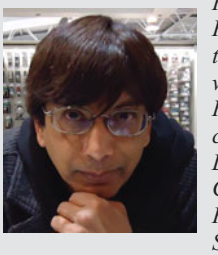
Where does a New English dictionary stop? On the making of the Dictionary of South African Indian English

RAJEND MESTHRIE

An account of authorial decisions made in compiling the *Dictionary of South African Indian English*

This paper reflects on the recently published *Dictionary of South African Indian English* (Mesthrie, 2010, henceforth *DSAIE*) in terms of the decisions that have to be made over content in a New English variety. 'New English' is used in the commonly accepted sense of a variety that has arisen as a second language in a multilingual context, mainly under British colonialism, but which has gained an identity of its own on account of its characteristic linguistic features which differ from those of the erstwhile target language, viz. educated British English. Dictionaries of English outside of England and the United States of America are no longer novel: well-known efforts include the *Macquarie Dictionary* of Australian English (Butler et al., 2009) and *The Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles* (Silva et al., 1996). In the same vein *Hobson-Jobson* (Yule & Burnell, 1886) recorded the lexis of colonial India, concentrating more on the vocabulary of the British there, though usage characteristic of Indians is also cited. Post-colonial India is still served by lexicographers of British origins: *Hanklyn-Janklin* (Hankin, 1994) and *Sahibs, Nabobs and Boxwallahs* (Lewis, 1991) are both true to the Hobson-Jobson tradition in feel and style, whilst being fairly up-to-date. I am unaware of any systematic dictionary work treating of the more colloquial words of Indian English, this 30 years on from Braj Kachru's (1983) article 'Toward a Dictionary'. The popular guidebook series *Lonely Planet* has stolen a march on the lexicographers in producing a vibrant, popular book *Indian English: Language and Culture* (2008), with an emphasis on vocabulary amidst other culture lessons. The new internet era has also provided online dictionaries, the most sophisticated in my experience being the *Dictionary of Singlish and Singapore English* launched in 2004 (www.singlishdictionary.com).

The *Dictionary of South African Indian English* therefore is something of an exception, insofar as it treats of a subgroup within a post-colony in fairly



RAJEND MESTHRIE is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Cape Town, where he holds a National Research Foundation (NRF) chair on Migration, Language and Social Change. He is a past President of the Linguistics Society of Southern Africa (2001–2009) and a past head of the Linguistics Section at UCT (1998–2009). He was co-editor of ET (2008–2012) and currently serves as advisory editor. Amongst his publications are Language in South Africa *(CUP 2002),* World Englishes *(with Rakesh Bhatt, CUP 2008) and* A Dictionary of South African Indian English *(UCT Press 2010).*

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great detail. Whether this is an independent New English or a variety of Indian English in diaspora is not easy to say (it certainly is spoken by an Indian community in diaspora). The main issue is that first generation migrants to the colony of Natal in the nineteenth century did not speak much English; they learnt the language mostly under conditions of L2 acquisition in classroom, plantation fields, colonial homes where they served, and as traders (see Mesthrie, 1992b: 6–27). Nevertheless, given their background and continuing links with India, it is not surprising that South African Indian English (henceforth *SAIE*) is an offshoot of both Indian English and South African English. Colonial and then apartheid practice kept this segment of the populace a highly distinctive subgroup. At the same time westernization and greater group cohesion amongst Indians who were originally from very different regional backgrounds resulted in English becoming the community's main language by 1960 or so, a hundred years after the first migrations.

