

ENGLISH USAGE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The text of three discussion programmes in the series *Talking of English*
These talks were broadcast last year on the English Service of the South
African Broadcasting Corporation

PROGRAMME 1: Vocabulary

Beeton: We in South Africa have acquired a great many words of which we have a right to be proud, and which have contributed to the expressiveness of English, specifically of course in this country, but sometimes also, we believe, in other English-speaking countries in the world.

The subject of lexical innovation is a fascinating one, and in this programme we shall look at some of the words that have given colouring and expressiveness to South African English, and we shall try to decide or suggest whether they are legitimate parts of our vocabulary or not. I am joined in this discussion by Miss Helen Dorner who is helping me compile the *Index of English Usage in Southern Africa*.

We thought it would be a good idea to start off with some passages of what we regard as fairly respectable South African description. Herman Charles Bosman who has his origins in the Marico district of the Transvaal is a wonderful subject for South African reading because of the colour and flavour in his writing. He is perhaps most famous as a short story writer but the first passage I intend reading is taken from his book of essays, *A Cask of Jerepigo*. Here it is, *Veld Story*:

There is a fascination about old cemeteries of the kind that are dotted about the South African veld, family grave-yards at the foot of koppies; small plots for burial grounds that were laid out during the past century, in the old days when amongst the harnesses and riems and trek-chains in the wagon-house, or by the side of the sacks of mealies in the grain shed there was always, on every farm, ready for use in emergency, a coffin.

One such old cemetery — a comparatively large one — is at Warmbaths, the headstones bearing dates going back to the 1840's. A number of Voortrekkers were buried there, not those who were leaders of any Treks, but obscure persons, men and women and children, whose memories have been obliterated with the erasing of their names and the dates of their birth and death from the headstones. And when you look at the little mounds of sunbleached stones (do they search the veld specially for stones of the white sort when a mound is raised over a grave, or does the sun make the stones white with the years? ...), a century does not seem so very long, somehow....

And what is of more particular interest to a passer-by is an old cemetery somewhere on a lonely part of the veld, overgrown with tangled grass and oleanders and shut in with barbed-wire fence, the rusted strands put very close together — and all traces lost long ago of the following generations of that family that had laid its dead to rest in a piece of ground closed in with barbed-wire that is clothed with half a century of rust.

Such a grave-yard I came across at the week-end on a farm that is within easy reach of Johannesburg. The farm has changed hands a good number of times in recent years. The new owners, I found, did not know very much about the original family of van Heerdens, whose names are engraved on the headstones in the cemetery.

There is still a stretch of rising ground in the neighbourhood that is known as van Heerden's Bult. But nobody named van Heerden has lived in those parts for as long as most people can recall.

I could not, of course, resist the temptation to climb over that fence. The oleander — Selon's-roos it is called in Marico — at one time the most popular flowering tree in certain parts of the country, because it is hardy and stands up well to drought conditions, had grown tall and shaggy, through not having been pruned..., but the colour of its flowers tinted in well with the yellow of the grass and the sunlight and the pallid yellow of the mood evoked by the surroundings, and the upper part of the grave-yard reposed in the cool of the oleander's shade.

There is in this passage, a sense of locality. This is induced partly by proper name references to the Marico district, to the family of van Heerdens and by clever and genuine descriptions such as that of the yellow grass of the veld and the barbed-wire fence, which to us seem typically South African. There are, of course, a great many other words, some known universally, others fairly local. One might pause here for a moment at 'veld', 'riems' and 'mealies'. But now, Miss Dorner, I'd like you to join with me in discussion, indicating with special reference to some of the words in this passage, what you think would be a reasonable attitude to a vocabulary in South African English, and to the question of innovation. Perhaps you could refer to several of the words that occur in this passage. And perhaps you could also comment on their effectiveness within the passage and the desirability of their currency outside it.

