

## THE DICTIONARY AS A BASIS FOR LANGUAGE LESSONS

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- The dictionary is viewed by most pupils and a number of teachers as having only two functions, namely the giving of the correct spelling of a word and its definition. Many pupils leave school unaware of its other uses, viz.
- phonetic transcription and the indication of stressed syllables to indicate pronunciation;
  - grammatical designation and usage;
  - etymology;
  - plural forms of nouns, comparative and superlative forms of adjectives, and other forms of verbs according to tense;
  - derived words;
  - abbreviations;
  - levels of usage or register; and
  - illustrative examples.
- All of these can form the basis of interesting and valuable language lessons, using the dictionary.
- Two lessons which illustrate this point follow. The second requires little introductory work but the first requires a thorough knowledge of the above uses.

### LESSON 1:

#### Aim

To involve the pupils in practical use of the information given in a dictionary and to demonstrate to them its value as a source of information on English Language.

#### Materials

Cards listing five complete entries from *A Dictionary of South African English* by Jean Branford, printed sheets of language questions based on the information given in the entries, and answer sheets.

#### Five entries from the dictionary

PADKOS ('pat, /kɔs) n. Provisions: lit. 'roadfood': a picnic, sandwiches or other snacks for consumption on a journey; also figur. 'Take — for your car!' (Oil advt.); see also quot. at *lekker*. (Afk. pad road cogn. path + kos food, victuals)

I was not allowed to depart without a good supply of pat-koss, and other comforts provided by the kindness of the parishioners. *Gray Journal II 1851*

... tins of petrol — apart from 'padkos' — were essential to a feeling of confidence as a motorist set out on a long journey. *Evening Post 26.2.72*

SUKKEL ('sək-kəl, 'sək) vb intrns. colloq. Struggle, have difficulties, battle, etc. (Afk. fr. Du. sukkelen to live poorly, plod, drudge; sukkelaar a poor fellow, a drudge)

Every night you lie there and sukkel with things you'd like to forget. *Molennan Winter Vacation 1970*

— aar one who struggles against odds, a plodder. cf. Austral. battler also in the political sense; see quot. at *remskoën*.

BONSELLA ('bɒn 'sɛlə) n. pl. s. colloq. A present, gratuity; also *basela*; cf. *Canad. potlatch* (orig. gift: money or goods). Anglo-Ind. *bakshesh*, *buckshee*. (Zu. *ibhanselo* a gift, (*ukubansela* vb.) Xh. *ukubasele* to give a present, token of gratitude.)

South Africa's brandy distillers are to receive a *bonsella* worth between R350 000 and R400 000 a year from taxpayers. *Sunday Times 5.9.71*

BRINGAL ('brɪn, dʒɔ) n. pls. -s. Also *brinjial*: *Solanum melongena* aubergine or egg fruit, long pear-shaped or globular purple vegetable used fried or as an ingredient of curries and similar dishes. See quot. at *kalya*. Also Anglo-Ind., Jam. Eng. *brown-jolly*. (fr. Port. *bringella* egg fruit)

Many of the most common plants grown belong to this family — *Solanaceae* — including potatoes, tomatoes, brinjals and green peppers. *Evening Post 30.6.73*

MAHEWU (ma 'xei) n. A drink made of thinned, slightly fermented mealie-meal porridge; various sp. (Now commercially available in cartons, see third quot.; also as a 'mix.') The h is frequently rendered r, in this word, see quot. at *mqombothi*, and the sp. *mahewu* is also used. (bantur: various sp. Zu. (*amaphewu* fermented porridge drink) ... they drank *mamaghevu* which is made from mealie meal and water ... *Mamaghevu* is made and left overnight before it is drunk. *Daily Dispatch 18.8.71*

... the children had interrupted their lessons at about 10 am on Wednesday for the traditional drink of 'mahewu' the vernacular name for their nutritional drink. *Evening Post 2.11.73*

The number one food for health and strength **MAGEU NUMBER 1** — mealie-meal, wheat and sugar. *World Advt. 24.10.76*

#### Language questions based on the information given in a dictionary

##### 1. SPELLING/PRONUNCIATION

- 1.1 Which of the five words has a spelling which differs from its pronunciation?
- 1.2 How would you spell this word phonetically?
- 1.3 Which of the words have an alternative pronunciation?
- 1.4 What are the alternative pronunciations?
- 1.5 Which of the words has an alternative spelling?
- 1.6 What is the alternative spelling?
- 1.7 Which of the five words are pronounced with the first syllable stressed?
- 1.8 Which word is different from the others in regard to the number of syllables in the word?

