

African Englishes in the *Oxford English Dictionary*

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Abstract: In some of its recent quarterly updates, the *Oxford English Dictionary* has published particularly large batches of new and revised entries from South African English, Nigerian English, and East African English. The present article is a detailed discussion of the editorial work behind these updates for African varieties of English, whose distinctive vocabularies the OED is currently taking steps to cover more widely. The paper explains how words are selected for inclusion, how new entries are researched and written, how new sources of textual evidence such as social media give OED editors greater insight into African Englishes, and how the dictionary's African consultants and users contribute to ensuring the accuracy and authenticity of the OED's definitions, etymologies, pronunciations, and quotation evidence. The article also highlights a selection of African words and phrases that have recently been added to or revised in the OED, all of which show the many different forms of lexical innovation that shape the distinctive vocabularies of African Englishes.

Keywords: OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY, HISTORICAL LEXICOGRAPHY, AFRICAN ENGLISHES, EAST AFRICAN ENGLISH, SOUTH AFRICAN ENGLISH, WEST AFRICAN ENGLISH, NIGERIAN ENGLISH

Opsomming: Afrika-Engels in die *Oxford English Dictionary*. In sommige van die onlangse kwartaallike bywerkings van die *Oxford English Dictionary* is besonder baie nuwe en hersiene inskrywings uit Suid-Afrikaanse Engels, Nigeriese Engels en Oos-Afrikaanse Engels gepubliseer. Hierdie artikel is 'n gedetailleerde bespreking van die redaksionele werk agter hierdie bywerkings vir Afrika-variëteite van Engels waarvoor die OED tans poog om wyer dekking aan elkeen se kenmerkende woordeskatte te verleen. Hier word uiteengesit hoe woorde vir insluiting geselekteer word, hoe nuwe inskrywings nagevors en gedefinieer word, hoe nuwe bronne van tekstuele bewys soos die sosiale media die OED-redakteurs groter insig in Afrika-Engels gee, en hoe die woordeboek se Afrika-adviseurs en -gebruikers daartoe bydra om die akkuraatheid en geloofwaardigheid van die OED se definisies, etimologieë, uitspraak aanduidings en aanhalingsbewysmateriaal te verseker. Die artikel plaas ook klem op 'n groep Afrika-woorde en -frases wat onlangs toegevoeg is tot of hersien is in die OED, waarvan almal die verskillende vorme van leksikale vernuwing toon wat die kenmerkende woordeskatte van Afrika-Engels vorm.

Sleutelwoorde: OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY, HISTORIESE LEKSIKOGRAFIE, AFRIKA-ENGELS, OOS-AFRIKAANSE ENGELS, SUID-AFRIKAANSE ENGELS, WES-AFRIKAANSE ENGELS, NIGERIESE ENGELS

1. Introduction

The English language has a long and complex history in Africa. It first reached the shores of the continent's West Coast, where trade contact was established with British merchants as early as in the 15th century. English gained a firmer foothold in Africa with the arrival of British settlers in the early 19th century, with these settlers and their descendants forming a significant population of native English-speaking Africans (Van Rooy 2020). Finally, the colonization of large swathes of African territory by the British beginning in the late 19th century led to further entrenchment of English as an African language, to such a degree that in the mid-20th century, when British colonies in Africa became independent nations, these new states chose to continue using English, with many of them even giving the language official status (Schmied 1991).

Today, English is seen in Africa as a prestige language, one that is associated with educational and professional success and upward social mobility. It also serves a very useful role as a neutral lingua franca for the highly multilingual, multi-ethnic, and multicultural communities that form part of modern African countries. However, the violent, repressive, and exploitative imperial history behind the spread of English in Africa is far from forgotten, and the lasting hegemony of this colonial language is often decried as a threat to the autonomous development of local languages and cultures. Its presence in Africa resulted in the creation of an English-speaking elite and further deepened inequalities between socioeconomic classes on the continent.

Despite its contradictory roles and the conflicting attitudes towards English in Africa, what is clear is that with their continued use of English throughout the centuries, Africans have been able to adapt the language to suit their communicative needs, thereby giving rise to indigenized varieties of the language with their own unique phonological, morphological, lexical, and pragmatic features, now known collectively as African Englishes. It is the documentation of these distinctive features of African varieties of English in a historical dictionary that will be the focus of the present article.

