

# THE DICTIONARY OF SOUTH AFRICAN ENGLISH

by J. Walker

The purpose of the *Dictionary of South African English* (hereafter DSAE) is to produce a comprehensive linguistic history of all English words reflecting a distinctly South African culture or environment. We shall concentrate on the progressive adaptation of the English tongue to the needs of our developing society over the period of three centuries that has seen its relative isolation from the parent language in Great Britain.

The DSAE gains significantly by the variety of institutions which serve it. Central to these is the Human Sciences Research Council on whom we depend financially. The lexicographical unit at Rhodes, under the auspices of the Institute for the Study of English in Africa, also has full inter-disciplinary support. The basic work falls on the shoulders of the editor, Professor William Branford, his assistant editors Jean Branford and John Walker (replacing Penny Silva) and the research assistant Margaret Britz. Editorial control of the DSAE lies in the hands of the Dictionary Committee: Professor J. Smuts (Chairman), Head of the Department of Afrikaans/Nederlands; Professor W. Branford, Head of the Department of Linguistics; Professor A. de Villiers, Director of the Institute for the Study of English in Africa and Mr. M.V. Aldridge, Senior Lecturer in Linguistics.

Related to the DSAE are two further lexicographical projects. Jean Branford is preparing for publication a concise dictionary of about 3 000 items of South African English. In this both common everyday expressions and fairly rare items will appear. Secondly, a pilot study of the main project is to be published in the near future in the form of a pre-dictionary. It will contain approximately 1 000 nucleus items of South African English treated, unlike those in Jean Branford's dictionary, on historical principles. The format of the entries in the pre-dictionary will be similar to that in the main publication, of which two sample entries are shown here, *heemraad* and *smous*:

*heemraad* [ˈh m,r :t -r :d] *n*; pl -raden often capitalized. [Du *heem* = village, home + *raad* = council(1or)]

Forms: heemrad, hemraad; pl forms: heemraaden, hemraaden, hemradens, hemredens, hemrodens.

(1) (Hist) A member of a board assisting the landdrost (qv) in local government and the administration of justice.

Boards of Heemraden were instituted at the Cape in 1682 (three years before the establishment of the office of Landdrost, with which they were associated), to provide local jurisdiction for petty civil cases in which decisions were subject to appeal. Heemraden were unsalaried and were not required to have legal training. The functions of the boards changed from time to time and they could eventually levy and administer taxes. They ceased to function officially in 1827 when the Charter of Justice came into operation.

1795 Theal Records I (1897) p. 209: ... the Burgher War Officer Cornelis Coetzee and two Heemraden named Hendrik Meyntjes van den Berg and Stephanus Naude have been dismissed on account of their sacrificing, contrary to their Oath and Duty, the general Welfare to the vain Friendship of the Landdrost, by agreeing always with the same.

1797 Theal Records II (1898) p. 20: Good Friends! – I have duly received by the hands of the Heemraad Nicolaas van der Walt and the Lieutenants Pieter Ernst Kruger and Johannes van der Walt your Letter of the 13th of November, which could not fail of giving me the most sensible satisfaction. ...

1800 B.O.23 cit Venter P.J. (1940) p. 190 ... more especially as those Heemraaden, being inhabitants of the most respectability have ... offended against your Excellency's commands ...

1801 Barrow I p. 12 cit CP: The Cape of Good Hope ... is divided into four districts over each of which is placed a civil magistrate called a Landdrost, who with his *Heemraden*, or a council of country burghers, is vested with power to regulate the police of his district, superintend the affairs of government ...

1881 Ewart (1970) p. 40: ... each of the districts is govern'd by a court of seven members of which the landdrost or chief magistrate of the district is the president; the other six members are called heemraaden.

1816 Barker 21 Mar: They were taken from the prison at Uitenhage ... accompanied by the Revd Mr. Herold; minister of George, the Landdrost of Uitenhage and the Hemraads and Field-Cornets of the district ...

1818 C.O. 1477 cit Venter P.J. (1940) p. 47: ... certain crimes of an aggravated nature not intended by the authority aforesaid to be subjected to the jurisdiction of the Board of Landdrost and Heemraden ...

