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ISSUES IN AUSTRALIAN STYLE AND THE USE OF ENGLISH IN AUSTRALIA

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Names and Genes

Flavia Hodges is Director of the Asia-Pacific Institute for Toponymy, and has co-authored two dictionaries of personal names: A Dictionary of First Names (Oxford 1988) and A Dictionary of Surnames (Oxford 1990).

Dictionaries of personal names are often considered byways of lexicography. They tend to be dictionaries only in the sense of the *Macquarie Dictionary's* second definition – “a book giving **information** on particular subjects or a **particular class of words**, names or facts, usually under alphabetically arranged headings” – rather than the base definition “a book containing a selection of the **words of a language**, usually arranged alphabetically, with information on their **meanings**, pronunciation, etymologies and other information concerning them, expressed either in the same or in another language” (my emphasis).

The principal focus is etymological, tracing the derivation of each name back to early forms and explaining its morphology and meaning. In addition, several entries in the surnames dictionary contain brief genealogical notes. The information for these was derived from biographical sources in the case of famous bearers, or in many cases from the researches of family historians such as members of the Guild of One-Name Studies.

Family history is a focus of great popular interest, the result of a widespread quest for connection with one's roots and awareness of one's personal heritage. Normally the first step undertaken is the construction

of a family tree, beginning with the members currently or recently living and traced back as far as possible.

One of the identifying links facilitating this process is the fact that in most parts of Europe surnames have traditionally been hereditary through the male line since the early middle ages. Following this clue it is generally possible to begin tracing back ancestors through centrally maintained records of births, marriages and deaths, or for earlier periods by the more uncertain means of parish registers.

Nevertheless, it is normally the case that this chain of proven or inferred genetic relationship will break within a few generations away from the present, and for more distant periods it is usually possible to find individuals with the relevant surname without being able to show conclusively that they are forebears of the current family. The likelihood of there being some connection is higher in the case of unusual surnames, hence the fact that most members of the Guild of One-Name Studies concentrate on distinctive surnames such as *Pockney*, *Polyblank*, and *Pulvertaft*.

The resources available to family history researchers have increased greatly over the past decade. The biggest single factor is the growth of the Internet: more records and new websites become available online

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every day. For example, the International Genealogical Index, maintained by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, holds the names of over 20 million individuals and can be consulted free of charge or obligation at www.familysearch.org, where a well designed interface allows access by name and by country. The use of email and web-based discussion forums such as www.genforum.genealogy.com have also enormously facilitated communication between geographically separated researchers.

One very recent and promising development in the field of surname research and family history comes not from archives and philological analysis but from the science of genetics.

It has long been a matter of debate whether the bulk of surnames of middling frequency are monogenetic or polygenetic, that is, whether they were each originally borne by one particular individual, or whether the process of surname formation took place at various places and dates. George Redmonds was the first to argue convincingly, in his 1973 volume *The Surnames of West Yorkshire*, using genealogical and distributional evidence, that many locally common, distinctive Yorkshire surnames such as *Barracough* and *Ackroyd* are monogenetic, and he developed this work in more detail in his 1997 book *Surnames and Genealogy*.

Support for this position has been provided by the work of Bryan Sykes, Professor of Human Genetics at the University of Oxford. Prof. Sykes has recently become famous for *The Seven Daughters of Eve* (2001), in which he claims, on the basis of mitochondrial DNA passed from mothers to daughters, that almost all present-day people of European stock are descended from just seven women who lived up to 45,000 years ago. His work on surnames appeared in the *American Journal of Human Genetics* in 2000 and involved a different aspect of genetic inheritance, the Y chromosome passed

from fathers to sons.

Prof. Sykes took as a test case his own surname, which is common in West Yorkshire and East Lancashire, and certainly not an obvious candidate to be monogenetic. He and his colleague, Catherine Irven, randomly selected 250 men, from all parts of the UK, with the surname and asked them for DNA samples for analysis. Half of the 60 who complied with this request from a same-named stranger proved to share four unique DNA sections that were not found in control subjects either in Yorkshire or elsewhere. The other half did not have these sections, suggesting instances of “non-paternity events” such as illegitimacy or adoption. Yet the rate of such events need not have been high, since statistics tells us that the result may be accounted for by just 1.3% of each generation’s offspring, over the 700 years for which the surname has been in existence, being fathered by someone other than a Sykes.

