Phonological Inclusion, and Exclusion, Regarding South African English in the Online OED

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Abstract: This article approaches the subject of inclusivity and diversity from a phonological perspective, as applied to the online *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). Specifically, the pronunciation guide within the OED entry for South African English (SAE) is investigated. On the one hand, that the OED provides a list of World Englishes is a step forward in terms of diversity, avoiding the linguistic hegemony of British and American English, for example. On the other hand, the pronunciation guide for SAE relies on a rather singular variety — that reflective of white South Africans. Moreover, the OED pronunciation guides for all varieties of English reflect "educated urban speakers of standard English". Therefore, the pronunciation guide is exclusive regarding race and class, and thus additional varieties of SAE are not represented. As such, while the OED, as a trusted source, has made efforts to address linguistic diversity, more work needs to be done in this area.

Keywords: PRONUNCIATION, ACCENT, WHITE SOUTH AFRICAN ENGLISH, GREAT TRICHOTOMY, EXCLUSIVITY, LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

Opsomming: Fonologiese insluiting, en weglating, rakende Suid-Afrikaanse Engels in die aanlyn OED. In hierdie artikel word inklusiwiteit en diversiteit, soos toegepas op die *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), vanuit 'n fonologiese perspektief benader. Die uitspraakgids binne die OED-inskrywing vir Suid-Afrikaanse Engels (SAE) word spesifiek ondersoek. Aan die een kant is die insluiting van 'n lys van Wêreldengels deur die OED, in terme van diversiteit, 'n stap vorentoe om sodoende, byvoorbeeld, die linguistiese hegemonie van Britse en Amerikaanse Engels te vermy. Aan die ander kant steun die uitspraakgids vir SAE op 'n enkele variëteit — wat 'n weerspieëling van wit Suid-Afrikaners is. Boonop reflekteer die OED-uitspraakgids vir alle variëteite "opgevoede stedelike sprekers van standaardengels". Hierop gebaseer, is die uitspraakgids eksklusief rakende ras en klas, en dus word addisionele variëteite van SAE nie verteenwoordig nie. Alhoewel die OED, as 'n vertroude bron, pogings aangewend het om linguistiese diversiteit aan te spreek, sal meer werk op hierdie gebied verrig moet word.

Sleutelwoorde: UITSPRAAK, KLEM, WIT SUID-AFRIKAANSE ENGELS, GROOT DRIE-DELING, EKSKLUSIWITEIT, TAALHOUDINGS

Introduction

British and American English have long since had a hold on the English language, notably in educational contexts such as EFL teaching (Baratta 2019). Beyond the implications this has for vocabulary teaching, there is also the issue of pronunciation to consider. Largely, this has focused on Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American as linguistic 'stand-ins' for British English and American English respectively (Kaur 2014; Carrie 2016; Wong 2018). While there is evidence of more regional British accents being appreciated for their 'difference' by EFL students (Baratta and Halenko 2022), if we look to dictionary entries then it is often the case that RP and GA are still the de facto guides for pronunciation. This is no exception within the online OED. While this suggests a certain exclusivity regarding pronunciation models for these two varieties of English, we might consider a more inclusive approach to language from an even broader perspective. This perspective in question pertains to the vast diversity of Englishes spoken around the world, those that go beyond the inner circle of native speakers (Kachru 1982) and involve speakers of English from countries such as India, Singapore and Ghana, as but three examples. Millions of people around the world have made the English language their own as part of World Englishes, varieties which are "unfairly judged based on exonormative norms set by more prestigious varieties such as British and American English" (Salazar 2023: 38). The features of World Englishes reflect differences — and not deficit — from the native speaker varieties in terms of grammar, lexis and pronunciation, and it is this latter category that is the focus of this article. While the central purpose of dictionaries is undoubtedly to present the vocabulary of a given language variety, there is perhaps a somewhat overlooked function — the role of dictionaries in providing pronunciation guides for their lexical entries. The OED has indeed taken steps to reflect the diversity of English, with its online dictionary providing entries for a variety of native (e.g., Canadian English) and non-native Englishes (e.g., Kenyan English), to include stigmatised native speaker varieties such as African American English (commonly known as Ebonics). Thus, the OED, in acknowledging the linguistic reality which involves all kinds of Englishes, is making positive linguistic strides, but there is perhaps additional room to incorporate further varieties within varieties. This article now focuses on this spirit of linguistic equality, and by extension *cultural* equality, by turning to the entry on SAE within the World Englishes project, which itself comprises a prominent section of the online OED.

South African English entry within the OED

In the entry for SAE (OED 2023a), there is a great deal of information on the topic, including recently recorded words (e.g., *ghoen* and *lightie*); a link from which individuals can submit new words for inclusion; and further links to relevant information, such as 'Introduction to South African English'. Of par-

ticular relevance to this article of course is the link to the pronunciation guide, which ostensibly reflects 'the South African accent'. There does not exist, of course, a singular South African accent. The OED acknowledges this, stating that "there is no single, reasonably uniform SAE accent", within the 'Introduction to South African English' section (Silva 2023). This then raises the question as to what accent will be provided via the pronunciation guide. Much like RP and GA representing the socially dominant accents of British and American English, and not, say, Liverpool and New York City, this raises the issue of linguistic exclusion.