1820 Hancock p. 52a: ... you may depend on my proceeding against you in the court of Landdrost and Heemraaden – without delay ...

1822 Pigot Mar p. 66: Papa so vext with Government he has sent in his resignation, Mr. Phillips also has agreed with him to refuse to serve as heemraad.

1823 Bird p. 23: It is true that an Englishman has been rarely called to the office of heemrad, except in the new drostdy of Albany, where the settlers are located.

1827 Thompson p. 60: My host, a jolly consequential-looking person, was, I found, a Mynheer Van Heerden, a *heemraad* and *kerkraad* of the district (i.e. a member of the district court and churchwarden)....

1828 Cape Statutes (1862) 28 Feb p. 124: Whereas certain of the taxes now payable in this colony have been heretofore collected and got in by the landdrosts, landdrosts and commissioned heemraden, ... the revenue can no longer be collected as heretofore...

1848 Cape Statutes (1862) p. 895: Ordinance for enabling Resident Magistrates to exercise in regard to disputed Rights of Water certain Powers formerly exercised by Landdrost and Heemraden.

1856 C of G.H. Almanac p. 291: ... its government is now in the hands of a President, freely elected by the inhabitants, assisted by an Executive Council and Landdrosts and Heemraden in the several districts while the Volksraad exercises legislative functions.

1858 Goldswain I p. 50: Letters were sent rownd to all the hemradens or Justes of the peace ...

1861 Borchers cit Venter P.J. (1940) p. 55: The heemraden followed successively, dressed generally in black, and when assembled, with the Landdrost presiding, the large village bell beside the Drostdy-house was tolled ...

1899 Voigt p. 158: In 1828 ... the Courts of Landdrost and Heemraden were abolished, and Magistrates' Courts, presided over by the District Civil Commissioners, were established.

1909 Theal II p. 258: To provide for the settlement of trivial disputes between the burghers of the new district, a board of heemraden was established on the 30th of August, 1682. This court consisted of four of the leading inhabitants, who held office for two years, without receiving salaries for their services.

1938 Botha G. p. 17: The Landdrost was the magistrate of today, the Heemraden, when acting in a judicial capacity, were petty magistrates, and in an administrative capacity performed duties somewhat similar to those of a Municipality and Divisional Council.

1948 Hockly p. 73: At the same time two other settlers ... were appointed heemraden to assist the Deputy Landdrost at Grahamstown.

1970 Butler p. 18: Old Captain Somerset takes one look at us and roared with laughter, and then sent us each a new linen shirt, and summoned our master to show cause why we should not be given our discharge, before the court of Heemraden.

1972 SESA VI p. 530: The Voortrekkers took the office of landdrost with them to the Boer Republics, but not that of heemraad ...

(2) The local council presided over by the Landdrost.

1900 Westm. Gaz. 19 Dec 3/2 cit OED Supp (1972): Lord Caledon, after our second annexation of the Cape, revived an old kind of elected Councils, named Heemraden, for the government of the inland districts.

1913 Fairbridge p. 56: Then followed the Landdrost of Stellenbosch, Michiel Ditmar, and the members of the Heemraad or Village Board of Management.

1939 Bense p. 618: The Dutch set up *heemraden* (councils) at Batavia in 1664 (abolished in 1809), and in the Cape Colony, at Stellenbosch,

there was a council consisting of the landdrost and six *heemraden* (members of the council called heemraad): ...

1949 RR in SA p. 57: In country districts, the inferior courts consisted of the landdrost, primarily an administrative officer, presiding over an appointed board of burghers known as the heemraad.

(3) (figurative) A senior tribesman, counsellor to a Chief. See *amapakati, induna*.

1833 GTJ 16 May p. 3 (W. Southey): ... a trading station about 1 or 1½ miles from the kraals of the robbers where the neighbouring Caffer Heemraden came to me, and where the cases were settled.

1835 GTJ 27 Aug p. 1: ... one of Tyalie's oldest Hemraden came into my camp on the "Goolo" ...

1835 Stretch 2 May: You the day before yesterday shot the wife of our principal Heemraden T'Zebe and some others which give us great pain.