Dorner: Established words that immediately come to mind, in this particular passage, are 'voortrekker', 'trek', 'veld', 'trek-chains', 'wagon-house', and 'mealies'. They are, of course, all connected with pioneers, and with the land; so many of the words that we have introduced into the English language from South Africa, are. 'Riem' disturbs me a little. We don't use the term although the diminutive form does occur in a word like 'riempiestoel', which cannot be translated without losing its authenticity.

Beeton: Perhaps I could interrupt here, and come back to this word 'riem' which you have identified as having a local rather than a universal meaning. Do you see any possibility of our accepting 'riem' as a piece of local description? You have made the point that it is 'old-fashioned', but is there a possibility of its replacing an English word?

Dorner: I don't think that the word 'riem' could be accepted, because we have a perfectly good English word not to replace it, but to use. A leather thong or a leather strap would serve the purpose adequately.

Beeton: Yes, I think I agree with you. The point here is, we use a particular South African word if it adds to our vocabulary. If it merely confuses the issue, we should perhaps avoid it in expository writing, and in descriptive writing if it doesn't aim perhaps at the

type of evocation Bosman achieves here. Now Miss Dorner, what about some of the other words. I noticed 'van Heerden's Bult' — a good Afrikaans word — Bult. Perhaps you could say something about that for the moment.

Dorner: I think that in the combination, 'van Heerden's Bult', it is acceptable. But the word 'bult' on its own is not acceptable to me, whereas a word like 'krans' would be.

Beeton: Yes, I suppose 'krans' adds what one might call, a scenic proportion. Do you feel 'bult' doesn't do this?

Dorner: No, I don't think it does. 'Bult' can be translated as 'ridge, hillock or knoll'; a 'krans' is more than the translation 'rocky ridge' can convey.

Beeton: Perhaps now, we should look at the opening of one of Bosman's short stories, where he aims even more purposefully at local colouring, at the evocation of local landscape through local vocabulary. This story is called *Ox-Waggons on Trek*. I read the opening paragraphs:

When I see the rain beating white on the thorn trees as it does now (Oom Schalk Lourens said) I remember another time when it rained. And there was a girl in an ox-waggon who dreamed.

And in answer to her dreaming a lover came, galloping to her side from out of the veld. But he tarried only a short while, this lover who had come to her from the mist of the rain and the warmth of her dreams.

And yet when he had gone there was a slow look in her eyes that must have puzzled her lover very much, for it was a look of satisfaction, almost.

There had been rain all the way up from Sephton's Nek, that time. And the five ox-waggons on the road to the north rolled heavily through the mud. We had been to Zeerust for the Nagmaal church service, which we attended once a year.

Dorner: 'Nagmaal' has a great deal of specificity here. I think it is as clear to South Africans as 'Dominee'. We have no replacements

really for these words. 'Thorn trees' too, like 'fever trees', find their place in South African English. But a word like 'oom' in general use has a replacement and disturbs the ear and the eye.

Beeton: This word 'oom' is interesting, and 'tante' – they are, of course, the Afrikaans words for uncle and aunt. It's interesting to note that at the beginning of the century, Olive Schreiner used these words extensively in her book *Thoughts on South Africa* to evoke the Boer people, as the Afrikaners were then called, and in fact to make a direct appeal to them to preserve their way of life. I tend to agree with you, Miss Dorner, that 'oom' and 'tante' can only be used for an ulterior purpose. They can never constitute essential vocabulary – uncle and aunt are so accessible.

Bosman's writing about the Marico and Zeerust and Sephton's Nek brings me back again to *Thoughts on South Africa* because Olive Schreiner evoked, as no person before, and I believe no person after her, the Karoo, which could be described as semi-desert I suppose, or scrub country, but somehow the Karoo stands for itself only. It seems essential vocabulary, essential geography. Having got to Olive Schreiner, perhaps we should look at one of the passages in *Thoughts on South Africa*:

At night, when they had drawn up their wagons beside some iron-stone kopje, or near the bed of a sloop where there might be water in the sand, they heard the jackals howl about them (as you may still hear them at almost any farm in the Karoo, if in the night you will walk a mile or two from the house and sit down alone on the rocks) and the lion's roar, which for the span of more than a life has not been heard there now. And in the morning, when they woke and peered out between the sails of the wagon, within a stone's throw they saw the springbok feeding with wildebeest among them; and when the sun rose, and they stood up on the wagon-chest and scanned the plain, they rejoiced if they saw far off a vley where their cattle might drink; and if they saw none, they looked about for any indication of those carefully concealed drinking-places of the little Bushman, so well covered with stones, lest the wild animals might tread them in, or strangers drink the water; if they found none, and digging in the sand of the river-beds yielded too little for their cattle, then they

trekked on. If they found enough, then they often stayed for awhile till the veld was brown and barren and the game gone and then they trekked again.

In reading this passage two things occurred to me immediately. One is the origin of our indigenous words. Some words here are clearly picked up from the Afrikaans. Others seem to me translations. 'Wagon-chest' comes to mind. 'Bushman' is composed of English elements unlike, for example, 'vlei' or 'wildebeest'. The second point is that even at this stage South African words were being adapted in a new manner. Originally we had mainly to do with proper nouns. We have here to do with general nouns, nouns universally understood, nouns covering certain qualities or properties, and 'trek' because of this, has in Olive Schreiner, become a verb as well. I've said too much about the passage possibly, but Miss Dorner might like to look at the words we have mentioned here.

Dorner: I'd like to go back to your point of essential geography. You mention the word Karoo in this connection, and I should like to add words like 'lowveld', 'highveld' and even 'dorsland', if I can give this an English pronunciation at all. There are, of course, words in this passage which refer to our animal life, and South African English is very rich in vocabulary of this kind. One thing that interests me here is that Professor Beeton read the word as 'springbok' and it is written that way in the text — but I think one is more inclined in South Africa today to say 'springbuck' whereas 'gemsbok' is probably the more likely pronunciation, not 'gemsbuck'. This of course might be the influence of the Afrikaans word 'gems' which if given an English pronunciation, changes its meaning. And so 'bok' is retained instead of 'buck'.

I also want to comment briefly on the words 'kopje' and 'sloot' which are so typically South African and I cannot think of another word which would describe a sloot as well. I could add to the words I mentioned a while ago the words 'platteland' and 'bokkeveld', for which we do not have an English equivalent. 'Donga' perhaps is another.

Beeton: You mentioned our specific names for animals. The list of course for flora and fauna is extensive. Birds — what about 'bokmakierie', 'piet-my-vrou'?

Dorner: Yes, we have some very good English names as well: ‘Go-away bird’, ‘Secretary bird’.

Beeton: And what about plants? I can think of ‘kaffirboom’.

Dorner: Or there is the ‘ifafa lily’ and the ‘vygie’.

Beeton: Fish – ‘stompneus’ comes to mind here.

Dorner: Or ‘kingklip’, ‘klipfish’ and ‘kurper’. The interesting thing about fish, I think, is this – that we have different names in South Africa for fish along the Cape coast and those along the coast of Natal. For instance, the ‘dageraad’ of the Cape becomes the ‘slinger’ in Natal.

Beeton: This matter of idiom is interesting – words and expressions that have been curiously, possibly acceptably, adapted in this country. Perhaps we could deal with this in our next programme.

PROGRAMME 2: Usage and Misusage

Beeton: This evening we are going to deal not with vocabulary, that is not with new words in English, but with what I call idiomatic adaptations, in other words, with terms that exist in English but have never been used with the frequency with which we employ them in this country, or with terms, compounded of English elements, that have a curious, specific relevance to our daily lives in this country. What we are dealing with, in fact, is idiom rather than vocabulary, although these divisions become very arbitrary indeed. I thought we might begin by reading a few stanzas from a poem I found in one of our local magazines. It is called *The Birth of South Africa*:

White dust gets up in the wide streets;
The watertank by the railway line drips for a goat;
The location there, all broken glass and tin
And a mongrel dog and flies, sleeps;
When it’s cooler we’ll take a stroll
And look in Cohen’s
At pans and saddles, candles, rope and seed,

And in the Corner Cafe we'll get the paper
That comes from Cape Town in the night.
Sunday. Sunday is always hot. We wait for coffee.