##### 2. PARTS OF SPEECH

- 2.1 One of the five words is the odd one out when classified according to parts of

speech. Write this word down and state why it is the odd one out.

3. PLURAL FORM

- 3.1 Which of the nouns does not have the usual plural form (i.e. the addition of -s)?
- 3.2 Why does/do /it/they not have the usual plural form?

4. MEANING

- 4.1 According to their meanings, three of the words can be classified together. List the three words and state how would you classify them.

5. ORIGIN

- 5.1 Which of the five words does not originate from a language indigenous to South Africa?
- 5.2 Where does it originate from?
- 5.3 Can the other four words be paired according to origin? If so, how, and why?

Answer Card

- 1. 1.1 Mahewu.
- 1.2 Maghrow.
- 1.3 Bonsella and Mahewu.
- 1.4 Basella and Marewu.
- 1.5 Bonsella.
- 1.6 Basella.
- 1.7 Padkos, sukkel and bringal.
- 1.8 Bonsella.
- 2. 2.1 Sukkel.  
It is a verb and the others are nouns.

3. 3.1 Padkos and mahewu.

- 3.2 They are words which do not have a singular form. They are always in the plural form.

- 4. 4.1 Padkos, bringal and mahewu.
- 4.2 They are foods.

- 5. 5.1 Bringal.
- 5.2 Portuguese.
- 5.3 Afrikaans Origin — padkos and sukkel.

Nguni Origin — bonsella and mahewu.

Method

- (a) The pupils will work in pairs and each pair will do two cards. Each pair will receive one card listing five entries from the dictionary and once they have completed the answers they will mark their answers from an answer card. They will then exchange their card for a card from another pair who have completed their task.
- (b) Although the actual entries on each of the cards will vary, the pattern of the entries will remain the same; thus the questions based on the entry cards will apply to all the cards.
- (c) Once the second card has been completed and corrected, check each

group's answers to identify areas of difficulty or misconceptions.

Possible follow-up lesson

Discuss all problems and misconceptions identified in the previous lesson. Then, each pupil will draw up a list of five entries from the dictionary, which can be used with the questions given to them in the prior lesson. The pattern of entries must, therefore, remain constant — four nouns and a verb; one word with a different number of sounded syllables and so on. This will test each pupil's understanding of the lesson and his ability to apply the knowledge which he has acquired.

LESSON 2: GREEK WORD PARTS: WORD BUILDING BY COMPOUNDING

Aims

To acquaint pupils with Greek word parts as a source of English words; to make them aware of the fact that a 'word part' can be used with numerous other word parts; and to equip them with a useful approach to the deciphering of many words.

Materials

Dictionaries, and three worksheets.

Worksheet 1

GREEK WORD PARTS

Column A	Column B
micro — .....	— scope .....
psycho — .....	— meter .....
photo — .....	— graph .....
hydro — .....	— trope (tropic) .....
peri — .....	— therapy .....
chrono — .....	— phobia .....
helo — .....	— logy .....

Worksheet 2

LIST OF MEANINGS OF THE GREEK WORD PARTS

water	looking (instrument)
fear	mind
time	light
small	written/recorded
sun	treat/cure
study	around
turn	measuring (apparatus)

LIST OF POSSIBLE COMBINATIONS

- |                  |                  |                 |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. microscope    | 10. photograph   | 19. periscope   |
| 2. micrometer    | 11. phototropic  | 20. perimeter   |
| 3. micrograph    | 12. photophobia  | 21. chronometer |
| 4. micology      | 13. microscope   | 22. chronograph |
| 5. psychograph   | 14. hydrometer   | 23. chronology  |
| 6. psychotropic  | 15. hydrotropic  | 24. helioscope  |
| 7. psychotherapy | 16. hydrotherapy | 25. heliometer  |
| 8. psychology    | 17. hydrophobia  | 26. heliograph  |
| 9. photometer    | 18. hydrology    | 27. heliotope   |