+ OED Supp 33

+ W3

<sup>1</sup>*Smous* [sm s] n; pl -es [ Du *smous*= Jew, poss fr Moses, or German dialect *schmuss* = talk, patter or Jewish *schmuoss* tales, news].

Forms: smouch, smoucher, smouse, smouser, smoutch.

An itinerant pedlar, esp during the 19th C. Sometimes derogatory.

*Smous* meaning 'Jew' was once current in English but is now obs; cognate with US *smouch* = acquire dishonestly. *Smous* sometimes takes on both these meanings in SAE.

1796 tr Le Vaillant, *Travels* I p. 55 cit CP: There is at the Cape ... a species of old-clothes men ... who, from their enormous profits and the extortion they practise have obtained the name Cape-*Smouse*, or Cape Jews.

1827 Thompson II p. 136: ... but brandy (the only luxury besides tobacco in which the poorer boors indulge) is purchased from *smouses*, or hawkers, who traverse the remotest skirts of the Colony with waggon-loads of this detestable beverage.

1828 Kate Pigot Apl (Fitzroy 1955 p. 84): Smaller items travel round the country in smouses packs – we have learned to call pedlars so – they bring to the farms threads tapes and ribbons, and the last that came to us had a new invention blacklead pencils.

1832 GTJ 4 May p. 74: ... that useful and industrious class of people the *Smouses*, to whose spirit of enterprise this town is mainly indebted for its rapid rise.

1839 W.C. Harris p. 63: Traders, or smouches, as they are called by the colonists, constantly visit Latakoo and its neighbourhood, and often proceed to a considerable distance beyond it into the interior, ...

1844 Backhouse p. 433 cit Jeffreys 1964: At this place (Scheid Fountain) there were some wagons belonging to a travelling Boor, and two belonging to a trader, called in this country, a *Smous*, which literally means a cheat.

1863 Shone 14 Oct: Mr & Mrs Crout, Smouch, stopt all night. I bought from them 2 shirts paid 7/- for them. Henry S., J.K. Badley bought a great many things.

1870 Dugmore p. 27: .. the milch cows began to show themselves on the locations, and the fat hamels came with them, brought down by the young “Smouses” from the inner istricts ...

1883 Schreiner p. 164: Piles of white linen, and some aprons and quilts; and in the little box in the corner a spray of orange blossom which she had bought from a smouse.

1899 Blackburn p. 74: ... one day, before Piet had been made Field Cornet, a young Jewish smoucher broke his leg by falling down a shaft on Piet’s place ...

1933 MacDonald p. 88: Commercial travellers or “smouses”, as they were called, trekked with herds of cattle from the Transvaal and Zululand into Natal, and so added to the glut of live stock then prevailing in the country.

1937 Prance p. 64: There was the “Smous” for instance, the hawker trudging humbly with pack on back from farm to farm, promoted to pack donkeys by his own industry and ability...

1940 Brett-Young p. 391: Where is your donkey-wagon now, then? You are no longer a *smous*. I know you are looking for gold.

1949 Green p. 142: ... Another duty of the *smous* was to bring news of the outside world.

1956 Neumark p. 145: The *smous* is known to have played an important part in the frontier economy during the time of the Great Trek (in the 1830's).

1967 Croudace p. 57: Only that morning they had met a *smous*, a Jewish pedlar, returning with his pack animals to the coast, and he had paused long enough to regale them with the gossip of the garrison.

1968 McMagh p. 32: As the population grew and the settlers moved further afield the *smous* followed and took to the road, bearing his pack on his back until such time as his profits enabled him to afford first a cart and horses and later a wagon and oxen.

1972 Green p. 53: They were hunters as well as farmers, and probably they were visited by a wagon *smous* who bought the skins of the buck they had shot.

<sup>2</sup>*smous* v Forms: *smouch*, *smouse* *smouth*.

To peddle, to be engaged in itinerant trading.

1839 Shone 4 May: We met John a coming back, he was going a *smouth*ing. I gave him my watch and a Quarter of mutton, he gave me his watch and some coffee and sugar.