Hey, youse chaps, you want to play with?
We'll get some ou's from the railway,
They got peppertrees where you can hide
And we fight for them; there's shade when you win.
Meet at the donga....
Stand in a line. We pick first...
Cavalry like that bio;
You buggers are crooks or Indians.
You want to play Boers and Rooineks?
You'll ask for Trekkers and Kaffers next.
But someone has to make a start;
It wears your shoes out to make lines like this;
But this river-bed is nice;
This could be a laager, or Ladysmith
And you Boers hide in the willows;
You had cannons....

There are here some delicious scenic evocations. The water-tank by the railway line seems to me very much part of the South African scene. The 'Corner Café' (or, to give it its local pronunciation, 'caffy') is a nice, indigenous touch, and then of course, we have words that have become part of our vocabulary, adapted from the Afrikaans. In our last programme, Miss Dorner mentioned 'donga'. 'Boers' is another word. 'Trekkers'. 'Rooineks', I think, is verging certainly on colloquial acceptance. What do you make of this word 'bio', Miss Dorner?

Dorner: Well, it is of course as legitimate a word as 'bioscope', but I prefer 'cinema'.

Beeton: You know, I don't agree with you. I don't object at all to 'bioscope'. I think that once we have identified its meaning, it is a perfectly clear and specific word. And it has the additional quality of local feeling.

Dorner: But you would reject 'flick', wouldn't you?

Beeton: Yes, I think it ugly slang. I'd also reject, incidentally, 'youse chaps' from the poem we have just read!

Dorner: Yes, I would reject that too, and 'to play with' of course is purely ungrammatical. It has the same ring as 'to come with'. This is laziness in speech and expression.

Beeton: And also I think direct translation from the Afrikaans.

Dorner: 'Laager' is perfectly legitimate here, and 'location' is widely accepted as the term for a Bantu township. 'Rooineks', colloquially used, is acceptable, but 'ou's', I think, can be objected to. We do not use the word 'kêrel' in South African English either. 'Kaffirs' is essentially a derogatory term, yet it appears in combinations like 'kaffir watermelon', 'kaffirboom', 'kaffircorn' and on the London Stock Exchange, they speak of 'Kaffirs' – South African gold shares, in particular, indeed the corner set aside on the London Stock Exchange for the transaction of these shares is known as the 'Kaffir Circus'. We also have the 'kaffir blanket'. Funnily enough, this 'kaffir blanket' has, by various deviations, given us the 'blanket vote'.

Beeton: Vocabulary and idiom do tend to become confused. I think we should go on to a few other words, like 'location', that we have derived direct from English, and see what we make of them in this country. I have said I don't object to 'bioscope' because it has local colouring and it has a very specific reference. 'Robot' in this country refers to traffic lights, and I do object to it. Does this seem inconsistent? I don't think so, because if you look at 'bioscope' it refers to one thing and one thing only, the cinema. 'Robot', throughout the English-speaking world, refers to the mechanical man of steel. There is a confusion here. Traffic light is accessible. Why not use it?

Dorner: 'Resting place' seems as objectionable to me, because in the first place a 'resting place' is a stop where one consumes food along the road and, from my experience, the seating accommodation is anything but conducive to rest: 'lay-by' seems to me a better word to use.

Beeton: I always rather liked ‘resting place’, but it has been pointed out to me that some polite people refer to the cemetery as a resting place.

Dorner: I could, of course, refer to cookers which we call ‘stoves’ in South Africa, and electric fires which we call ‘heaters’ or ‘radiators’, but I should like to take up this question of traffic again. Our ‘traffic circle’ seems to be far more expressive than the British roundabout. And a ‘loop road’ in the Kruger National Park, for instance, is more appropriate than a ‘circular drive’. Our ‘meter maids’ or ‘ticket tannies’ (an expression which I think less acceptable than ‘meter maids’) are terms that come to mind here. And then our ‘highways’, ‘freeways’ and ‘dual carriageways’ – I believe the engineers have come to a decision about the proper terms for different kinds of ‘motorways’.

