

# A Dictionary of English Usage in Southern Africa

## 1. SOME COMMENTS BY READERS

### (a) Mrs Kathleen M. Abbott, Pretoria:

- (i) Can you add *sobo-sobo* to any new edition? People who come from the Eastern Cape, as I do, will look for *sobo-sobo* (the 'o' pronounced exactly as in *toktokkie*) the common name for *Solanum nigrum*. As children, we all ate the berries and our mothers made the most delicious, rich purple stews or pies with them. However, grown on some soils, or picked green, they can also be toxic and overseas have earned the name of 'nightshade', 'deadly nightshade', etc. ...
- (ii) Have the terms *voorskot* and *agterskot* really made their way into the English vocabulary, or do they remain Afrikaans words to be labelled, perhaps, +*rest*? 'Advance payments' and 'final payments' are the English terms often used, so the others are not necessary.

### (b) Mr Dennis Walder, Edinburgh, Scotland:

This is, first of all, to congratulate you on your *Dictionary of English Usage in Southern Africa*, a copy of which O.U.P. has allowed me to look at. As someone born and bred in South Africa, but now permanently resident in Britain, I was fascinated to read your work, and I must say I found it both enjoyable and instructive.

May I take this opportunity of offering some rather random comments and suggestions? No doubt you will be inundated with possible alterations and additions — always a reflection of strong interest — but I thought I might add some of my own.

#### *Alterations or Additions to Current Entries*

- (i) I was surprised to find that 'boy' was considered an acceptable usage; as I recall, it seemed unacceptable to

black South Africans, and I wonder if you consulted any on this.

- (ii) 'Sarvi' should surely be entered as 'arvie', which is the constituent element — hence 'tomorrow arvie' as well as 'this arvie' etc.
- (iii) 'cossie' should perhaps have pronunciation given, as the consonants are — unexpectedly — voiced.
- (iv) You might note that the confusion between 'thē' and 'thē' exists in Great Britain too, notably among speakers on radio and television, who commonly refer to 'thē beautiful flower', for example.
- (v) The 'live/stay' confusion I've noticed here too, although it is not as common as among South African English speakers. I felt you might have expanded this entry, which refers to such a common confusion.
- (vi) 'face cloth' is common here, as a visit to a local supermarket confirmed — perhaps American influence.
- (vii) 'bok-bok' deserves a brief description of the game?
- (viii) 'just now' to mean 'presently' *is* common in Great Britain — at least in Scotland, which may well be the origin of this usage (as well as of others in Southern African English — a fruitful topic for research).
- (ix) The pronunciation of 'sah'dizm' [sadism] is not standard here — indeed I cannot say I have ever heard it — and would, I think, sound affected in both South Africa and Great Britain.
- (x) The definition of metaphor offered on page xvii struck me as limited and inadequate — at least one needs to point out that metaphor is *not* only visual ('mental picture' is misleading).

#### *Possible New Entries*

- (i) Usages common among black South Africans. There seems to me to be a vast area omitted here — two expressions which I remember as common in the Cape are 'nylon' for a police van (the more you put in, the more it holds) and 'zones' for single men's quarters. But there are many more, equally familiar among black speakers of South African English. Another would be the South African meaning of 'township'.
- (ii) Teenage usages; 'smoothie', 'ducktail', 'slimjim' etc. There are many of these.

- (iii) Obscene usages — why are these omitted? They do fall into the descriptive side of your work, I would think, and may be found in South African literature in English, even if not acceptable in polite speech — e.g. ‘gat’, ‘kak’, ‘moer’ ...
- (iv) Assorted omissions; ‘kroes’ (fuzzy); ‘miggie’ or ‘muggie’ (small flying insect); ‘outa’; ‘capey’; ‘jus’like’; ‘sluk’; phrases such as ‘skop ’n donner’, as in ‘it was a skop ’n donner flick’.

These are some of the items which have come to mind. I offer them with the view that your book will become the standard work on the subject, and may need to become more comprehensive to achieve that aim.