2. What is the use of a sociolinguistic dictionary?

The DSAIE is the outcome of 25 years of collecting data on the dialect. The primary focus is a sociolinguistic one of precedence given to the spoken language of ordinary folk, rather than a preponderance of educated and written usage. In any case educated and written usage tends to follow the pyramid effect (Trudgill, 1983: 41) of narrowing variation the higher up the social scale one goes, and the more formal the setting. Most educated SAIE speakers command a range of usage, that includes mesolectal forms in informal usage and acrolectal forms in more formal settings. Lesser educated speakers still use the basilect (see Mesthrie, 1992b), which remains a stylistic resource for other speakers too. DSAIE aims to capture the distinctly Indian part of the vocabulary of this range of speakers. Written sources were used to supplement the spoken word, especially for citations. Whereas 25 years ago there were few works to cite, this has changed considerably, with several writers producing work that draws on the dialect. These authors include the playwright and short story writer Ronnie Govender, the novelist Aziz Hassim and the short story writer Essop Pahad. Above all there is Imraan Coovadia, whose early work (*The Wedding*, 2001) transformed the dialect in literary use into something approaching the mock heroic, the comic and the poetic. The slang element and older speakers' Indian lexis is best captured in Sumayya Lee's novels, *The Story of Maha* (2007) and its sequel *Maha, Ever After* (2009), two 'popular' novels that focus closely on the mores of female Gujarati Muslim life in Durban. The dialect then tends to be associated mainly with localized settings and community-oriented discourse, and with comedy. The comedy partly inheres in the public use of a dialect that is usually limited to domestic and close community interactions. Although no one has tried to use the dialect beyond these two settings, the very prominence of informal SAIE usage in creative writing has given recognition to the dialect. Only one work to my knowledge gives it a name: *Chaar-speak* is the label used by the character Maha (Lee, 2007), drawing on an informal term for Indians in South Africa. Here is the entry for *Char-ou* from DSAIE (note that macrons or bars over vowels denote a long vowel).[1]

> **CHĀR-OU** n. *Slang**
>
> An Indian, i.e. person of Indian descent in SA. Not usually derogatory, except perhaps when used by outsiders with negative intent. Often jocular or critical of over traditional attitudes in SAIE. Cf. *Charro's Chickenland* – name of take-away in Cape Town, run by Indians**.** Occurs in Tsotsitaal as ***charras*.** Spellings**: charo**, **charra**, **churra**. See **coolie**, **Indian**, **Mary**, **Sammy** and **boer-ou**, **bruin-ou**, **pekkie-ou**, **Radio Chār-ou**. ¶ Many false etymologies have been proposed for this term in South Africa, the following are inappropriate: ***achār*** (q.v.) 'pickle' (Hn), *char* 'to blacken' (Eng), *char* 'a cleaning woman, domestic servant' (Eng), *charras* 'the cannabis narcotic' (Hn). No convincing evidence has been given for any of these. The most likely etymology is given below. [From Afrik *ou* 'fellow' plus *char*, probably based on Anglo-Indian *charwallah*, 'an Indian servant who brought in the morning tea to British officials'. Also used as an adj. pertaining to Indians, as in *charwallah squadron* 'a British Air Force squadron consisting of Indian personnel' – E. Partridge *Dict. of Slang & Unconventional Eng*. Based on *char* 'tea', Br Eng from Mandarin Chinese *ch'a* (also Hn, Ur *cay*) plus Hn, Ur *wālā* 'person, agent'. A less likely possibility is Hn, Ur *cār ādmī* 'people in general, representatives of a community'].
>
> I felt sorry for her, what with her *super*-Chaarou parents, who didn't think it important for a female to at least finish school — S. Lee *Story of Maha*, 167.

Chaar ou is one of many slang terms in the dictionary. Many speakers mistakenly associate all of the

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dialect with slang. The rationale appears to be that speakers are aware that they do not use many of the terms in public or formal settings, and so consider them to be slang or unsanctioned use. The rule of thumb I give to my first year students at the University of Cape Town is that if you use a word with your grandparents, it can't be slang. By this test only a small but very expressive proportion of the dictionary is marked as slang, typically young males' usage from adolescence onwards. Older men may use slang in diminishing quantities as a reflection of a long-faded adolescence. Even though speakers consider their slang to be unique, a large amount of it is shared across ethnic boundaries, especially with Coloured males, but also with Whites and Black males. Many of the terms are related to a general South African phenomenon called Tsotsitaal (the slang associated with gangs and young males in Black townships, as expressed in urban forms of African languages). Yet some terms are often associated with Indians, because of the high proportion of use in their English and their distinctive pronunciation: one famous example in South Africa is *lahnee.*

LAHNEE/ LĀNI [la:ni:]. *Slang.**

1. n. One's employer, usually in a shop, factory or other business, a rich person (often male), a person of means, a White man.
2. adj. Rich, exceedingly rich. Also SAE slang and Tsotsitaal. Spellings: **larney**, **larny**, **larnie**, **lahny**. [Originally Cape Coloured Afrik *oulana* 'Hollander, rich person,' in contrast to a local Afrikaner. The latter appears to have passed into African languages like Sotho and into Tsotsitaal. Popularized via Durban Indian and Coloured usage of the late 1950s and 1960s onwards. In the Cape Town context the word may have been reinforced by an abbrev. of Afrik. *kappielaanie* 'chaplain' – Stone 1991].