Beeton: Perhaps we should now concentrate for a while on what we might call ‘abusage’, in other words on what we regard as feeble corruptions, illiteracies, barbarisms – in fact whatever terms of derogation you find to describe language that enfeebles language.

This evening we read a passage from a poem in which the following occurred: ‘do you want to play with?’ ‘we’ll get some ou’s from the railway’. These seem to me to fall into the category with which we are now dealing. The word ‘ou’s’: a case could probably be made for it. After all, England has ‘chaps’, America has ‘guys’. What do you think, Miss Dorner?

Dorner: I think you could add to that list, ‘kêrel’, which I mentioned before, and which does appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. It is the equivalent of ‘ou’.

Beeton: But what about ‘ou’? Do you think we should allow it?

Dorner: I wouldn’t use it. But others may feel that it suits the purpose in colloquial speech.

Beeton: We can’t very well prevent it, but I think as people concerned with language, and usage, even colloquial usage, we should declare ourselves against it wherever possible. For some reason – I’m not quite able to find the reason tonight – it does seem objectionable.

The case against 'you want to play with' is a very strong one, but we have already dealt with this. We shouldn't accept this sort of thing.

Afrikaans has given our vocabulary a great many useful and colourful words. It has also given us what I regard as barbarisms, even in colloquial South African English. 'I feel deurmekaar', someone might say, someone too lazy to think of the word 'confused'. Another person thinking of 'that's settled' might say 'that's finish and klaar'. We also have words such as 'gonna' and 'griet' — and 'ja', 'lekker' and 'sis!' are used far too frequently. Another word I've noticed more and more in colloquial English is 'maar', for 'merely'. 'You must maar do it', someone might say.

But let's leave this list, it's quite an extensive one — as long as we are aware of these words that pull language down, that corrupt and enfeeble it. Let's consider a few words that are clearly English words, but to which we have given peculiar meanings. Earlier on, Miss Dorner, you mentioned the word 'rest place', or 'resting place', for 'lay-by'. We in this country are very fond of using 'just now', which of course is used all over the English-speaking world, but our sense seems to be peculiar to us. Would you like to comment on the expression 'just now'?

Dorner: 'Just now' does, I think, lead to some confusion because one isn't fully aware of whether the action will be carried out immediately or three hours later or a day later.

Beeton: What about the confusion of a word like 'shame'? 'Oh, shame', someone might exclaim on hearing that you are feeling ill or have been hurt in an accident.

Dorner: It seems a pity to confuse 'shame' with 'pity' as in the case of 'that is a pity', because 'shame' seems to indicate 'to be ashamed'. Our use of this word is influenced, probably largely, by the Afrikaans use of 'siestog'. It could also, as we use it, convey certain degrees of emotional participation, for example admiration on seeing a pretty baby.

Beeton: Can you think of any other expressions, Miss Dorner?

Dorner: There are such expressions as 'not so?', 'is it?', 'must I?', 'hey' and 'see', this last when it is used in an expression such as 'I'll do it, see'; the 'see' is often much repeated by this kind of speaker.

Beeton: This expression 'must I?' – it has, of course, a peculiar meaning in the way we use it – that's why we regard it as undesirable.

Dorner: In the sense of 'must I 'phone him?' when I should really use, 'does he want me to 'phone him?' or 'shall I 'phone him?'.

Beeton: A very curious question in South Africa is 'how come?', translated, I think, from the Afrikaans 'hoekom?', though here one should also consider the question of American influence.

Dorner: What do you think about 'how so?'. Do you think this expression is generally used in the English-speaking world, or is it peculiar to South Africa?

Beeton: I think it is again a translation. In fact, there are probably several translations of this kind.

Dorner: You could add 'now-now', for instance. And then the interesting 'off load' when there is a perfectly good English word to use, 'unload' – again the influence of Afrikaans. But I could not object to 'inspan' and 'outspan' because these words certainly lend colour to our English in South Africa.

