

Preface

Penny Silva, Managing Editor of the original print edition, April 1995

Introduction

This dictionary is the product of twenty-five years of work, and contains the accumulated and synthesized insight, skills, knowledge, and resourcefulness of many people. Three who made most significant contributions are no longer working in the Dictionary Unit: William Branford initiated the project and guided it for close to two decades, and Jean Branford and Margaret Britz worked on it for much of that time. In addition the employees of the Dictionary Unit for South African English, those acknowledged for the assistance they have so generously given the project, and the many hundreds of unnamed South Africans who have telephoned, written, or stopped staff members in the street with snippets of information have all contributed to the text, whose threads are too tightly interwoven to be distinguishable as the work of any one individual.

The present shape of the dictionary particularly reflects the combined work of the small editorial staff, which, over four years, reworked the material they had inherited from others, and added over 2,500 new entries. While all staff members participated in every facet of the work, each also became skilled in particular areas—Wendy Dore in styling, Dorothea Mantzel in bibliography and natural history, Penny Silva in history, Colin Muller in African languages and management of the computer network. Through communal decision-making the editors decided upon policy and developed new methodology.

Begun in 1969 during the height of the apartheid era, the dictionary records the vocabulary of English in South Africa over 300 years: from the late sixteenth to the late twentieth century. The work was completed at the end of 1994, the year of the country's first democratic elections.

In compiling the text, the editors have made a conscious attempt to give voice not only to the documented utterances of powerful men, but also to the daily speech of ordinary people—men, women, and children—who are identified as 'informants' in the text and acknowledged by name wherever possible. Illustrations have thus been gleaned not only from the printed word, but also from overheard conversations, and from ephemeral sources such as letters, handbills, and radio and television broadcasts.

The dictionary attempts to map and illustrate the complex landscape of that variety of English which is particular to South Africans—words borrowed from the many languages of South Africa, English words which have acquired particular senses here, and words coined for local phenomena. A few words and phrases which are not South African in origin, but which have a particular significance for South Africans (e.g. *constructive engagement*, *Sullivan (principles)*, and *Eminent Persons Group*), have been included.

South African English (*S. Afr. Eng.*) is the property not only of South Africa's relatively small number of English-speakers (about 10% of the population), but also of the much greater number of people who use English as a second or third language. All varieties of English are represented in this dictionary, and the provenance of regional or 'group' vocabulary is provided wherever a word is not widely familiar to South Africans. If these descriptions sometimes seem uncomfortably like racial labels, this is because the Group Areas Act ensured that for over forty years people were geographically segregated along racial lines; 'separate development' ensured that varieties of English developed separately, the vocabulary or English usage of each group being only partially understandable to others. Typical of this breakdown in comprehension is the use of the word *late* (deceased), which is used in general English only attributively ('my late father'), but is usually heard in 'township' English in the predicative ('my father is late'). The separation by racial or linguistic group is reflected also, for instance, in the two headwords *bhuti* and *boetie* ('brother') documenting use in two different communities. The scrapping of apartheid legislation and the broadening of non-racial schooling is likely to lead to a blurring of the linguistic barriers of the past.

In any country where many languages rub shoulders, there is a great deal of 'code-switching', or *ad hoc* borrowing, between languages. Many borrowings are not yet truly integrated into *S. Afr. Eng.*, but the decision has been taken to record such words, often marked as unassimilated (ll), in order to document the *S. Afr. Eng.* vocabulary as comprehensively as possible.

South Africans are notorious for their inferiority complex about all things South African, and this is true too of their own English. Time and time again the Dictionary Unit has been accused of 'writing a dictionary of slang'. This dictionary does, of course, include colloquialisms, slang, and vulgarisms; however, it is hoped that readers will be pleasantly surprised by the age, creativity, and variety of the standard vocabulary recorded here. Many words which the average South African would perceive as standard international English have been identified by colleagues beyond South Africa's borders as being peculiar to *S. Afr. Eng.*, and everyday words such as *advocate* and *attorney*, *bond* (mortgage), *cubby-hole* (of a car), *gem squash*, *geyser* (hot-water tank), and *to motivate* (*a project or proposal*) are used here in senses which are perplexing to English-speakers elsewhere.

The task of describing borrowed words has presented its own set of challenges:

Dutch, South African Dutch, and Afrikaans Borrowings

In documenting the words borrowed from the Dutch–South African Dutch–Afrikaans continuum, a decision had to be taken as to how to describe the various stages in this continuum. 'Dutch' has been used of words used in Holland in the same form and sense, and 'South African Dutch' of Dutch words which were either used in a new sense, or reflected South Africanized spelling forms, or were coined for South African phenomena. 'Afrikaans' is applied from about 1870—the beginning of the decade of the 'Taalbeweging', or 'Language Movement'. Some scholars would disagree, placing the birth of Afrikaans at an earlier date—the 1850s, or even the 1820s.