   He smiled and, moved to pity, said: 'I am not a Transvaaler. I am a Hollander. I appreciate your feelings, and you have my sympathy. . .' – M. K. Gandhi *Autobiography*, 108.

   Stranger: . . . in another twelve and a half years you might get yourself a gold watch. *Sunny:* My lahnee will give it to me, man – R. Govender *Lahnee's Pleasure*, 4.

   Sushilla – everyone called her Suzy – was a junior school teacher, real sophisticated, light skinned, spoke like a *laanie*, was actually more European than the Europeans – J. Naidoo *Coolie Location*, 104.

To leave out such slang terms from the dictionary would have been to risk disappointing many speakers-cum-buyers (see section 4, on the reception of the dictionary and newspaper write-ups stressing slang).

This leads to the question of the function of the dictionary: who are its users, and to what use will they put it? Given that the SAIE community (especially of the main province KwaZulu-Natal) is a very cohesive one, it is unlikely that people will be consulting the dictionary for the meanings of the words they use. Rather for them the dictionary has the sociocultural and historical function of putting their lexicon together, showing its coherence and magnitude and validating the usage by relating them to terms from other dialects and from their source languages. It is also a source of humour, since for many people this is the first time they will be seeing many of the words they use in print in what is usually taken to be a serious educational document, the dictionary.

For other South Africans, the dictionary explains words that they might know from interactions with Indians, but are not fully familiar with. Here is an example from the special meaning of *late* in SAIE (and Black South African English), which came to hand from a friend just after the dictionary went to press:

> Dear Raj
>
> . . . I recently had a terrible misunderstanding with a lady when I phoned to speak to my mother's lawyer. The receptionist said to me, 'I'm sorry, but he's late', which I took to mean 'He should have been here, but he's been delayed', but which I eventually, after a most frustrating exchange, came to realize meant 'He's dead'! The shock of the realization and the preceding confusion threw me utterly.
>
> As far as I know, when *late* is used as a euphemism to mean 'dead' it is always used attributively, and I have never come across it used in this sense in the predicative position. So I wondered if it's just someone's idiolect, or a widespread usage . . .
>
> Yours etc.
>
> (name omitted).

In addition to clarifying such special dialect semantics, the dictionary would serve a useful glossing function for scholars interested in South African literature of the more common words found in works by Indian authors. Some examples include *should* (which could confuse readers between the expected standard obligative meaning, as opposed to the past habitual meaning in SAIE 'used to') and *cheeky* (meaning 'harsh, stern,

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authoritative', rather than 'full of cheek, obstinate'):

CHEEKY/ CHICKY adj. [tʃIkki:]

Stern, fierce, harsh. Also SABE. [Semantic shift from Eng. *cheeky* 'insolent, impudent'].

E.g. The foremen of those times were very, very, very chicky – Sezela resident, June 2010.

The other use of DSAIE pertains to documenting a history. Researching the origins and history of usage within South Africa is a potentially greater source of information for SAIE speakers than the meanings given. Here the plantation period is important, giving rise to words that originated in languages other than English but which survived language shift and pass as part of SAIE today. A highly significant historical term is exemplified below:

GIRMIT n.

1. A contract under indenture.
2. Service under indenture.
3. Place of work under indenture. Older speakers. Historical. Also spelt **girrmet**, **girrmit**. [Bhojpuri *girmit*, ultimately from English *agreement*].

Indentured labourers, on the other hand, were just armed with a flimsy agreement (girrmit), 10 shillings and rice per month – P. Naidoo, Preface *Girrmit Tales*, xi.

Murugan did not work that day, the first time ever since he had come to work under the girrmet to Mr Rutherford at Mount Edgecombe – P. Poovalingam *Anand*, 128.

One word which originated in this period outside the plantations, in connection with the ill-treatment of indentured workers and other Indians, has become an international term. Gandhi's concept of *Satyagraha* (Gandhi, 1950: 102) is worth quoting in full:

SATYAGRAHA n. *Historical*.