2. Documenting African Englishes in the *Oxford English Dictionary*

2.1 World Englishes in the OED

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) is widely regarded as the undisputed authority on the history of the English language. It is an historical dictionary of unparalleled size and scope, showing not only the current meanings of hundreds of thousands of words, but also tracing their chronological evolution through millions of quotations taken from written examples of authentic language use.

The OED is presently undergoing its first thoroughgoing revision and update since it was first published in full in 1928. This endeavour, the biggest

humanities project in the world, employs over 70 editors based mostly in Oxford and New York. The dictionary's third and latest edition is accessible through *OED Online* (oed.com), where updates are published quarterly. This makes the OED a work in progress, a hybrid text which combines unrevised entries from previous editions with fully revised and newly added entries. One of the key components of the dictionary's revision project is improving and widening its coverage of varieties of English used outside of the United Kingdom and the United States. This is in response to the global spread of English and the emergence of new varieties of the language — collectively termed World Englishes — that are developing their own standards of grammar, pronunciation, and more importantly for a historical dictionary, lexis.

In recent years, the OED has undertaken targeted projects to broaden its coverage of several World Englishes, publishing particularly large batches of new and revised entries for varieties spoken in the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, Canada, Bermuda, the Caribbean, and Ireland. The dictionary's latest quarterly updates have also featured the results of ongoing editorial work on African Englishes. The OED's December 2018 update included 26 new entries from South African English (Salazar 2018), while its January 2020 update contained 29 new entries from Nigerian English (Salazar 2020). More recently, the June 2022 update saw the publication of close to 200 new and revised entries for words from East African Englishes, chiefly covering words from Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda (Salazar 2022).

2.2 Selecting words for inclusion and editing entries

Lexicographers working on the *OED* today have several resources at their disposal to track the emergence of new words and senses from different parts of the English-speaking world. The principal research tool for this lexical monitoring is Oxford Languages'¹ monitor corpus of English (henceforth the Oxford Monitor Corpus), which currently contains over 14 billion words of web-based news content from 2017 to the present day, and is updated each month. This corpus also consists of subsections with texts from different countries, which make it possible to carry out variety-specific searches and comparisons between different varieties of English. As of this writing, the Oxford Monitor Corpus contains around 284 million words of South African English, 158 million words of Nigerian English, 133 million words of Ghanaian English, 129 million words of Kenyan English, and 16 million words of Ugandan English.

Another important resource for lexical monitoring is the OED's Reading Programme database, which currently comprises over 1.3 million separate quotations drawn from a huge variety of writing. The Reading Programme has been in existence since 1857, when the British Philological Society began to recruit volunteer readers to collect quotations for a planned historical dictionary that would later become the OED. The database started as a collection of quotations

written on slips of paper filed alphabetically, but has now evolved into a digitally stored compendium that is fully searchable. An increasing number of publications written in or about World Englishes is now being included in the Reading Programme, so that a greater quantity of quotations from a wider geographical range of texts can be added to the database.

In addition to their in-house resources, the OED's lexicographers also make use of external evidence sources to monitor lexical developments in different varieties of English. They regularly consult text databases, newspapers, journals, and books from across the globe, as well as a number of regional dictionaries and grammars. They are also aided by contributions from members of the public, and specialist advice from an international network of consultants. Various forms of social media have also given lexicographers a view into current, informal, idiosyncratic uses of words from many different places, and even allow them to reach out to speakers of World Englishes to ask them about the words that characterize their vocabulary.

Once a list of candidates for inclusion has been established, OED editors begin to carefully research both print sources and electronic databases to make sure that there are several independent examples of each word being used, for a reasonable amount of time and reasonable frequency in the types of text in which it can be expected to be found. There is no exact timespan and frequency threshold, as this may vary depending on each word. Some words are relatively young, but they were quickly added to the OED because of the huge social impact they had in such a short space of time; other words are not overwhelmingly frequent, but are included because they are of specific cultural, historical, or linguistic significance (see Diamond 2015).

The OED's editors consider thousands of word suggestions every year, reviewing each and every one. Words that have not yet accumulated enough evidence for permanent record in the OED remain on the watch list for continued monitoring, while suggestions for words with sufficiently sustained and widespread use are assigned to an editor.

Editors begin the process of drafting a dictionary entry by reviewing the information gathered so far for their assigned word, before embarking on their own research to trace the word's development. This research might lead them to search newspaper archives, online forums, academic studies, magazines, law tracts, recipe books, or social media for dated or dateable evidence of the word. If a key example is available in a library or archive that they cannot access digitally, they can enlist the help of the OED's network of researchers, who are based at institutions around the world, to track down this example.