1887 Wilmot p. 191: Dont with the goldfields meddle,  
But stick to steak and Simms' mild make!  
And *smouse* around and peddle.

1968 Edgecombe p. 235: He had opened a shop in Graaf-Reinet in 1824 and '*smoused*' about the country. By 1836 he had established a shop in Colesberg.

Derivatively:

*smousing* *vbl n*.

1823 Bird p. 148: Smouching, which here is an appropriate word, meaning buying an article, and selling it again at profit, is practised by all the Cape-Dutch, except a few of the highest class...

1876 Stubbs I p. 51: Having given by Kurveying – I thought a Smousing trip might pay, I got a waggon load of goods from W.R. Thompson at 6 months Credit, and started.

1886 Farini p. 328: They have large farms now and thousands of sheep and cattle, and I might have been like them, but I fancied smousing (trading), and in two years I lost all I had.

1897 Graaf-Reinet Advertiser 23 Aug cit CP: That kind of thing soon knocked the smousing man over.

1973 OI: A: Have you made them an offer?

B: NO, apparently they're sort of smousing it around.

1973 Caravan XIV: 7 July p. 21: During the evening's friendly circle at Beaufort West Guy was fined for "smousing" on a public road.

+ OED

+ W3.

#### Explanatory Notes:

For each word selected for the DSAE, informed readers collect illustrative quotations in written contexts which show how the word has been used since its inception into or adaptation by SAE. These quotations are gained as a result of close scrutiny of as many books, magazines or papers produced in or about South Africa as possible. The range of contexts should fully illustrate the word's peculiar linguistic behaviour and represent as wide a range of specialist and popular usages as a full coverage may require. Written sources supply most of the raw materials but the spoken language is also sampled.

Each context is entered on an index card as shown in this example from Robert Gray's *Journal of the Bishop's Visitation Tour through the Cape Colony in 1850* published in 1851.



I was not allowed to depart without a good supply of pat-koss, and other comforts provided by the kindness of these parishioners.

Once we have a reasonable number of contexts for a particular entry, the cards are arranged chronologically into significations (e.g. *heemraad*, (1) a member of a board or (2) the board itself). A *headword* in what is judged to be the most typical spelling (e.g. *padkos* rather than *pat-koss*) is chosen and the *corpus* as it is now called is edited.

For those items only whose standard South African pronunciation may not be clear from the spelling to non-South African readers, a *phonetic transcription* is made. Where there are established alternative pronunciations (as in *heemraad*), these are reflected.

*Grammatical designations* ('noun', 'verb' etc.) and grammatical markers (e.g. '*plural*') based on the actual behaviour of the word are then added.

We have limited our etymologies to account for the establishment and development of a word in its South African sense. There would be little purpose in taking the SAE *location* (as an area of black inhabitation) beyond its British English origins to include Old French or Latin, for this earlier part of the word's history is suitably treated in the OED and elsewhere. The reader is always referred at the foot of each entry to other dictionaries where further information can be found (e.g. W 3 for *Webster's Third New International*).

The list of *forms* or variant spellings which follows the etymology is not meant to provide alternatives to the standard spelling but to complete the word's record and in some cases to carry information about early pronunciation.

Although an historical dictionary cannot be prescriptive in favour of, say, contemporary users, we have made some attempt to allow for social forces operating on the use of items. *Status Labels* such as *historical*, *objectionable* or *colloquial* are added only after careful

consideration and consultation and always, of course, in terms of the illustrative material to hand.

At this stage in editing, the various senses of the word are studied once more. Should the senses indicate a semantic accordance, a single comprehensive *definition* can be drawn up from them. Sometimes, however, it is a more natural reflection to split the illustrations up into their major significations and provide definitions for each. Where the definition seems an inadequate guide to the user of the dictionary, a *background* is provided, although this is seldom found necessary. The purpose of the DSAE is not encyclopaedic.

*Heemraad* and *smous* are typical of entries in the DSAE, but it should be stressed that they are not necessarily in the form which they will take in the ultimate publication of the Dictionary itself. New material and new insights, perhaps provided by readers, might result in extensive metamorphosis.