

Phrase book is good for both tourists, locals

STOEP TALK

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Visitors have to contend with our 11 languages and even more accents

I HEARD this conversation at the hardware the other day. Shopkeeper: You want cup hooks? Customer: Yor. Djavenny?

In our 11-language country, a lot of people are concerned that English-speaking visitors during the World Cup will become totally bewildered. Let's face it, there's a lot they will have difficulty understanding. Take this next conversation:

Visitor: Do you speak English?

Local: Corsado.

Visitor: No, I mean English.

Local: Ja.

Visitor: I am trying to find the Post Office?

Local: Isit?

Visitor (slowly): The Post office? To post letter...

Local: Man, no, it's just porst the robot. Bah the way, djavthetarm?

There's nothing one can do about accents of course. It's worse in England where they say "Nawattameen?" (know what I mean?) and "Wenoff" (the party

wenoff well). But what about visitors coming to grips with our 11 official languages? Not that we South Africans ever have.

Jenny Gautschi has bravely self-published South Africa's first phrase book for all eleven languages. It is called "Hello South Africa" and the best clue I have about how to get hold of a copy is to ring 011 291 8617 or go to www.hellosouthafrica.co.za

Jenny organised it (with lots of expert help) for the World Cup but then realised how badly we ourselves needed it.

It's a chunky little book designed for the pocket or handbag despite its 432 pages.

Although it's not going to help you to say, "Excuse me but I am looking for some yellow socks with little elephants on them" it does allow you to say all the pleasantries from "good morning" to "good night" and a lot of the stuff you'll need in between such as "How do I get to ...?" and "I don't understand".

The book is so easy to use even I can use it. It contains 600 useful phrases in 11

colour-coded sections (one for each language). Each is divided into 30 topics (weather, banking, doctor, on the road, birds, mammals, in the restaurant, etc).

Some words are unforgettable such as the Zulu for Goal! - just shout "igoli!"

As with all phrase books it does not answer the dilemma that arises when, for instance, you say to a Xhosa, "How far is it?" ("Ikude kangakanani?" - pronounced "ee-koo-deh kah-ngah-kah-nah-nee) and they answer in that language.

At least you will have shown courtesy and, no doubt, greatly pleased (amazed!) the person by trying to speak their language.

Nothing is likely to please a Sotho waiter more (apart from a big tip) than for you to tell him, "Tshebeletso e ne e le ntle" (pronounced: tsche-beh-leh-tswa ee neh ee lee ntleh) - "The service was great!"

There's an aid to understanding the national anthem, lots of useful statistics and information about each cultural group.

Talking of accents, perhaps Jenny Gautschi should have added a guide to

"Sefrican English". Words such as:

Beds - birds

Leave - opposite to die

Green - smile

Ship - woolly animal

Sheep - ship

Beggars - MacDonalds hem beggars

South African English-speakers grumble about "Sefrican" but friends who emigrated to Canada say they miss Sefrican badly and are finding it very hard not to be irritated by North American English where "Baal" is not a god but a thing with which you play soccer; "forced" describes a lot of trees as in the Amazon forced; Yirp is the continent on the other side of the Adlann and Trahná is where most expats live - Canada's biggest city.

Whatever happened to the fraffly English accent, by Jove?

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