For historical research on African English words, online book, journal, and newspaper depositories such as Google Books, Hathi Trust, Internet Archive, Proquest, JSTOR, and Gale are especially useful for finding antedatings — the earliest evidence of a word being used in English. Works of British traders, explorers, and colonizers in Africa, as well as documents relating to British colonial administration, are particularly rich sources of these antedatings. For

example, *First Footsteps in East Africa*, British explorer Richard Francis Burton's record of his first expedition to Somalia, published in 1856, is the source of the OED's antedating for the word *shuka*, a noun referring to a long piece of fabric usually worn as a loincloth or used as a bedsheet: 'He had ... a Shukkah or half Tobe for his daughter' (Burton 1856: 92).

An invaluable source of historical data for South African English is the *Dictionary of South African English* (DSAE), first published in print by Oxford University Press in 1996 and now maintained as an online dictionary. The DSAE follows the same historical principles as the OED, and now consists of over 4,000 uniquely South African words across three centuries. OED editors consult the DSAE for further information on South African vocabulary and usage, as it contains material that is more detailed as regards to this particular variety of English than that published in the OED.

For more contemporary quotations, OED lexicographers working on African English entries usually consult the newspaper database Nexis, which includes the latest issues of a number of newspapers published across Africa. As previously mentioned, social media sites, particularly Twitter, also provide plenty of evidence for current African English vocabulary, especially for slang and colloquial usages. The tweet shown in Figure 1, posted by a Tanzanian on Twitter in 2020, is the last quotation for the OED entry for *chips(i) mayai*, the name of a thick omelette having fried potatoes (chips) mixed in with the eggs during cooking, often eaten as a street food in Kenya and Tanzania.

Figure 1: Tweet cited in the *OED* as an example for the Tanzanian noun *chips(i) mayai*



Although the *OED* now has access to a more geographically diverse range of research resources, it remains true that the amount of lexicographical evidence available for region-specific vocabulary is still very small compared to that for general English. This is also due to the fact that publications in postcolonial nations continue to be edited following British or American standards, so that

lexical innovations in speech may not always make it into published writing (Salazar 2014). For this reason, OED editors are increasingly turning to less mediated forms of writing, such as social media posts and song lyrics, in order to find quotations that more closely approximate the way that speakers of World English talk, and therefore serve as more authentic illustrations of how World English words are used in real-life contexts (Salazar 2021).

Yet another important data source for contemporary evidence of African English usage is the Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE), which consists of about 1.9 billion words of text in 1.8 million web pages from 340,000 websites in 20 different Anglophone countries, including South Africa (45 million words), Nigeria (43 million words), Ghana (39 million words), Kenya (41 million words), and Tanzania (35 million words). Just like the Oxford Monitor Corpus, GloWbE allows for many types of searches and comparisons between different varieties.

Once an editor has collected enough evidence to form a detailed picture of the word, they begin to build their dictionary entry, adding each element, beginning with the headword and including its pronunciation, variant forms, etymology, definition, example quotations, and any other senses or associated phrases it may have. For new senses of existing words, these are included in their chronological position in the entry, with the definition and example quotations.

In choosing the illustrative quotations to include in a World English entry, it is now of utmost importance for an OED editor to ensure that these quotations are taken from works written by speakers of the variety in question, and published in the word's place of origin. Consider this entry for *buka*, a Nigerian English word for a roadside restaurant or food stall (Figure 2).

Figure 2: OED entry for the Nigerian noun *buka*

The screenshot shows the OED entry for 'buka, n.'. The entry includes the following information:

- Pronunciation:** Brit. ˈbuːkɑː; U.S. ˈbuːkɑ; West African English ˈbuka
- Inflections:** Plural *bukas*, unchanged.
- Forms:** 1900s– *buka*, 1900s– *bukka*.
- Origin:** Of multiple origins. Partly a borrowing from Yoruba. Partly a borrowing from Hausa. **Etyms:** Yoruba *bùkà*, Hausa *bùkkà*.
- Etymology:** < (i) Yoruba *bùkà* hut, market stall, and its etymon (ii) Hausa *bùkkà* grass shed, hut.

The entry is categorized as **Nigerian English**. The definition is: **A roadside restaurant or street stall with a seating area, selling cooked food at low prices. Cf. BUKATERIA *n.*, MAMA PUT *n.* Frequently as a modifier, as in **buka food**.**

Quotations are provided from 1972, 1991, 2009, and 2017, illustrating the word's use in various contexts.