Beeton: They seem to me to fall into the category of legitimate vocabulary. I mentioned earlier in this programme 'do you want to go with' which seems to me simply a case of omitting the final noun or pronoun. There is another expression in South African English which is not simply a matter of omitting a noun, that is 'throw with': 'I'll throw you with a stone', for 'I'll throw a stone at you', is again a sin in translation from the Afrikaans.

Dorner: Then there is also 'stand forward' for 'move forward', or even more dreadful, 'come there' instead of 'arrive'. And then South Africans have a habit of dropping prepositions. For instance, I come back to the example, 'come there'. One frequently hears this type of construction: 'I shall come there, Monday three o'clock', whereas it should be 'I shall arrive on Monday at three o'clock'.

Beeton: The South African English speaker also sometimes says he 'fell in the water'. Here quite clearly he wasn't in the water all the time, but fell *into* it. This again is a corruption of preposition in your sense, Miss Dorner.

Let's leave the matter of translation and now consider examples where we cannot think of guilty Afrikaans equivalents. 'A lovely person', used not only in South Africa, but, I think, in many countries – this is not a question of external beauty; it is a matter of spirit and soul. I don't like 'lovely' in this spiritual sense, do you?

Dorner: No, I don't. And I think, too, of a word like 'fabulous'. We over-stress and over-use that word in South Africa as we do the word 'too' in the sense 'she is too beautiful', 'this was too wonderful'.

Beeton: This matter of excess leads to 'hey', and 'I *just* did it', 'I *just* went there' – expressions that seem to occur with a disturbing frequency in this country. And also 'I *never* did it', 'I *never* told him'. We have something too which seems to me rather curious. We talk of an artist painting a *person*. Am I wrong here? – surely he is painting a portrait, and is not putting paint on his sitter. Is this a case of excessive pedantry?

We should perhaps conclude with a mixed bag, where a word curiously used in this country seems to waver between acceptability and non-acceptability. I think, for example, of our use of 'bottle store' for 'off licence' or 'wine merchant'. Our use of 'account' for 'bill' or 'invoice'. But here again, is 'account' any more confusing than the confusion of 'bill' to those crossing from England to America? Any other examples of wavering that you can think of?

Dorner: I can think of our use of 'annexure' when something is appended to a letter, an enclosure perhaps. Our use of 'cottage' for a holiday bungalow, 'coast' for 'seaside', and 'flower girl' for someone in attendance at a wedding.

Beeton: In fact, the list is very extensive. This is one reason why we have decided to compile an *Index of English Usage in Southern Africa* and we shall have something to say about this in our programme next week.

PROGRAMME 3:

Index of English Usage in Southern Africa

Beeton: In this talk we propose to say something about the *Index of English Usage in Southern Africa* which is being compiled at present

at the University of South Africa. We might in fact begin with some sort of description of this *Index*. I have again with me Miss Helen Dorner, who is mainly responsible for its compilation, and I am going to ask her to tell us something about the project.

Dorner: To begin with, I'd like to say something about the origin of the *Index of English Usage*. We received numerous queries about correct or acceptable usage before we began our compilation; these enquiries were answered sometimes in letter form, sometimes simply over the telephone. We felt that a lot of useful work and research was being lost, and because of this we decided to record enquiries and answers on cards. Basically our *Index* will follow the pattern of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* and Fowler's *Modern English Usage*. Although this is not our primary interest, we shall also try to indicate the origin of words. And we shall try to determine their acceptability at various levels. We shall also pay attention, where it is necessary, to pronunciation. The *Index* will therefore include vocabulary, idiom, grammatical forms and any other question relevant to the English language in this country.

Beeton: Could you tell us something about the response to our appeals for assistance?

Dorner: We have had considerable response from all the Provinces of South Africa, particularly from the Transvaal and the Cape. In some cases, people have sent us long lists of terms, in other cases, just one or two examples. But we have also had enquiries from far beyond our borders – from England, from Belgium, from Germany. It seems that there is a real need for a dictionary of South African English usage.