Worksheet 3

SIMPLE DEFINITIONS

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. an instrument for looking at the sun.              | 15. the study of time.                                  |
| 2. measure around an area.                            | 16. recorded information on the sun.                    |
| 3. to record time.                                    | 17. an instrument used to look at something very small. |
| 4. apparatus to measure the sun.                      |   |
| 5. the recorded image of something very small.        |   |
| 6. a fear of water.                                   | 18. a fear of light.                                    |
| 7. an instrument used for looking around.             | 19. it turns towards water.                             |
| 8. the treatment of the mind.                         | 20. recordings of the workings of the mind.             |
| 9. to cure by water.                                  | 21. an apparatus to measure light.                      |
| 10. to record by the use of light.                    | 22. the study of very small things.                     |
| 11. an instrument for looking at water.               | 23. it turns towards light.                             |
| 12. an instrument used for measuring something small. | 24. to measure water.                                   |
| 13. it turns towards the sun.                         | 25. the turning of the mind.                            |
| 14. the study of the mind.                            | 26. the study of water.                                 |
|   | 27. an apparatus for measuring time.                    |

Method

Pupils will be given a worksheet — Worksheet One — on which are listed, in two columns, fourteen word parts. Pupils will use a dictionary to look up the meaning of each of the word parts. They will then write the meaning in the space provided next to each word part. Check these as the pupils work to ensure that the meaning given is both simple and accurate. Pupils experiencing any difficulty in deciding on an accurate word/words would be assisted, as an inaccurate definition would prevent pupils from providing satisfactory answers in the next two parts of this exercise. If I found that any particular pupil or class was unable to select a key word from the dictionary definition of the word part, I would give him a list of defining words — Worksheet Two — and he would then choose one of the words from the list after examining the definition given in the dictionary.

Pupils must test each word part in column A with each word part in column B to see whether or not the combination is a feasible one. To check whether or not the word exists, the pupil must refer to the dictionary. Once checked,

the word must be written down with a simplified definition.

Example

The pupil will take the first word in column A — 'micro-' — and test it with each word in column B starting with '-scope'. Each feasible combination, e.g. 'microscope', will be tested by referring to the dictionary. Once the pupil finds that the word exists, he writes it down. He then has to construct a simple definition, based on the meanings of the two word parts used to form the compound word. This means that the pupil must construct his own definitions, for example: helio + scope = helioscope: an instrument used for looking at the sun.

In most cases, the constructed definition will be adequate and accurate. In some cases, however, the constructed definition will not be exact, such as 'hydrometer: an instrument to measure water'. At a later stage, these exceptions may be pointed out but in this exercise, slight inaccuracies are unimportant. What is important is the knowledge acquired by the pupils that hitherto undecipherable words are easily understood if broken down into components, once a few basic word parts have been learned. One hopes that this knowledge will become an integral part of the pupils' approach to unfamiliar words as many words can be understood if approached in this manner.

I have found that my practical classes find lessons of this type particularly enjoyable and satisfying, because each 'new' word constructed gives the pupil a sense of achievement. When they find that they can understand and work with words which were previously incomprehensible to them but which have become clear and easy to understand during the lesson, they feel particularly satisfied. The fact that some of the combinations are incomprehensible to many of their teachers, and to most adults, fills them with delight. This exercise is, therefore, not only informative and useful, but also a great ego booster, an invaluable addition in a lesson given to pupils who do not often achieve academic excellence.

Possible variation

As a possible variation on the above lesson, give the pupils in addition to Worksheet One a list of the definitions of those words which can be formed by combining the word parts in Column A with those in Column B (Worksheet Three). By looking up the meaning of each word part, the pupils should then be able to construct a compound word to fit each of the definitions given. This would perhaps be more suitable for a less able class or for a class whose concentration span is short and who would tire during the extended period of looking up each possible combination.

Example: If 'hydro' means 'water' and 'phobia' means 'fear', then 'hydrophobia' will fit the given definition, 'fear of water'.