Learn to speak Truly South African

Thanks to its melting pot of 11 official languages, South African's tend to use a lot of South Africanisms drawn from the various languages. South African conversational English is littered with words and phrases from its seductive menu of official languages, so don't be shy to mix it up. Here’s an example:

Mark: ‘Howzit my china?’
Claudia: ‘Hundreds bru!’
Mark: ‘Why don’t you chuck on your cozzy and plaatjies and jump in the bakkie. We’ll stop at the Spaza shop for some biltong padkos and head to my chommie’s laney rondavel where we can sit on the stoep, braai some sosaties and boerie and catch the latest skinner.’
Claudia: ‘Yebo, sounds lekker man. I’ll be ready just now.’

Other South Africanisms to get you chatting the truly South African way.

Aikona – not on your life / never
Alta (Pronounced ai-tah) – a greeting
Arvie – afternoon
Bobotie (Pronounced buh-boor-tea) – served with yellow rice and raisins, this is a spicy traditional Malay mince with an egg custard topping
Babbelas (Pronounced bub-elas) – South African Afrikaans for hung over or tender
Bakgat – when something is done correctly
Bakkie – a utility / pick-up truck or Tupperware container
Biltong – dried, seasoned meat, similar to jerky
Bioskop (Pronounced bio-skoowp – the Cinema)
Biscuit – South African Afrikaans for cookie, used as a term of affection – Claudia, you biscuit!
Bliksem – hit or punch
Bitter Koud (Pronounced bittem-coat – South African Afrikaans for very cold
Boer – Afrikaans word for farmer
Boerewors (boerie) – spicy South African farmers’ sausage
Boetie (Pronounced Boet–tea – South African Afrikaans for little brother, this can also be used as a nickname.
Bokkie – a small buck, or affectionate name for a female (my bokkie)
Bra – Afrikaans word for male friend - dude in English
Bru – male friend
Braai – a BBQ
Cell – mobile phone
Choc – township slang for R20 note
Chommie / china – my friend
Choon – South African Indian slang for telling someone something, could also be a song
Chow – to eat
Cozzy (Pronounced cozzie) – swimming / bathing costume
Dik bek – sulking / pouting
Diski – South African township slang for football e.g. Learn the Diski Dance for 2010
Doss – a nap
Dorpie (Pronounced door-pea) – a town small in size
Droë wors (Pronounce Drew-a-voars) – dried sausage, similar to biltong
Eina! (Pronounce A-nah) – Ouch!
Eish! (Pronounce aysh) – a phrase of exclamation e.g., Eish! I am so tired
Fundi – expert
Gatvol – fed up, had enough
Gelukkige Verjaarsdag (Pronounced Ggeluk-kighe Ferrr-yaars-dag) – South African Afrikaans for Happy Birthday
Gogga – bug in Khoikhoi
Gooi (Pronounce ‘g’ as a rolling ‘gggg’ almost like a cat purring) – chuck or throw something
Highway – motorway / freeway
Howzit – how’s it going? How are you?
Hundreds – excellent, good – Hi buddy how are you? I am hundreds
Indaba – from the Zulu language meaning a matter for discussion or widely known in South African English as conference
Just now – interchangeable meanings which could be just now tomorrow... or perhaps never
Kombi – a minivan
Kwaai (Pronounced kw-eye) – a homonym meaning – cool, excellent or angry in South African Afrikaans
Monkey’s wedding – a rain shower when the sun is out
Plaatjies (Pronounce ‘j’ as an ‘ck’) – flip slop sandals (also see slip slops)
Laaitie (Pronounces as lightly) – a young person, usually a young male such as a younger brother or son
Laduma! (Pronounced la-doowm-a!) – it thunders in Zulu - used when a
goal is scored in South African soccer matches

Larney – fancy / designer

Lekker – great / tasty

Makarapa – a modified, decorated miners’ helmet used by South African soccer fans

Mielie – corn on the cob

Naartjie (Pronounce V as an ’f’) – tangerine, mandarin

Ou Ballie – South African Afrikaans for old man

Oke (Pronounced oak) – a guy / bloke

Padkos – food for the road / journey

Pap / mielie meal – ground maize

Pavement – sidewalk

Robot – traffic light

Rondavel – free-standing round building which usually has a thatched roof

Sangoma – South African traditional healer

Shongololo – millipede

Siff – Used in South African English to describe disgusting, horrible or ugly – “This milkshake is siff!”

Skinner – gossip

Slap chips – French fries

Slip slops / slops – flip slop sandals

Spaza shop / cafe (Pronounced caffie – convenience store

Stoep – veranda

Sosatie – a kebab on a stick

Swak (pronounced – swuk) – South African Indian slang for bad or a lot on your shoulders

Tannie – Afrikaans for aunt

Tekkies – sneakers

Tokoloshe – evil spirit

Toyi-Toyi - South African Zulu for protesting and dancing in the street

Tsotsi (Pronounced Tzotzi – a person who does no good, gangster, layabout

Tune – to give a person lip – Don’t you tune me

Veld – bush / grassland

Veldskoens / vellies (Pronounce V as an ’f’) – traditional Afrikaans outdoors shoes made from hide

Voetsek (Pronounce V as an ’f’) – go away / buzz off

Vuvuzela (Pronounced Voo-vooce-la ) – Setswana for a stadium horn, used by football fans during matches in South Africa

Yebo (Pronounced Yeah-baw) – Yes in Zulu