This ground-breaking research first made a connection between genetics and genealogy, mediated by surnames. Prof. Sykes and others have found similar results for other moderately common names, although the link seems not to hold in the case of the commonest of all such as *Smith* and *Jones*. Yet the evidence does not all point in one direction: for example DNA testing has refuted the idea of a single origin for bearers of the distinctive surname *Pomeroy*.

These dramatic findings formed the basis of a five-part series on BBC Radio 4, and a range of commercial companies now market DNA testing facilities to family historians. Further implications are still being explored, and current trends in this boom area are summarised by Mark Jobling in a 2002 article in *Trends in Genetics*. To date the methods have not yet been incorporated into the lexicography of family names, but no doubt it will be necessary to take account of them in any possible *Dictionary of Australian Family Names*. □

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It is edited by Pam Peters, with executive assistance from Adam Smith. The editorial reference group includes Ann Atkinson, David Blair, Sue Butler, Richard Tardif and Colin Yallop. Views expressed in *Australian Style* and the styles chosen are those of the authors indicated.

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Style Council Report

As a conference dedicated to the “state of the language”, Style Council is never a purely academic gathering, although many of the papers delivered are based on research. Rather, it is always a very stimulating blend of principle and practice; theory illuminated by example; language as it is evolving, in use and in context.

This year, the focus was on language in the context of changing communication media: “The digital shift from print to electronic media”. Held in Brisbane from 22 to 24 November, Style Council 2002 saw more than 100 participants gather to absorb and ponder a wide range of presentations.

In his keynote address, publishing visionary Richard Walsh struck several chords that were to resonate throughout the weekend.

One was his observation that the new “e-media” have not killed “p-media” (that’s print), as forecast by some “e-vangelists” at the end of the 90s. In fact, like radio faced with the rise of television, “old” media can find new niches. So the “shift from print to electronic” can be seen as more an expansion of possibilities than a journey that leaves print behind, consigned to oblivion.

We saw evidence of this in a paper by CCH’s Penny Martin which described research into the use of electronic media (CDs and websites) as an adjunct to print in educational publishing. There is a preference for print as the core medium among both students and teachers, she reported, but supplementary material in electronic form added new and valuable dimensions.

Even in the world of computer games, one of the newest of the new digital media, print has a role, according to Bond University’s Jeff Brand.

Another keynote introduced by Richard Walsh was an appreciation of the “experience of reading” in different media. Reading text on screen is still inferior to reading on

paper, he said, although some of the factors that currently contribute to this are becoming less relevant as screens improve and new technologies such as “e-ink” become commercially viable. The success of e-media will then be more a function of good management and viable business models than technical constraints. “Impractical dreams are giving way to new realities,” said Walsh.

The relationship between what readers are used to, what they’re comfortable with, and what might be seen as “efficient” or “good” design emerged in several presentations.

Macquarie University’s Jennifer Thurston, for example, cited web useability guru Jakob Nielsen’s insight that for a reader, the web is experienced as a whole, and an individual website is a mere speck in this universe. When a radically different web page embodying all his good useability design principles was resoundingly rejected by users (“Don’t expect me to learn new things just for your site!” said one), Nielsen’s reluctant conclusion was that modest, incremental change is the only way to go.

Nobody touched on the “hypertext” experience as a key difference between print and electronic media, although some insights did emerge along the way – the importance of a narrative thread, for example. “We’re currently dazzled by narrative,” said Richard Walsh. We want “beginning, middle, end”. But for the user of a web *site* (as distinct from a web page) the beginning, middle and end of the experience is defined as much by their own actions as by the author or publisher.

The length of text in different media is also an issue. Are electronic texts longer because they’re not limited by the physical or cost constraints of print? Or are they shorter because it’s harder to read large slabs of print on screen. The answer, it seems, is a bit of both.

Cathy Gray is a freelance editor working in both print and electronic media, and was president of the Society of Editors (NSW) from 1996 to 1999. She reports on Style Council 2002.

A paper by Pam Peters and Adam Smith, provocatively subtitled “the death of the paragraph?” described the first stage of a Macquarie University research project into text structure in print and online, hypothesising that structural elements at all levels (section, paragraph and sentence) would be getting smaller. Preliminary indications are, however, that although sections in e-documents may be shorter, paragraphs and sentences can be longer – often extended by devices such as bulleted lists, which are evolving as a key structural device.

There was much more. We heard about new e-lexicons emerging from SMS messaging and e-commerce; about the challenges of editing in the digital age: about the phenomenal success of Queensland University Press’s venture into print on demand (POD); and about e-media and education. Access and equity – the problem of a growing “digital divide” – was raised often by delegates as well as speakers. We were introduced to *blogs* (weblogs), *nicks* (chat room nicknames), *ludology* (the study of games, particularly computer games), and *papyrocentricity* (a “paper-centred” world view). A veritable feast.