It can be seen that all the quotations for this entry come from Nigerian sources, from its earliest attested use in 1972 in *The Combat*, a historical novel written by Nigerian author Kole Omotoso, to a 1991 quotation taken from Nigerian writer Ben Okri's Booker Prize-winning novel *The Famished Road*, to tweets posted by Nigerians.

In their definition, an editor can also add geographical labels, as well as provide more discursive information to accompany these labels. Note how the entry for *buka* includes a *Nigerian English* label. The definition also comments on the frequent use of *buka* as a modifier, and cross-refers to *bukateria* and *mama put*, synonymous words for which the OED also has entries.

After the editor finishes their draft, the entry is passed on to several specialist teams at the OED, such as the etymologists, who check the accuracy of and add more detailed information on the origin of the word, and the bibliographers, who review the quotations to ensure that sources are cited correctly.

Table 1: List of varieties of English for which the *OED* has a pronunciation model (as of November 2022)

Australian English	Indian English	Singapore and Malaysian English
Bermudian English	Irish English	South African English
Canadian English	Manx English	Welsh English
Caribbean English	New Zealand English	West African English
East African English	Philippine English	
Hong Kong English	Scottish English	

Another specialist group in the OED is the Pronunciations team. The dictionary's Pronunciation editors have formulated specific pronunciation models for several World English varieties (see Table 1 for a complete list), which can all be consulted on the *OED* website. Each pronunciation model has a dedicated page with a discussion of the rationale for the model, along with major reference sources and potential discrepancies and compromises. These models were developed using pronunciation data drawn from varietal dictionaries, knowledgeable native speakers and expert consultants, and online evidence of natural language use. The OED's East African pronunciation model (Sangster and Moreland 2022) is based primarily on the work of Josef Schmied, who was also the dictionary's phonetic consultant; its pronunciation model for South African English largely drew from the work of Sean Bowerman and the contrasts found in the DSAE (Sangster and Moreland 2016); and its West African English pronunciation model is chiefly informed by the work of Ulrike Gut, who similarly acted as the OED's phonetic consultant (Sangster and Moreland 2020).

These pronunciation models form the basis of variety-specific transcriptions in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) for World English entries, accompanied by recorded audio pronunciations. See, for instance, how in the OED's entry for *buka* (Figure 3), there are the IPA transcriptions and audio pro-

nunciations in British and American English that are standard for all non-obsolete OED entries, but alongside these is the IPA transcription in West African English, and a blue button that, when clicked, will play a recording of the word being pronounced in a West African accent, as determined by the OED's pronunciation model for West African English.

Figure 3: IPA transcriptions and audio pronunciations for the Nigerian noun *buka* in British English, American English, and West African English



The audio pronunciations are not synthesized, but are recordings made by actor-phoneticians recruited for each variety, who came to Oxford University Press' recording facilities in Oxford to read each transcription aloud. The OED currently features 1,016 South African English transcriptions, for which there are 1,010 sound files; 299 West African English transcriptions, for which there are 256 sound files; and 140 East African transcriptions and sound files. The dictionary's review of World English pronunciations is a work in progress, and pronunciation models for more varieties, along with transcriptions and audio recordings for corresponding entries, are continuously added to the dictionary by its Pronunciations team.

Once the dictionary entry has been signed off by each specialist team, it is given a final review by the dictionary's Chief and Deputy Chief Editors, before it finally takes its place in the OED.

The publication of the OED's World English updates is accompanied by detailed release notes on the OED blog. The varieties of English covered by the dictionary are also featured in the dictionary's World English Hub, a section of its publicly accessible pages which serves as a central repository for the content and resources related to World Englishes on the OED site². The OED also promotes further engagement with its World English content by regularly hosting webinars³ on various topics relating to variation in English, as well as bigger events such as the Oxford World English Symposium, held online in April 2022⁴.

3. Elements of the African English lexicon in the OED

This section will highlight a selection of African words and phrases that have recently been added to or revised in the OED, all of which show the patterns of lexical innovation in African Englishes.

3.1 Borrowings

A significant proportion of the OED's new and revised entries for African varieties have been borrowed into English from some of the most widely spoken languages on the continent. For South African English, Afrikaans is a particularly important source for such loanwords, lending two of the oldest words in the dictionary's December 2018 update. *Deurmekaar*, first attested in 1871, is an adjective applied to something that is confused, muddled, or mixed up. The adverb *voetstoots* was first used in English in 1883 as a legal term describing the buying or selling of items in their existing condition, but nearly a hundred years later, it also began to be used more generally to describe actions done unconditionally, without reservation or qualification.