Non-violent struggle, soul-force, passive resistance as advocated by Gandhi. Not exclusively SAIE. In *COD*. [Coined by Gandhi in 1906 in Durban from Skt *satya* 'true, honest', *āgraha* 'firmness, obstinacy'].

As the struggle advanced, the phrase 'passive resistance' gave rise to confusion and it appeared shameful to permit this great struggle to be known only by an English name … A small prize was therefore announced in Indian Opinion to be awarded to the reader who invented the best designation for our struggle. Shri Maganlal Gandhi was one of the competitors and he suggested the word 'Sadagraha', meaning 'firmness in a good cause'. I liked the word, but it did not fully represent the whole idea I wished it to connote. I therefore corrected it to 'Satyagraha'. Truth (*satya*) implies love, and firmness (*agraha*) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force - M. K. Gandhi *Satyagraha in SA*, 102.

There are also items of relevance to SAIE speakers, rather than being used by them. As the following example shows, these are often derogatory terms or misrepresentations of Indian culture.

COOLIE-CHRISTMAS n. *Historical*.

Term formerly used by Whites in Natal for the **Moharrrum** festival (q.v.) celebrated by Indians in Natal. Not used in SAIE. Cf. US Eng *Jewish Christmas* for 'Chanukah'.

3. Decisions, decisions: establishing lexicographical boundaries

This section focuses on defining the outer limits of the dictionary. The problem of working out what to include and exclude is a reflection of two facts. Firstly, dialects and languages are not well-defined discrete entities, but have social, geographical and temporal propinquities with other varieties. Secondly, they have considerable internal variation.

3.1 Relations to Indian languages

Although this is an English dictionary, overlaps with the ancestral languages lead to the first liminality. The Indian languages that make a strong appearance in DSAE are Hindi, Urdu, Bhojpuri, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu and Konkani. In addition there are classical languages like Sanskrit and Arabic, and brief mentions of Persian, Marathi, Panjabi and Malayalam. The main principle was, of course, that if a word from an Indian language were used in everyday SAIE, and known to children who did not speak an Indian language any more, then it was a prime candidate for inclusion. This often relates to culinary, religious, kinship, music, clothing and other cultural terms.

BHINDI/BINDI n.

Okra, *Hibiscus esculentis* – a small type of marrow. Also know as **slippery jack** in Natal English markets, and as **lady's finger** in IE, *lady-finger* in US and Br Eng. Known as **bhinda** in Gujarati homes. Spreading in KwaZulu-Natal English. [Hn, Ur *bhiṇḍī*, Te *beṇḍakāya,* Ta *veṇḍakāi*].

Fried Bhinda (Okra) recipe: Select nice long bhindas. Wash and wipe clean, then slash through

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bottom to about half way up. Stuff with above masala and fry in shallow oil, very slowly till crisp – Z. Mayat *Indian Delights*, 42

Some words are indeed limited to sub-communities of SAIE speakers, but deemed of sufficient cultural importance to be included in DSAIE, especially if there are citations in print as well. Here is one such item:

PUTTU/ PITTU n.

A mound of earth as in an anthill or snake's dwelling. Treated as a shrine, the cobra being sacred to followers of Shiva. Hence **puttu-house**. [Prob. Kannada *puṭṭu*, Te *puṭṭa* 'anthill, snake's hole, heap', Ta *purru*, South African Tamil *puṭṭu*].

According to legend, a *Puthu*, a mound similar to an anthill in appearance and which is regarded as home to the sacred Snake Goddess, materialized on the present temple site [in Mt. Edgecombe]. For believers this was a sure sign that the temple was located on an auspicious spot. The *Puthu* has been growing each year, and stands at over two metres – A. Desai & G. Vahed *Inside Indenture*, 234.

Many religious terms from Hinduism and Islam make an appearance in the text. No special Christian terms were uncovered in the research, despite there being a sizeable minority of Christians among SAIE speakers. Many specialized items pertaining to less common festivals or religious practices were left out. (Rationale: ultimately this is not a religious work.)

A decision had to be made about words from Indian languages that had been adopted from international usage (*bhangra* 'dance and musical style', *chicken tikka* 'pieces of barbecued chicken') rather than from an Indian language within South Africa. These are almost part of international English, British English, and now general SAE, rather than specific to SAIE. However, they were included since the most natural place for general South African readers wanting the terms explained would be DSAIE.