Some of the papers from Style Council 2002 will be available shortly on the Style Council website (www.shlrc.mq.edu.au/style). They’ll be worth a close look. □



SMS Messaging

Sue Butler is publisher of The Macquarie Dictionary. This is an abbreviated version of her paper presented to Style Council.

SMS may seem an impossible riddle to the outsider, but there is a method to the madness of its abbreviated language. Put very simply, the functional aspects of communication are the most abbreviated, and the individual and once-only messages are the least abbreviated.

Basic abbreviations

At one end of a spectrum you have the caps-only messages which are the formulaic greetings and farewells, the indications of availability, privacy, etc. Examples include: *BRB* (Be right back), *TTFN* (Ta ta for now). These functional expressions are used commonly and are therefore heavily abbreviated.

Social formulas

Then there are the clichéd expressions, which are useful as language fragments that are well known and therefore, in abbreviated form, easily recognised. Since the word cliché has negative connotations I would prefer to call them “social formulas”. As in spoken language, in SMS they fulfil the useful

social function of easy communication combined with demonstrated solidarity with a group. Again they appear in caps with just the first letter of the word capitalised. Some examples are:

H&K Hugs and kisses

AML All my love

MYOB Mind your own business

Abbreviation patterns

Some of the patterns of abbreviation are evident at this point.

It is taken for granted that a syllable which has the sound of a number can be represented by that number. The comedian, Victor Borge, invented what he called “inflationary language” which involved taking these sounds and progressing the number by 1, so that “too wonderful” became “three twotiful”, and so on. It is surprising how often these sounds turn up as syllables so the representation by number is a space saver, as in *2d4* representing “to die for”.

Similarly, if a syllable has the same sound as a letter of the alphabet, then that letter represents it. For example, *BCNU* is preferred to *BsmYu*. *CUL8R* is a good example of the alphabet letter, number combination.

Extended messages

This pattern of coding becomes important when we reach the third level of SMS – the not-so-familiar phrase or adhoc expression.

The rule here seems to be that the first letter of a word is caps and the other letters in the word are lower case. Enough letters are selected to give the rough shape of the word sufficient for identification. There also seems to be some phonetic indication so that a long “a” will be cap A, a short “a” lower case, a long “o” will be cap O, a short one lower case.

Take the example:

All EstIDntHavAFAdIkaBmusedHaDck
This demonstrates the rules perfectly with the exceptions of the lower case “a” – I can only suggest that *Lika* seems to operate as one word, in a way that parallels *wanna*, *gonna*, etc. The cap D in the middle of *HaDck*

seemed wrong to me, but my informants, Year 9 and 11 boys from a Sydney high school, explained that it represented the double /d/ that was sounded. Again the phonetic element creeps in.

Similarly with *SmOkGtsInYaiis*. I was not sure why *iis* was not capitalised and lengthened to become *Is*. My informants explained that *iis* is a visual joke capturing the two eyes in the dots.

Variation in abbreviations

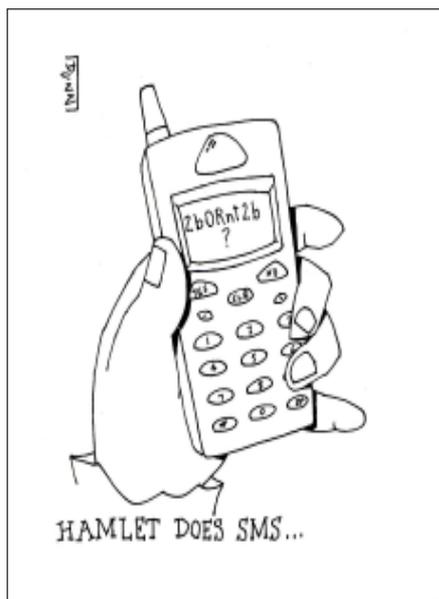
Where there is scope to invent, there is scope for variation. Some of the informants favoured *PLS* for “please”, others the more phonetic *PLZ*. Some favoured *CU* for “See you”, others the more relaxed *Cya* (regarded as one word). “Talk to you later” appears as *TTYL*, following the initial capital rule, *TTUL* following the phonetic substitution of U for Y, and *TTYL8tr*, being the least cryptic and most helpful. However, because SMS coding is for high-frequency items, there is a high degree of standardisation.