Beeton: We do not, of course, pretend that there are not similar projects of this kind in South Africa.

Dorner: No, indeed. The Institute for the Study of English at Rhodes University is, under the direction of Professor William Branford, working on a dictionary of South African English based on historical principles. And we have such reference books as Pettman's *Africanderisms*, which was published in 1913, and Eric Rosenthal's *Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa*, which have both been valuable

sources of information to us. We have also found Boshoff and Nienaber's *Dictionary of Afrikaans Etymology* invaluable in our research.

Beeton: In addition, we intend working with various institutes and organisations where terms are used in a curiously South African way.

Dorner: The Chamber of Mines and the South African Defence Force have shown an interest in this project and they are assisting us. Other institutions and bodies will also be approached and I am quite sure that they, too, will give us all the assistance they can.

Beeton: There are some things that we cannot pretend to do in the *Index*. Having looked at mining terms, we find these lists so extensive that we shall in fact only be able to include the most frequent of these terms. Is that correct?

Dorner: Yes, I think so. Except that some of these words need explanation. The mining dictionaries are mainly Afrikaans-English, English-Afrikaans and then Afrikaans-English and Fanagalo. Words such as 'mine-shaft', 'winze' and 'tailings' appear in the Oxford English Dictionary, but such words as 'giraffe', 'bandon', 'cage-boy' and 'lashing' — all peculiar to South Africa — will require special attention.

Beeton: Yes. We shall be looking at many lists. But when you take one specific area of our inquiry, for example common bird names, you have a list so extensive that we shall, for the most part, have to refer our readers to Austin Roberts and other authorities. Take the list of fish. Here again, we would probably have to refer readers to the authorities, for example to J.L.B. Smith and his *The Sea Fishes of Southern Africa* — except, as I have said, in the case of the most frequently used common names. However, the fact is we are here looking at source material, and in the *Index* we shall try to indicate its presence.

Dorner: I don't want this to sound like canvassing, but I am quite sure that many listeners can, without much effort, call to mind five, ten, fifteen words that they think should be included in the *Index*, and they don't let us know because they think they are so common that we already have them. And that is not always the case.

Beeton: We are, in fact, astonished by how many terms we miss. And often they are the words that we have lived with so continuously that we hardly notice their presence.

In these three talks we have tried to indicate local vocabulary, both legitimate and illegitimate, and also colloquial vocabulary, allowable in speech but not, possibly, in print (unless we are writing in the character of some colloquial creation). We have tried to point to idiom: both idiom adapted from other languages, but more especially, idiom that has borrowed direct from English to make entirely new concepts. We have pointed to some of the corruptions and barbarisms in our speech. Such misusages indicate something of the area of our work in the future. This kind of inquiry should, I believe, interest all South Africans, English speakers and speakers of other languages who are concerned with the standard and expressiveness of English in this country.

It may be of interest to read a few extracts from the letters we have already received.

Dorner: As I indicated, our letters do not come simply from South Africans or from people domiciled in or visiting South Africa.

Here, for example, is a letter from someone in West Germany:

At present I am dealing with the Republic of South Africa in my English lessons at a Secondary School in West Germany. Therefore I would rather like to know whether you have published any theses or reports on 'English or Teaching English in the Republic of South Africa' (concerning especially Primary and Secondary Schools) respectively in the last few years.

Last but not least my special request: Do you know any booklet containing South African English, e.g. idioms, phrases, new words picked up from Afrikaans, the other official language in your country?

Beeton: We've also had a letter haven't we from a notable linguist at the University of London, Professor Randolph Quirk?

Dorner: Yes, here it is:

In connection with our work here on the Survey of English Usage, I have been most interested to hear of the project that has

been initiated in your Department for an 'Index of English Usage in Southern Africa'. I should be very grateful if you could put me in touch with the Director of the project and to ask him to let me have information upon it. I enclose a list of our publications in which he may be interested.