Some terms that are regional in India have become widespread in SA.

ĪSEL n.

A large flying ant or winged termite that appears from a hole in the ground, greatly attracted by lights. [Ta *īcal*, Te *isuḷḷu*].

I miss Diwali and Durban in October, all the fun and fireworks and the isels coming out of the ground attracted by all the lights – V. Singh, letter from Santa Barbara, Aug 2003.

This term is not cited in any dictionary of the English of India that I have perused.

3.2 Relations to Indian English

As might be expected, many items co-occur in the English of India and its (partial) offshoot in South Africa. Some terms came directly from Indian English into SAIE, rather than via an intermediary Indian language: *by-heart* 'to learn off by heart' and *carom board* 'game played on a small wooden board similar to billiards'. These are old terms from the nineteenth century. The number of such words is small, possibly due to lack of extensive contact between the two varieties of English after 1911, when Indians were not generally allowed entry into South Africa. Post-apartheid openness (since 1994) has renewed this contact, opening up the possibility of new expressions from Indian English. One new term that has come into vogue is *leaf dinner*, brought into the country by priests from South India.

LEAF-DINNER n. phr.

Meal served at functions on a large leaf, usually that of a banana plant. The leaf is known in IE as a **dining leaf**. Once a common practice at Indian weddings, for reasons of cost and convenience, obviating the need to hire and wash plates. Now rare except as a nostalgic and consciously gentrified practice.

Leaf dinner for members next Saturday – sign at Cape Town temple, April 2010.

While there are overlaps between dictionaries of 'Anglo-India' and DSAIE, the differences are unmistakable: (a) greater influence from the south of India in DSAIE, since Tamil was a major language of the indentured period in Natal – see *pottemari* below; (b) greater influence from Bhojpuri and allied rural languages of North India, rather than Hindi – see *thittha* below; (c) greater accumulation of entries reflecting English of the lesser educated, since English is used by all of the Indian community in South Africa – see *lookafter* below; (d) occasional influence from Konkani, the most-spoken Indian language in the Western Cape province, whereas this language makes little or no impression in greater India – see *barishap* below.

POTTEMĀRI n.

An effeminate male. May be applied as a mild insult to any male who is not considered 'cool'. Sometimes abbreviated to **Potter**. Also spelt **Potter Marie**. [Ta *poṭṭemāri*].

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So what do they think? That I only like you because I might be a pottemari and I like your body – K. Pillay *Looking for Muruga*, 2.

Hey you Potter Marie, what you skryfing there? . . . The more I swore him, the more tickets he wrote. 'POTTER!', I screamed at him – Salam Bombay (pseudo.) *Bhajia & Bhoondi, Post,* 7 May 2008.

LOOK-AFTER v.

To look after. Used as a single fused unit in SAIE, so that the verb ending occurs at the end of the unit.

E.g. She look-aftered me when I was young; I couldn't come because I was look-aftering the baby.

BARISHAP n.

Fennel, usually fennel seeds, less commonly the leaves, which may be known as **barishap leaf**. The term has passed into Cape Malay usage. Same as **sauf**. [Ko *barishap*].

Ingredients for Dried Prawns with Potato: . . . 1 tsp chilli powder; 1 tsp turmeric, Pinch of barishap, ¼ tsp fine koljana powder – N. Parker *Kokni Delights Cookbook*, 14.

THITTHA adj.

Spicy, curry-hot, chilli-hot. Same as **kāro**, **kārum**, **thikka**, **thikku**. Mainly Hn homes. [Bhoj *tīt*, SA Bhoj *tittā* in contrast to Hn *tīkhā*].

E.g. This curry is too thitta

3.3 Relations to general South African English

The fact that SAIE is embedded within the larger entity of South African English raises similar issues regarding fuzzy boundaries. Words originating in another sub-variety of SAE (essentially White, Black and Coloured sub-varieties) are obviously non-candidates for DSAIE. A few exceptions test this rule:

(a) words that are mistakenly thought to have originated within the Indian community or are associated with them despite being SAE words – see *lahnee* above; (b) conversely a few items that originated with an Indian connection but whose origins are often forgotten since the word is no longer associated with the Indian community – see *chutney*; (c) words that have been adopted from SAIE into SAE – see *dhania* below.