Silva (2023) asserts that "no particular (model) is promoted over another" regarding pronunciation for (World) Englishes in the OED. This claim, however, is somewhat dubious regarding SAE (and perhaps other entries), for the following reasons. First, the pronunciation model for SAE within the online OED is based on white South African English, as clearly stated on the website (OED 2023b):

> The focus for South African English is not the African variety widely termed 'Black South African English', nor the distinct 'Indian South African English', but the variety known as 'White South African English'.

This is not to suggest that white South African English should be replaced with, say, a pronunciation guide reflecting black South African English; rather, one can simply ask if room can be made for additional varieties in terms of pronunciation models and guides, such as Indian South African English.

That said, within the section 'Introduction to South African English' (Silva 2023), there is a great deal of information provided which discusses this variety, in terms of the origins of English in South Africa, the linguistic tug of war between English and Afrikaans, and in more specific terms regarding pronunciation, this section fully acknowledges, as referenced earlier, that there is no singular South African accent. Moreover, the point is made that ethnic differences regarding pronunciation became more pronounced due to the Apartheid system of separate schooling, for the most part, regarding the different groups (e.g., Black South African English, Indian South African English). However, Silva (2023) goes on to say that as children are now educated together, "ethnically determined differences in SAE are tending to break down". Though no phonological examples of this are provided, it is arguably still the case that distinctions on the basis of race, class and ethnicity can be detected in people's accents, and as such, perhaps this can be reflected in additional pronunciation guides on SAE.

Furthermore, the pronunciation guide for SAE is also very much reflective of social class, as are all the entries for (World) Englishes within the OED. The OED makes clear that its pronunciation guides reflect a "carefully-devised model", representing "educated urban speakers of standard English" (Silva 2023). This in turn suggests that working-class individuals, speakers of dialects and, more controversially, 'uneducated' speakers are not included regarding their models of pronunciation.

Furthermore, within the South African context, accents deemed to be 'broad' are not only associated with working-class individuals, but also associated with Afrikaans English phonology (Lass 2002); thus, not only are pronunciation models absent on the basis of race and class, but, to an extent, pronunciation models on the basis of ethnicity are also excluded, within the broader category of white South African English (OED 2023c):

> Within White South African English, there are three groupings: the upper-class-associated 'Cultivated' form, the middle-class-associated 'General' form, and the working-class/Afrikaans-associated 'Broad'. The variety of focus for the OED model is the General form, although tending towards Cultivated over Broad.

To provide further background information, we need to consider the Great Trichotomy (Lass 2002), an approach taken in an attempt to classify South African accents. This consists of the three accents referenced above, cultivated, general and broad, each of which comes with specific connotations of the speaker, notably regarding class levels. Lass (2002), for example, points out that the broad accent is stigmatised, associated with those with low levels of education and low socio-economic status, and approximates Afrikaans English in terms of its phonology. Thus, we can see how class and ethnicity can intersect, and in this case, reflect a pronunciation — and by extension, accent — which does not receive perhaps a great deal of societal respect. Tellingly, Lass (2002) refers to the classifications within the Trichotomy as earlier involving terms such as 'respectable' and 'extreme' for the general and broad varieties respectively, further pointing out that the broad accent is looked down upon by cultivated and general speakers of white South African English in particular. Lass (2002: 110) refers to terms such as 'respectable' and 'extreme' as "nasty creations", and goes even further regarding his discussion of linguistic attitudes toward the three accents that make up the Trichotomy of white South Africans: "Type 2 speakers would not want to be caught dead really sounding like Type 3, but they don't sound all that much like Type 1 either, though many tend to think they do or wish they did."

That the OED entry for SAE pronunciation is based on 'General White South African English' without a "single, reasonably uniform SAE accent" (Silva 2023), might be a reflection of what Salazar (2023: 30) refers to as "potential discrepancies and compromises" within the OED's pronunciation entries for African Englishes overall. Bowerman (2008: 168), commenting on the Trichotomy, explains that the focus on white South Africans' use of English as the basis for the trichotomy is "not intended to reflect the apartheid classifications", but this particular variety might nonetheless create a sense of exclusion. Nonetheless, to use a variety of SAE associated with white South Africans, and to focus on the pronunciation of a particular social class, suggests that other accent varieties are marked and potentially subject to negative perceptions. Thus, there is the potential for exclusion on the basis of race and class, and arguably ethnicity, regarding South African English pronunciation guides within the online OED.

Going forward, online dictionaries in particular have the potential to address more fully the diversity seen within the English language from a phonological perspective. This is something Baratta (2022) argued for, in the specific context of online dictionaries compiled by individuals who themselves use a specific language variety, though not professional lexicographers themselves. This represents what Damaso (2005: 4) refers to as "democracy and equal access to meaning-making rights". We can see this reflection of linguistic diversity in South Africa, broadly, with the creation of the Kaaps dictionary, reflecting "a great democratic resource for developing understanding" (Haupt 2021). Further, The Dictionary Unit for South African English is another good example of linguistic inclusivity, as it is a resource committed to documenting the varieties of English within South Africa, and the various linguistic influences on SAE. Regarding pronunciation models specifically, further inclusion in online dictionaries could include non-white Englishes, such as Indian South African English, and the working-class/Afrikaans-associated broad accents. Lass (2002: 111) in fact states that non-white Englishes in South Africa, such as Indian South African English, "have their own internal varietal stratification", suggesting further variety within variety. That the OED is "still subject to ongoing review" regarding SAE pronunciation means that there is scope for further inclusion. It is with this purpose in mind — a democratic approach to SAE — that phonological inclusion should continue to be a main feature of dictionaries.

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