Later borrowings from Afrikaans were first seen in English in the first half of the 20th century. They include *eina* (first attested 1913), an interjection expressing sharp pain or distress, and *dwaal* (1957), a noun referring to a dreamy, dazed, or absent-minded state, frequently used in the phrase *in a dwaal*.

Other words in the OED's recent update for the English of South Africa have their roots in two of the country's other official languages — Xhosa and Zulu. The oldest of these loanwords date to the late 19th century: *amakhosi* (1857), a collective term of Xhosa and Zulu origin for tribal leaders or chiefs in traditional Nguni societies, and *ubuntu* (1860), a word signifying the fundamental values of humanity or of Africanness, also borrowed partly from Xhosa and partly from Zulu. *Ingcibi*, first used in English in 1937, is a Xhosa word for a person who performs circumcisions on young men as part of a traditional rite of passage, while the more contemporary borrowing *Mzansi*, dating from 1999, is the Xhosa name for South Africa, and for South Africans as a people.

Two years later, the OED's new additions for Nigerian English included such loanwords as the aforementioned *buka*, which was borrowed from the Yoruba word *búkà*, meaning a hut or market stall, and was itself borrowed from the Hausa word *búkkàa*, signifying a grass shed or hut. Two other Yoruba borrowings in the Nigerian update are the noun *danfo* (first attested 1973), which refers to a yellow minibus that carries passengers for a fare as part of an informal transport system in Lagos, and *tokunbo* (1990), an adjective denoting an imported second-hand product, especially a car. The latter comes from the Yoruba word *tòkunbò*, which literally translates into English as 'from overseas', and is formed by the words *ti* 'from, belonging to', *òkun* 'ocean, sea', and *bò* 'to return'.

Nigerian Pidgin is another fount of new words for Nigerian English. *Sef*, first evidenced in Ben Okri's novel *Flowers and Shadows*, published in 1980, is an adverb borrowed from Pidgin, which itself could have been an adverbial use of either the English adjective *safe* or the pronoun *self*. It is an emphatic marker added to the end of statements or rhetorical questions, often to express irritation or impatience, as in this quotation from Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2013 novel *Americanah*: 'He could have given you reduced rent

in one of his properties, even a free flat *sef*' (Adichie 2013: 396).

Also coming from pidgin contexts is the verb *chop*, which is a common colloquial word in Ghana and Nigeria meaning 'to eat'. However, beginning in the 1970s, *chop* also developed the sense of acquiring money quickly and easily, and often dishonestly. The negative sense of misappropriating, extorting, or embezzling funds is also in the earlier reduplicative noun *chop-chop* (first attested 1966), which refers to bribery and corruption in public life. This likening of stealing money to actually devouring it is also reflected in the even earlier synonymous phrase *to eat money* (1960), as in the following quotation from the 22 August 2016 issue of Nigeria's *News Chronicle*: 'Our roads were not done. By the end of this year, you will know who ate the money of these roads'.

More recently, the OED's update for East African Englishes published in its June 2022 update is dominated by loanwords from Swahili, the region's main lingua franca. This long list of borrowings includes the oldest of the new entries in the batch, *jembe*, referring to a hoe-shaped hand tool used for digging, which is first attested in an article by Richard Francis Burton published in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* in 1860. Over a hundred years later, renowned Kenyan writer and academic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o used the same word in his historical novel *A Grain of Wheat*, first published in 1967.

One of the newest words in the East African update is also a Swahili loan: *sambaza*, a verb originally used to mean 'to send mobile phone credit to someone', but is now used more generally to mean 'to share or send something'. Dating back to 2007, the English word comes from the Swahili word *-sambaza* meaning 'to spread, disperse, scatter', and now also 'to transfer mobile phone credit'. The transmission into English of this usage with reference to mobile phone credit may have been reinforced by the use of the Swahili word in the name for a credit sharing system in Kenya, introduced in 2005.

Other borrowings in this batch include Swahili forms of address such as *mwalimu* 'teacher' (first attested 1884), as well as *Bwana* (1860) and its abbreviation, *Bw* (1973), a title of courtesy or respect prefixed to the surname or first name of a man. There are also expressions and discourse markers of Swahili origin such as *asante sana* (1911) 'thank you', *pole sana* (1966) 'sorry', and *ati* (2010) 'as someone said; reportedly, allegedly'.