CHUTNEY n.

1. A hot meal with a tomato base, cooked with chilli and onion, and eaten with **roti** (q.v.), rice, bread, samp etc. Thus **tomato chutney**, **egg chutney**, **chops chutney**, **brinjal chutney** etc. This sense is known mainly within the SA Indian community.
2. A cold relish of **dhania** leaves (q.v.), mint, and/ or crushed nuts. Thus **nuts chutney**, **green chutney** etc. Known in Ta as **thovel**/ **thuvaiyal**. The English sense of a relish or sauce made with fruit and spices was rare in SAIE, but now also fairly common. The Indian term *cāt* (also spelt *chāt*) is now becoming known in SA with the influence of new migration. In *COD*. [Gu, Hn, Ur *catnī,* from *cāt* 'to lick', Ta *catni*].

DHANIA n.

Coriander, *Coriandrum sativum*, fresh green leaves of coriander used to flavour curries and other preparations like omelettes, salads etc. Sometimes referred to as *Indian parsley*. Known in Afrikaans as *koljander* or *koljana*. Spreading in SAE. Spellings: **danya**, **dhunia**, **dhunya**. [Hn, Ur *dhaniyā*, Te *dhaniyālu*].

Most Indian cooks will not allow a savoury dish to leave their kitchen without a good sprinkling of fresh, fragrant dhania coriander leaves – M. Bharadwaj *Indian Pantry*, 34.

My very own husband selling the cucumbers and the green beans and the dhunia-jeera for all and everyone – I. Coovadia *The Wedding*, 153.

(b) Some entries reflect British dialect forms or archaisms which stabilized in SAIE but not in general SAE:

INTERESTED part.

Euphemism for 'in love with'. Mainly older speakers, for whom love was not a subject to be discussed openly. See also **future, proposed** [Probably abbrev. of *interested in marrying*].

While I was going through all these torments over Mr. Andrews, I found that another young man had become interested in me – N. Govender *Acacia Thorn in my Heart*, 93.

3.4 Relations to other languages of South Africa

Very similar remarks apply to SAIE words taken from other languages of South Africa. Words from Afrikaans and Zulu (the important sources of words apart from Indian languages and English) were only included in DSAIE if they do

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not occur more widely in general South African English. For Afrikaans this often refers to slang items, whose meanings were drastically changed by Indian and Coloured youths of KwaZulu-Natal.

FLUKE v. [flUk] *Slang*.

1. To make a pass at; to talk sweetly to a member of the opposite sex. See **chaff**.
2. To pick on someone, to crack jokes at someone's expense. Not the same as Eng *fluke*. [Afrik *vloek* 'to curse, swear'].
   E.g. He was fluking her one way.

The fact that SAIE preponderates in KZN, the province in which Zulu is a majority language, shows up in words adopted in SAIE, but not more widely in SAE:

KAN-KĀN n. *Rural*.

Bostrychia hagedash, a large ibis bird, greyish brown with a strident call. Known as *hadeda* in SAE. [Zu *ingangane*].

Regarding Afrikaans, it must be acknowledged that this language is a major influence on many Indians in provinces outside KwaZulu-Natal, where they form small minorities, and have largely accommodated to the norms of Coloured communities. As such this includes a great deal of code switching and borrowing from Afrikaans. I do not consider these to be specific to SAIE, as many of the words are part of general SAE usage (again amongst English-Afrikaans bilinguals outside KZN). This general point was not appreciated by international reviewers, one of whom pointedly (and absurdly) criticized the absence of an entry for *apartheid* in a forerunner to DSAIE (Mesthrie, 1992a).

I conclude this section by stressing the creative aspect of dictionary making. The lexicographer has to select his or her material: it is not simply a matter of putting a corpus together and letting the computer select the most common items that are not to be found in, say, the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. Frequency of usage is important, though it must be stressed that spoken frequency is the main criterion for inclusion, with writing counting mainly for purposes of illustration. Certain historical words that may be obsolete are often well worth retaining – see *girmit* above. For practical reasons of length and coherence no domain should be allowed to dominate: rarer culinary, clothing, kinship and slang terms may have to be culled if these domains get too large (and stray into too great an overlap with other varieties – like Indian languages for culture or Afrikaans for slang).