Because of the changing orthography of South African Dutch and Afrikaans over the centuries, many words borrowed by *S. Afr. Eng.* appear archaic to the modern Afrikaner. For example, in *S. Afr. Eng.*, *kopje* is still frequently used for the modern Afrikaans *koppie*, *krantz* is the usual form for *krans*, and *veldskoen* is more frequently used than the modern Afrikaans *velskoen*. The principle applied in this dictionary has been to select the most commonly used *S. Afr. Eng.* form as the headword, despite the preferred modern orthography in the source language. One exception to this rule is the word *dagha* (mortar), the Afrikaans derivative of the original Xhosa *ukudaka*. Despite the frequent occurrence in *S. Afr. Eng.* of the spelling *dagga*, the editors decided that the headword form would be *dagha*, in order to avoid confusion with *dagga* (cannabis), and to indicate the difference in pronunciation between the two words.

When the spelling of a borrowed word causes difficulties in English, *S. Afr. Eng.* has tended to simplify the orthography, or even alter it radically. An example of this alteration is found in the treatment of two Afrikaans homophones (both pronounced ‘bray’)—*bry* and *brei*. In *S. Afr. Eng.* these tend to be spelled *brei*, and *bray* or *brey* respectively.

Some borrowed words are used extensively in speech, but the written form has not been standardized. For example the word *leguan/legevaan* is found in many spelling forms, and the editors decided to standardize the spelling as *leguaan*.

An additional complexity has been the considerable influence of the Khoi-San and Malayo-Javanese languages on Afrikaans. The relevant etymologies present these origins in as much detail as possible, but difficulties have been experienced, particularly in orthography; for example, in the Khoikhoi languages, most of which are no longer spoken, there may be a great deal of variation in the way in which a given word has been represented. In such cases, several alternative forms are provided in the etymology.

An interesting feature of *S. Afr. Eng.* borrowing from Afrikaans has been a tendency in recent years to ignore the process of simplification and alteration, and to return to Afrikaans orthography. Sometimes this selfconscious ‘correctness’ has been misplaced, as in the case of *tackie*, which, mistakenly interpreted as being Afrikaans in origin, is often spelled *takkie*, or even *tekkie*.

Borrowings from the Sintu (Bantu) Languages

The deeply resented adoption by the National Party government of the word *Bantu* as a racial designation for black people (from 1953 to 1978) has resulted in widespread rejection of this word among black South Africans, and avoidance of it by whites, even when it is used technically of the ‘Bantu’ languages. Despite the established international use of *Bantu*, several prominent black South African academics have stated a preference for the form *Sintu* (which reflects the Nguni prefix *isi-*, denoting language and culture). The question has generated lengthy discussion and some dissension among the Unit’s staff. Our decision has been to use the terms in tandem in this edition. It is possible that *Bantu* will one day re-enter the South African scholarly vocabulary when some of the pain and anger of the apartheid era has receded.

The Sintu words borrowed by *S. Afr. Eng.* have frequently been simplified, losing features such as clicks, ‘g’ indicating voice, ‘h’ indicating aspiration, and prefixes indicating concord: thus in *S. Afr. Eng.* the Xhosa *mngqusho* is often (*g*)*nush*, the Xhosa *ingcibi* is often spelled *incibi* and the Xhosa and Zulu *ugonothi* has become *kanoti*, the Xhosa *ibhunga* has become *Bunga*, and the Zulu *umasikanda* is *maskanda*. The Sintu vowel /a/ may be interpreted as /ɒ/: for instance, the Zulu *bansela* is represented as *bonsella*. Largely for typesetting reasons, the implosive ‘b’ has not been distinguished from ‘bh’ in this text.

English speakers display confusion over the complex prefixes and concords which are an integral part of the Sintu languages. There is little understanding of the numerous noun classes which exist (each requiring particular prefixes), or of the singular and plural prefixes, which are often used interchangeably in *S. Afr. Eng.* Only when a Sintu word is totally assimilated is there any consistency. In such words the prefix is either dropped (*bonsella*, *donga*, *moochi*, *tollie*), or is perceived as an integral part of the word (*amatungulu*, *impala*, *indaba*, *induna*). Some borrowings still display ambivalence—for instance *iqabane*, or the older *umpakati*, which is most commonly used either as *pakati* or *amapakati* (the latter being the plural form in the Nguni languages, but commonly used as either singular or plural form in *S. Afr. Eng.*). Other borrowings (e.g. *abakwetha*) are still highly fluid, displaying a plethora of forms, including a variety of singular and plural prefixes (which are used at random by English-speakers). Systematizing such words has proved to be a highly complex task, from choosing the headword form to describing singular and plural usage, and new systems have had to be developed to describe them. For example, a new method of treating singular and plural variants (see *Hurutshé*) was developed, which necessarily differs from the way in which these are treated in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In order to clarify how the Sintu noun prefixes are applied, and to explain the relationship between singular and plural prefixes, many such prefixes are included as entries in this dictionary.

As is the case with Afrikaans borrowings, there has been a tendency towards ‘correctness’ in recent years, manifested for example in the reintroduction of prefixes before words which had become simplified as a result of assimilation (‘the Xhosa’ becoming ‘the *amaXhosa*’, and ‘the Zulus’ ‘the *amaZulu*’, for instance), or in a reversion from an Anglicized spelling to the accepted orthography of the source language (e.g. *baSotho* rather than *Basuto*, *Mfengu* for *Fingo*).

The existence of a wide range of pronunciation-spellings, encountered in the writings of those unfamiliar with the Sintu languages, has necessitated numerous cross-references in this dictionary, which, it is hoped, will assist and not distract.