Beeton: We have had very general enquiries too, haven't we?

Dorner: The following is a good example. Here is an enquiry from an accountant:

Permit me to ask you for your elucidation of a few matters in connection with the English language, about which I am still in the dark!

I shall read only one of the queries.

Among as against amongst. Once when writing a letter to The Pretoria News I used the word 'amongst' which was changed to 'among' when my letter appeared in the newspaper. What is the difference?

Beeton: What kind of reply did you give him?

Dorner: My reply to this was as follows:

The rejection of your use of 'amongst' can be explained in this way:

- (a) 'among' can be defined as the relation between one object and other objects, or the local relation of a thing (or things) to several surrounding objects;
- (b) in the 16th century 'among' was corrupted to 'amongst' by form association with superlatives. Another example of this is 'amid, amidst'.

Since I replied to this letter I discovered another rule in the application of 'among' and 'amongst'. It reads as follows:

Use 'amongst' only before vowels and unstressed words like 'the'. 'Amongst strangers' presents us with a combination of consonants dreadful to look at and painful to pronounce.

'Among us' is not easily pronounced. 'Among strangers', and 'amongst us', are right.

This correspondent ends his letter with the following sentences:

I hope I may turn to you if and when the occasion arises, and anticipate my thanks for your kind assistance.

N.B. Anticipating thanks. If not mistaken I believe the Americans express themselves in this way. Correct me if I am wrong.

We have here a live example of the South African's attachment to 'in anticipation of'. I commented as follows:

Your use of 'anticipate' is confused:

- (a) 'anticipate' my thanks should rather be rendered as, 'In anticipation of your reply I wish to convey my gratitude for....', 'In anticipation I thank you for....', 'Thanking you in anticipation....' Such usage has a flavour of triteness.
- (b) 'anticipating thanks' may be an elision, but is suggestive of demanding an expression of gratitude from the recipient of your request.

Beeton: Many people, however, are not enquirers, but valuable helpers. Some of their letters reveal very careful observation.

Dorner: The following letter is, I think, an outstanding instance:

Here are a few examples of mispronunciation:

Westminister for Westminster;

Millin for Milne;

fillum for film;

pork for park;

cor for car;

gorden for garden;

kittle for kettle;

git for get;

yisterday for yesterday;

thutty for thirty;

kitchen zink for kitchen sink.

South Africans frequently use the following expressions:

'You'll have to see the manager';

'You must see the manager';

'You will have to wait'.

It would be far more polite to say:

‘Will you please see the manager?’;
‘Would you mind waiting?’;
‘Will you please wait’.

And then there is the use of ‘Is it?’ or ‘Isn’t it?’ when accepting a statement made by another speaker. For example,

He is flying to Europe. ‘Is it?’
which should be: ‘Is he?’

and

I am going on holiday.
‘Are you?’ not ‘Is it?’

Also

‘I beg yours’ or ‘Excuse me’,
when a person has not heard a statement or question.
Should be ‘Pardon’ or ‘I beg your pardon’.

Beeton: People often send us cuttings of English curiously used or misused.

Now! EXTRA POWER to quickly relieve aches and pain of COLDS and FLU

Here we have an excellent example of a split infinitive and misuse of the preposition ‘of’. The advertisement claims that ‘aches and pains’ will be relieved of ‘colds and flu’.

Beeton: We’ve had here examples of interest, help, and enquiry. What emerges is that though English belongs specifically to the English-speaking group of people in this country, it also belongs to us all.

Miss Dorner has with her an example of the interest shown by an Afrikaans-speaking South African.

Dorner: Yes, here is a paragraph from the letter. Translated it reads:

Because it has become so necessary that South Africans use and speak their official languages correctly, I would appreciate it if

you could let me know whether the *Index of English Usage in Southern Africa* will be available to the public.

Beeton: It will, we hope, be available in a few years' time. In the meanwhile we shall be glad to hear from anyone interested in what should be the highly pervasive subject of English in South Africa.

D.R. BEETON
HELEN DORNER