In addition to words used throughout the region, the OED's East African update also features words unique to the varieties of English spoken in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The lexicon of Kenyan English is represented by borrowings from a few of its many languages: for example, *kiondo* (1902) from Kikuyu and *Isukuti* (1972) from Luhya. A *kiondo* is a handwoven bag made from cord or string, now usually of sisal, with long handles or straps that can be slung over the shoulder, typical of the traditional handicraft of the Kikuyu and Kamba peoples of Kenya. An *isukuti* is a wooden drum, traditionally made from a hollowed log, which is usually hung over the shoulder and played by striking with the fingers and palms. *Isukuti* is also the name of a rhythmic, energetic traditional celebratory dance accompanied by drumming and sing-

ing, performed typically at festivals and weddings by the Luhya peoples of Western Kenya, such as the Isukha and Idakho.

Also included in this update are names of Kenyan dishes such as *githeri* (1973), a traditional central Kenyan dish consisting of boiled maize and legumes, typically beans; and *irio* (1931), a dish consisting of mashed potatoes or sweet potatoes with maize, peas, and leafy green vegetables such as spinach, typically eaten as an accompaniment to other dishes. Also newly added to the *OED* are names of traditional Kenyan home-brewed alcoholic drinks: *muratina* (1904), made from the fermented fruit of the sausage tree, also known locally as *muratina*; *busaa* (1967), made from fermented millet, maize, or sorghum flour; and *changaa* (1975), made from fermented millet, maize, or sorghum grains, a liquor so strong its production and distribution were illegal in Kenya until 2010.

As for Tanzanian English, one of the most widely known words from this variety is *daladala*, the name of a van or minibus that carries passengers for a fare as part of a local informal transport system. Dating back to 1983, the English word comes from Swahili, with *daladala* being a reduplication of *dala* 'dollar', perhaps originally as a bus driver's call. *Dala* is also the nickname of the Tanzanian 5-shilling coin, which used to be the typical fare for *daladala* minibuses.

The vocabulary of Ugandan English draws primarily from Luganda, one of the country's major languages (Isingoma 2016). Examples of Lugandan borrowings in this batch are *kaveera* (1994) 'a plastic bag, plastic packaging'; *kwanjula* (1973) 'an engagement ceremony where the families of the bride and groom formally meet'; and *nkuba kyeyo* (1991) 'a Ugandan person working overseas, especially one doing a low-paid or unskilled job' — the Lugandan phrase literally means 'someone who sweeps'. *Katogo* (1940) is another loan word from Luganda — it is the name of a typical Ugandan breakfast dish consisting of *matoke* (banana or plantain) boiled in a pot with various other ingredients. The word later developed a figurative sense, as it began to be used to mean 'a mixture or fusion of disparate elements; a mess, a muddle'.

3.2 Other lexical innovations

The African English word stock is characterized not just by borrowings, but also by lexical innovations based on English elements, several of which have now made their way into the *OED*. They include words formed through suffixation, such as the East African word *unprocedural* (first attested 1929), meaning irregular or illegal; or through compounding, such as *bunny chow* (1972), the name of a popular South African takeaway dish consisting of a hollowed-out loaf of bread filled with curry; *barbing salon* (1979), the Nigerian expression for a barber's shop; and *deskmate* (1850), a compound East Africans use to refer to a person who sits next to another at school.

A few of the African English words in recent *OED* updates were created by shortening existing English words, like the South African greeting *howzit?* (1918)

and the East African verb *collabo* (2008), short for 'collaborate', used especially of musicians. Another example is the Nigerian English adjective *guber* (1989), which is short for 'gubernatorial' — so Nigerians, for instance, would call a person running for governor a 'guber candidate'. Another frequently used clipping with a longer history in English is *agric*. It was originally used in American English around 1812 as a graphic abbreviation for the adjective *agricultural*, but is now used chiefly in this sense in West Africa. In the early 1990s, *agric* began to be used in Nigeria to designate improved or genetically modified varieties of crops or breeds of livestock, especially a type of commercially reared chicken that is frequently contrasted with native chicken. Two decades later, Nigerian students also started to use the word as a noun meaning agricultural science as an academic subject or course.

