' where I think the other person (a Hollander) meant 'Sir' — cf. your article on *lady*. I don't know how widespread this usage may be.

mary and sammy

There seems to be some doubt as to whether 'mary' is capitalized.

A *msasa*

Tree very common in Rhodesia.

A *much better* (sch or sl?)

'He is coughing much better' = 'He is coughing a great deal'.

A *no*

In S Afr *no* often means *yes*: 'Do you feel all right?' — 'No, I'm fine, thanks'. I have also heard 'Yes-no, I'm fine, thanks'. Perhaps the *no* here is quite meaningless, as in the following, heard in an interview on the radio: 'Who are you voting for?' — 'No, I'm voting Nationalist'.

nouns, collective

Could we have guidance over 'two gin and tonics' or 'two gins and tonic' or 'two gins and tonics'?

offices/officers

Surely no one ends 'offices' with an S sound? The difference between the two words is not in the final consonant but in the final vowel: oficiz and officerz.

A *on* (ii)

'May I speak to Miss Smith?' — 'I'm sorry, she is on lunch'. Ugh!

oulaas

According to Afrikaans dictionaries, 'vir oulaas' means 'for the last time', so presumably 'oulaas' means 'the last time'.

A *over* (ii)

Must I do it over? x Should I do it again?+

oversea

The meaning of 'overseas' is sometimes restricted even further, denoting the UK. I don't know whether this is + or x.

particularly

The phonetic transcript should surely be pɛtɪ'kyōōlélē.

phrasal verbs

In S Afr we are in serious danger of catching 'meet with' and 'visit with' from the USA.

A *p.k.* (=piccanin kaia)

Invariably used for 'toilet' in Rhodesia.

post-graduate

As an adj (e.g. post-graduate studies) this is +; as a noun (there are eight post-graduates on our course) it is definitely x. There is not such animal as a post-graduate — except in heaven?

Protea

Why capitalized?

A *shebeen*

In S Afr the word seems to be limited to a non-white liquor establishment.

skelm x

But skellum + (SOED)

A *something else* x

Something rather good. Used by young people.

songalolo

Alt: chongalolo, shongalolo, tsongalolo.

span

According to the SOED this is 'a team of oxen or other draught animals consisting of *two or more yokes*'.

stamp

You define this *verb* as a process.

stone (i)

Mass and weight are two different concepts, and should not be combined.

stop street

Mostly used for the intersection itself. In fact, 'then you come to a stop-street' means 'then you come to a major road where you must stop'.

suikerbos (ii)

A definition is needed here.

taal

Seems invariably linked to 'praat': 'He praats the taal very well'. Used here in a jocular rather than a derogatory sense.

Table Mountain

Is not flat-topped; it is only the outline which appears flat.

A tickey boy

Used formerly to denote a newspaper boy. Has been partly replaced in Cape Town by 'argie'.

titles of address

'Good morning, Doctor' + 'May I see you for a moment, Professor?' + But in S Afr these titles are often used incorrectly as nouns: 'Doctor is not in yet' x 'Professor sends his apologies' x 'The doctor is not in yet' + 'Professor Jones sends his apologies' +

unreal

Also used by young people with a special meaning, similar to 'something else', q.v.

wash the dishes

Is also common in England: the paternal side of my family 'wash the dishes', while my mother's side 'do the washing up'.

woman/women

Surely no one says wè'mén? *Everyman's English pronouncing dictionary* says 'wimin'.

(f) Mr Hugo Cilliers, Pretoria :*Pico*

10^{12} , not 10^{12} (see p. 135 of *A Dictionary of English Usage in Southern Africa*); not a trillionth, but a billionth.

giga

a billion in South Africa is 10^{12} as in G.B., not 10^9 (see p. 75). In the U.S.A. a billion is 10^9 ; in South Africa and G.B. 10^9 is a *milliard*.

Enterprise

not a verb (see endings in -ise and -ize).

2. FURTHER ENTRIES FOR THE DICTIONARY (SOME WITH TENTATIVE DEFINITIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS)

(a) South African Colloquialisms and Slang

backyard n, E, X (+ coll??)

a vehicle parked in the garden/garage ('back yard') of a mechanic's house for repair in his spare time; equiv. of 'moon-lighting'.

bend it straight

'to bend the bar straight'; equiv. of 'straighten'.

morning glory n, E, coll.

term used by some public servants to describe female part-time workers; equiv. of 'mornings only'.

straight round the corner

lit.: 'turn right (or left) at the corner.'

(b) Further Entries

blackjack (ii) *Bedens pilosa*

weed, the seed of which sticks to clothing; often mistakenly used for khaki weed or khaki bush (*mula graveolens*; *tagetes minuta*) which is also said to have properties providing relief from rheumatism.

blackjack (iii) n, E, + coll.

term used in G.B. for adhesive 'electrical' tape on roll; specifically for types other than plastic tape; limited use in S Afr, especially among immigrants.

blackjack (iv) n, E, + coll.

term used by Johannesburg 'blacks' for 'black' officers of the West Rand Administration Board.

jerryunglum n, ??, coll.

alt: jerryunglim, gerryunglim, haarskeerder:

red hairy insect with disproportionately large jaws; commonly mistaken for a spider; very active; apparently not venomous; found predominantly in the karoo regions.

Matungulu n, Ngu, + (*clarissa macrocarpa*)

alt: amatungulu, amatungula, matungula, umthungulu, martingula, martingulu, big num num

coastal bush of the fam. *Apocynaceae*; found on dunes and edges of coastal forest from Humansdorp nwds through Natal and Zululand to Maputo; attains height up to 4m; conspicuous leathery leaves, pale below, shiny above, oval shaped; pure white flowers, with orange blossom scent; large plum-like fruit, enclosing 16+ seeds; 3,5cm in diameter; red with milky latex; edible; succulent, rich in vit C; good for making preserves.

perch n, E, +

name applied to fish of the fam. *Cichlidae*; a bream (?) found in waters off St Lucia.

Rector prop n, E, +

title used for principal at some afk univ.; also used for headmaster at Grey High School, Port Elizabeth and by Michaelhouse in Natal.

(c) Some examples of business and financial jargon:

business mood
 bridging finance
 cash budgets
 cost squeeze
 current account deficit
 fiscal corrective
 fixed investment
 gold bubble
 inflation rate
 private sector
 public sector
 real growth rate
 reflation
 structural rate

A.D.A.