## **2. FURTHER ENTRIES FOR THE DICTIONARY (some with tentative definitions and classifications):**

### **(a) South African Colloquialisms and Slang**

Capey n, Eng, x  
abbr of term ‘Cape Coloured’

charf v, -, sch  
He charfs he’s handsome = He thinks that he is handsome  
/ He is vain

dabs v, -, sch  
I dabs that (I choose, put in a claim for) that

goef v, -, sch  
alt: goof  
Come let’s go goef/goof = Let us go bathing  
See you at the goefies / at the goefs =  
I shall meet you at the swimming baths

going through  
I am going through to Johannesburg; the equiv of the simple ‘going’

graft v, E, sch  
I don’t graft geogo/jogo =  
I do not appreciate the study of Geography

- graze v, E, sch  
eat, e.g. I'll graze at his place
- houtkop n, D/Afk, x  
lit: wooden head  
derogatory term used of an Afr implying that he is dull-witted
- jammerlappie n, D/Afk, + coll (?)  
cloth for cleaning one's hands at a meal
- klawerjas n, D/Afr, ?  
an old card game (Wilbur Smith) (?)
- kreef n, D/Afr, + coll (?)  
crayfish, rock lobster
- onnie n, -, sch  
Our History onnie's a smart ou =  
Our History teacher is a fine fellow  
'Onnie' obviously from 'onderwyser'; 'smart' has lost its value as a descriptive of style, fashion or grooming, and has become 'fine' or 'lekker'.
- oorskiets n, D/Afk, + coll (?)  
left-overs
- pronk v, D/Afk, x  
he pronks around = he parades (himself) around in a showy manner
- Sap n, abbr, + coll (?)  
an abbreviation of the old South African Party, now used to denote a member of the United (South African) Party;  
also SAP, South African Police
- sixie n, E, + coll (?)  
diminutive of sixpence; used when S Afr currency was still £sd
- skoffel v, D/Afk, + coll (?)  
to clear weeds using a spade
- snaaks n, D/Afk, x  
he is trying to be snaaks (funny, difficult)
- snoep n, D/Afk, x  
mean, stingy

tog adv, D/Afk, x

the baby is tog sweet (he is just too sweet),  
I'll just tog do it (I'll simply do it)

tula v, Ba, + coll

be quiet

us for ourselves

Let's make *us* some tea.

The correct form of the pronoun to use here would be the reflexive 'ourselves', if indeed it was considered necessary and not superfluous to emphasise for whom the tea is to be made.

'We are having a table made *for us*.'

Yous ous n, -, sch

'You chaps'

**(b) Further Terms**

inkonka n, ?, + (?)

bushbuck (Wilbur Smith)

jerrymunglim n, ?, ? coll

alt: gerrymunglim

term widely used in Natal for a large species of spider

lammergeyer n, D/Afk, + (?)

'eagle (Wilbur Smith)

Okavango prop n, BA, +

see: Ovambo

river in Sth Afr; rises in mountains of Angola; flows S & Est to form part of boundary between Angola & SWA and ends in marshes & lakes of the Okavango Basin (or swamp) in Nth W Bechuanaland

pantihose n, E, + (?)

S Afr equiv of 'tights' in GB; in S Afr 'tights' applies only to ballet tights

slacksuit n, E, + (?)

S Afr equiv of trousersuit in GB; prob Amer infl

**(c) Some Political Parties in South Africa**

Herstige Nasionale Party prop n, Afk, + (?)

An opposition party; at present it has no members of parliament; name available in Afrikaans only

National Party prop n, E, +  
Ruling party in S.Afr

Nationalist prop n, E, +  
a member or supporter of the National Party in the Rep of  
S Afr; sometimes abbr to 'Nat'

Progressive Reform Party prop n, E, +  
Political party with several members of parliament; formed  
by uniting the Progressive Party with the Reform Party

United Party prop. n, E, +  
Official opposition party; see also 'Sap' under a. South  
African Colloquialisms and Slang

**(d) Some Uneasy Partners:**

aggregate/average  
certificate/diploma  
compile/write  
complement/supplement  
comprise/consist/compose/constitute  
discrete/discreet  
dose/dosage  
environment/habitat  
especial(ly)/special(ly)  
flammable/inflammable  
imply/infer  
number/amount  
principal/principial/principle  
relations/relatives  
sewerage/sewage  
translate/transliterate

**(e) Miscellaneous**

mileage  
the correct term in an age of kilometres?  
ofcourse/of course  
two words  
Tuesday  
*not* 'chooseday'