4. Popular reception of the work

It is of sociolinguistic interest to ascertain the impressions of ordinary speakers on seeing their speech in a formal dictionary. The following section gives a brief indication of the reception of a dialect with covert prestige. At the stage of collecting words and verifying meanings there was tremendous enthusiasm amongst speakers, after they realized the relation to their own speech habits. Many people volunteered words that they thought worthy of inclusion. However, many of these were deemed inadmissible on account of (a) their being too rare and more likely to be associated with only a few homes or to be examples of code-switching, or (b) their being more widely used than speakers realized – e.g. *babelaas* 'a hangover' which is general SAE, Afrikaans and Zulu, rather than specific to SAIE. Conversely speakers were surprised to learn that many words were not widespread outside SAIE: *bag lady* 'a home-trained midwife', *last-before-week* 'the week before last'. Male youth were particularly enthusiastic about sharing their slang, past and current, and were very astute about their standard equivalents. Word even got around one or two of the drinking places around Durban about the dictionary project.

Regarding the reception of the published version, two important qualifications must be made. Firstly, pride regarding a sense of historicity via language being asserted in the dictionary remains covert, rather than overt. No one made suggestions about using the work to challenge the hegemony of Standard English or make very strong assertions about the right to have the dialect recognized. More interestingly, lesser educated people, even ones who had contributed slang items and who had discussed them at their drinking houses, showed no interest in seeing the printed version. This was unrelated to the question of the cost of purchasing a copy: even when a copy was available for perusal, the response from some contributors was 'later, busy now, some other time'. Generally speaking the response was different among class lines. The highly educated (commanding dialect and standard) saw it as a source of entertainment. This did not apply to those who were less secure in their class status, literacy, and command of the standard. For them, my impression is that there was a feeling of unease about their words and grammar being put into the official spotlight associated with artefacts of literacy like the dictionary.

As far as the media are concerned, while coverage of the work was generous, there was far more interest in the slang aspect of the dialect (which often featured in headlines). My main focus during interviews on the historical and cultural aspects of the word

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collection process was generally played down. Overall, the reactions of individuals and media suggest a great appreciation of the work, and a delight in seeing so many informal or cultural words in print. For many this would have been the first time that what they spoke would have been described publicly as a coherent dialect. But this new realization or appreciation does not extend to elevation of the dialect into the realm of overt prestige. The SAIE community is far more pragmatic than that.

5. Conclusion: implications for other New Englishes

Ultimately, a New English dictionary is a sociohistorical and cultural work emanating from linguistics, though it is of more than passing relevance to literary scholarship. The SAIE case is somewhat exceptional insofar as colonial and apartheid practice led to a clearly focused ethnic variety in diaspora. DSAIE nevertheless offers a model for comparative work in the Indian diaspora. Most notably, its sister varieties are in the other former British colonies to which indentured workers were taken, especially Guyana, Trinidad and Fiji. Other territories of relevance include Malaysia and Tanzania, where large Indian communities exist. I know of no work on British Asian lexis, though surely there is a great deal to be said there too. The influence of Panjabi would be of special interest, as would the existence of words that have passed from South Asian cultures to mainstream British English. The differences in usage between Indians in Britain versus the British in India (of the Hobson-Jobson era) are worth studying. The United States is, I think, too large to have spawned a relatively focused South Asian English and a large enough vocabulary for lexicography.

DSAIE could also be of relevance to *in situ* South Asian lexicography, though the problem of demarcating what are genuinely English items and what belongs more appropriately to code-switching or nonce borrowing from indigenous languages which are still spoken and very much alive would be much more acute. The *Lonely Planet* guidebook does a very good job here, in capturing both Indian English vocabulary and the code-switching that goes by the name of Hinglish. Finally, I believe that DSAIE can serve as a model for work within South Africa, where a more cohesive picture could emerge from lexicographical work on varieties like Black and Coloured English, whose previously segregated sociolinguistic contexts resulted in deep histories of their own.

Note

1 The following abbreviations occur in the dictionary entries cited: Afrik – Afrikaans; Br – British; COD – Concise Oxford Dictionary; Dict – Dictionary; Eng – English; Gu – Gujarati; Hn – Hindi; IE – Indian English; SABE – South African Black English; Skt – Sanskrit; Ta – Tamil; Te – Telugu; Ur – Urdu; US – United States; Zu – Zulu.

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