A number of the African English entries that have recently been documented in the OED are for words that have developed meanings specific to the region. One notable example is *K-leg*, earliest seen in 1842 in British English, but now used mostly in Nigerian English. It is another term for the condition of knock knees, as well as a depreciative name for a person affected with this condition, whose inward-turning knees often resemble the shape of the letter K. It is of such widespread use in Nigeria that by the early 1980s, it had also acquired a figurative meaning — a *K-leg* can now also be any sort of problem, flaw, setback, or obstacle.

Also in Nigerian English, a *gist* (1990) is a rumour, and *to gist* (1992) is to gossip; and something described as *qualitative* (1976) is excellent or of high quality. In East African English, the noun *tarmac* (1982) is also used as a verb meaning 'to walk the streets looking for work; to job hunt'; a person who is *pressed* (1958) needs to go to the bathroom, while a *stage* (1965) is a bus stop or a taxi rank. In Kenyan English, a *biting* (1997) is a bite-sized piece of food, a small snack, appetizer, or canapé; while a *merry-go-round* (1989) is an informal cooperative savings scheme, typically run by and for women, in which each participant regularly contributes an amount, and the whole sum is distributed to the members in turn. *To shrub* is to pronounce or write words in another language in a manner that is influenced by one's mother tongue, and a *shrub* (2008) is a word pronounced or written in this manner. *To shrub* and *shrub* are colloquialisms chiefly used with reference to English or Swahili words pronounced in a manner characteristic of another Kenyan language. In Ugandan English, *to cowardize* (2003) is to act like a coward or to lose one's nerve, while *to extend* (2000) is to move from one's position so as to make room for someone else.

African Englishes also have their share of idiosyncratic phrases. In South Africa, a non-committal, resigned, or ironic 'whatever' is expressed as *ja well no fine*, pronounced quickly, almost as one word. In Uganda, *well done* (1971) is used as a friendly greeting or salutation, especially when encountering a person at work or in a state of activity; *you are lost!* (2013) is also used as a greeting, or in response to a greeting, in a manner similar to 'long time no see'.

3.3 Semantic fields

Schmied (1991: 82, 84) gives the natural and built environment, food, people, and clothing as semantic fields in which Africanisms often occur. This is reflected in the OED, as many of its newly recorded and revised African English entries belong to these domains. Table 2 shows some examples from the dictionary for each of these areas of meaning.

Table 2: Examples of African English entries in the *OED* belonging to commonly occurring semantic fields

Semantic field	Word	Date of first quotation	Variety	Definition
Food	<i>bunny chow</i> , n.	1972	South African	a South African dish consisting of a hollowed-out loaf of bread (or part of a loaf) filled with curry, typically sold as take-away food; a serving of this
	<i>chapo</i> , n.	1993	East African	a thin pancake of unleavened wholemeal bread cooked on a griddle
	<i>mandazi</i> , n.	1937	East African	a small cake consisting of sweetened dough fried in oil, usually triangular in shape and typically eaten as a snack or as an accompaniment to other dishes; (as a mass noun) these cakes collectively
	<i>nyama choma</i> , n.	1980	East African	roasted or grilled meat
	<i>sarmie</i> , n.	1970	South African	a sandwich
Clothing	<i>buibui</i> , n.	1929	East African	a traditional garment worn by Muslim women in East Africa, typically a long black gown with a black head covering that leaves only the eyes or face exposed

	<i>kanga</i> , n.	1895	East African	a type of cotton fabric printed with designs in bright colours, typically in squares or rectangles featuring a border on all four sides, and used especially for women's clothing; a piece of this fabric, often worn as a shawl or wrap
	<i>kanzu</i> , n.	1870	East African	a long, loose-fitting white tunic worn by men
Environment	<i>banda</i> , n.	1908	East African	a hut or shed with a thatched roof, used typically as a rest house or shelter for travellers
	<i>boma</i> , n.	1860	East African	a barrier formed from thorny branches or wooden stakes, used for defence against attacks by enemies or wild animals; a fence, palisade, or stockade
	<i>duka</i> , n.	1912	East African	a small neighbourhood store selling a variety of goods
	<i>spaza</i> , n.	1988	South African	a small, unregulated and unlicensed grocery shop in a township, usually run from a private house
	<i>tembe</i> , n.	1860	East African	a rectangular house with mud walls and a flat roof
People	<i>district surgeon</i> , n.	1829	South African	a doctor appointed by the government to fulfil specific functions in a particular district; (now) spec. a police surgeon or forensic medical examiner
	<i>ingcibi</i> , n.	1937	South African	among Xhosas: a man who performs circumcisions on young males as part of the traditional initiation ritual symbolizing passage into manhood

