

Vocabulary

South African English

If you listen to a South African speak you will notice that many words used in conversation have been borrowed from other languages. This is known as code-mixing. In this lesson we learn what code-mixing is and when it is appropriate to use it.

Lesson Outcomes

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- define code-mixing
- explain when using code-mixing is appropriate

Curriculum Links

LO 4: Language

- identify and explain the meanings of words and use them correctly in a range of texts
- recognise how languages borrow words from one another

Lesson notes

Code-mixing occurs when words from other languages are included in a conversation.

If you think of a language as being a type of a code, then code-mixing incorporates pieces of other codes. In writing or speaking this can be a really effective way of describing something or adding interest and colour to what you are saying.

Here is a paragraph that uses lots of words that are borrowed from other South African languages to describe different types of cars—do you know what they mean?

Amagents love their G-strings. They know that these are bound to make them more popular with the Model Cs than if they were driving starter packs. Another popular choice to burn rubber in is a "Vura". But, even a jalopy is better than arriving in a sandwich.

If you removed the code-mixing and slang from this paragraph, it could be rewritten like this...

Stylish men love stylish cars. They know that these are bound to make them more popular with girls who attend suburban schools than if they were driving a cheaper car with no extra features. Men also like VR6 cars, because these are fast. But even a dilapidated, old car is better than arriving in a taxi.

Your own conversations and writing can be enhanced through the clever use of code-mixing. But you need to do this carefully!

Code-mixing is positive when:

- your audience understands what you mean
- it allows you to express yourself creatively
- the word you use is the best way of expressing the idea

Code-mixing can be negative when:

- it excludes people from understanding
- it is over-used in inappropriate situations
- it is used in formal written texts

Some words have become so much a part of the way people speak that they are no longer regarded as code-mixing and, instead, are seen as part of South African English.

How many of these examples of South African English do you know? Can you add to this list?

Amabhokabhoka – The Springbok rugby team

babalaas – to have a hangover after getting drunk

bakgat – fantastic

moegoe – a gullible person

gatvol – to have had enough

gogga – an insect

car guard – a person who looks after your car

access bond – a mortgage that you can pay off quickly

slap chips – deep-fried potato chips

Fah-fee – a type of gambling game

bunny chow – a hollowed-out half loaf of bread filled with curry

bosberaad – a conference

TASK

Here are three words that are commonly used in South African English. What is the etymology or origin of each word?

- Karoo
- Kwaito
- Fundi