	<i>non-indigene</i> , adj.	1907	West African	belonging to an ethnic group considered not to be indigenous to a par- ticular area
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Another semantic field that is of particular significance to Africa has to do with street food. In Nigerian English, there are at least three words indicating a roadside restaurant or street stall that sells local fare at low prices. One of them is the aforementioned *buka*, while another is *bukateria* (first attested 1980), which adds to *buka* the *-teria* ending from the word *cafeteria*. An even more creative synonym is *mama put*, from 1979, which comes from the way that customers usually order food in a *buka*: they say 'Mama, put ...' to the woman running the stall, and indicate the dish they want. The word later became a generic name for the female food vendors themselves — Nobel Prize-winning Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka notably includes a Mama Put character in one of his works.

The informal transport systems that emerged in Africa's huge, densely populated cities such as Lagos and Dar es Salaam have also necessitated lexical invention. Apart from the previously mentioned Nigerian *danfo* and Tanzanian *daladala*, there is also the Nigerian *okada* (1993), the term for a motorcycle that passengers can use as a taxi service. The name is a reference to Okada Air, an airline that operated in Nigeria from 1983 to 1997, and its reputation as a fast yet potentially dangerous form of transport, just like the motorcycle taxi.

Tanzania's contemporary music scene is represented in the OED by *Bongo Flava* (2003) and *singeli* (2015). *Singeli* is a Tanzanian style of fast-paced electronic dance music, combining elements of hip-hop with influences from East African popular music such as *taarab* (1969), a form of music originating in Zanzibar. *Bongo Flava*, another style of music from Tanzania, fuses elements of American hip-hop with influences from reggae, R&B, Afrobeat, dancehall, and traditional East African forms of popular music, and features lyrics in Swahili or English. *Bongo* (1993) is a nickname for the city of Dar es Salaam — *bongo* being the Swahili word for 'brain' or 'intelligence', something one needs a lot of in order to thrive in the most populous city in Tanzania.

4. Conclusion

As can be concluded from the many lexical examples given throughout this article, African speakers of English have long adopted the language and adapted it as a means of expressing their own identity, culture, and experience. Yet despite this, their performance in English continues to be unfairly judged based on exonormative norms set by more prestigious varieties such as British and American English.

It is hoped that the OED's continuing efforts to document the lexicon of African Englishes can play a part in changing this deficit view of these varieties.

As explained earlier in this paper, African English entries in the OED undergo the same thorough and comprehensive research process that all entries in the OED go through before publication. By providing all of this high-quality historical dictionary data for African English words, the OED offers proof of the longevity and stability of these words, and by extension, the longevity and stability of African Englishes. This data can also be used by other researchers to undertake different kinds of historical and lexical investigations of these varieties.

In addition, recording African English words in a dictionary, especially an authoritative historical dictionary such as the *OED*, is a highly visible way of recognizing the valuable contributions that African Englishes have made to the development of the English lexicon. As Nigerian writer T.J. Benson commented to Reuters in January 2020 in reference to the OED's then newly published Nigerian English update (Ukomadu and Carsten 2020), 'I think this (recognition) is empowering for lots of us writers and for everyday people, because at the end of the day it ties back to identity and how we perceive ourselves and how we express ourselves'.

Endnotes

1. Oxford Languages is the department of Oxford University Press that is home to the *Oxford English Dictionary* as well as a wide range of dictionaries and lexical datasets for English and other languages.
2. The OED's World English Hub can be found at <https://public.oed.com/world-englishes/>. It has individual pages for East African English, Kenyan English, Nigerian English, South African English, Tanzanian English, and Ugandan English.
3. Information on the OED's upcoming webinars, as well as recordings of its past webinars can be found at <https://public.oed.com/webinars-and-events/>. A recent webinar relating to African Englishes is '*Mama put in the OED: World Englishes and the Oxford English Dictionary*', featuring Kingsley Ugwuanyi, the OED's consultant for Nigerian English.
4. All recordings from the Oxford World English Symposium 2022 can be found at <https://public.oed.com/world-englishes/oed-symposium-2022/>. The Symposium features three presentations on African Englishes: 'World Englishes and context-based ELT in Nigeria' by Joy Onyemaechi of the University of Abuja, 'South African English and OUP Southern Africa' by Phillip Louw, formerly of OUP South Africa and now Editor-in-Chief and Executive Director of the *Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal*, and 'Ugandan English' by Bebwā Isingoma of Gulu University.

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