The role of SMS

SMS is a flexible code – in this respect it differs from shorthand. After all, if you don’t understand an SMS code you query the sender. A person taking shorthand is expected to get every word of what is sometimes complicated text right. It would be considered a sign of failure to have to go back for clarification.

SMS codes, by contrast, are fine for the bulk of straightforward and repetitious communication using a small number of abbreviations – perhaps two to three hundred. The SMS dictionary, *The Total TXTMSG Dictionary*, from which the examples in this article are taken, is stuffed with standard abbreviations as well as SMS ones, along with one-off inventions designed to amuse.

SMS functions around the edge of more complex communication. The more important and individual the message the less it is abbreviated. □



Viva la difference! English is full of words that have more than one acceptable pronunciation. The existence of alternatives reflects the fact that human experience differs from place to place and from person to person. It's what makes language so dynamic and drives language change. Yet, judging from ABC listener feedback, many people are uncomfortable with alternatives and would prefer to have broadcasters pronounce words in the same way.

The word *meningococcal* is a case in point. Some listeners with a medical background have objected strongly to our recommendation, [muh-nin-juh-KOK-uhl].

They affirm a spelling pronunciation with the hard [g], citing words like *meningo-encephalitis* and *meningo-myelitis* in support. It's true that the prefix *meningo-* in these words is often pronounced with a hard [g] (*Webster's Dictionary* in fact allows both [g] and [j]). However, the *g + o* combination in *meningococcal* is different. In *meningo-encephalitis* and *meningo-myelitis*, the syllable containing *-go-* is pronounced with the diphthong [oh] (as in "oak"), a sound that can also occur in stressed syllables or syllables with secondary stress, whereas in *meningococcal* the *go* is in a completely unstressed syllable. The letter *g* occurring in a medial position after a consonant (i.e. in a similar unstressed position) is often pronounced [j]: *Belgian*, *danger* and *stringent*. The hard [g] in the same word environment occurs in just a few words (*finger*, *hunger* and *anger*).

But the strongest support for [j] is that it's used in both *meningitis* (a familiar term these days) and *meninges*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* seems to indicate that the [j] pronunciation was around in the early 19th century (coming to us via French) but that the [g] version arose later when the printed word began to exert more of an influence. In other words, the [j] pronunciations are there for all words in the set, either as an alterna-

tive or as the only pronunciation. The [j] version clearly wins (it is already well-established even though *meningococcal* has only recently become a household word). But when two versions are in use, SCOSE generally accepts both.

Another medical term with two pronunciations is *cervical*. The more common pronunciation, [SUR-vik-uhl], sensibly follows the pattern for the noun *cervix*, but some medicos cling doggedly to the somewhat counterintuitive version, [suh-VIGH-kuhl] (which many ABC listeners find perplexing). And for *encephalitis*, [en-kef-uh-LIGH-tuhs] continues to survive alongside the more commonly used [en-sef-uh-LIGH-tuhs], despite the fact that in most English words the letter *c* when followed by *e* is pronounced [s] rather than [k].

The pronunciation of *Don Quixote* has long been a bone of contention. There is a clash of ideologies at work here – the more authentic approach favours [kee HOH tay] while a more pragmatic one settles for the spelling pronunciation, [KWIK suht].

But both approaches can be accommodated, and SCOSE has endorsed both. The spelling pronunciation is well established. The *Macquarie Dictionary* gives (1) [DON KWIK-suht] and (2) [DON kee-HOH-tay], and the *OED* gives [KWIK-suht] first, and [kee-HOH-tay] ("foreign") second. For the adjective *quixotic*, all agree on [kwik-SOT-ik]. Incidentally, it is now a matter of policy that for words of foreign origin which have established anglicisations, SCOSE recommendations generally follow the first pronunciation preference given in the *Macquarie Dictionary*.

Variations are inevitable for proper nouns of foreign origin having spellings that permit several interpretations. However, with *Al Qaeda*, the ABC has managed to achieve consistency with its recommendation [al-KIGH-(uh)-duh], based on the closest English

Language researcher Irene Poinkin summarises recent discussions at SCOSE, the ABC Standing Committee on Spoken English.

Please note: pronunciations in "SCOSE Notes" are rendered in an alphabetic code developed by the ABC to be user-friendly for those not familiar with IPA symbols.

equivalent of the original Arabic, which is something like [al-KAH-uh-dah] (the first *a* in *Qaeda* being the long vowel [ah]).

The hitherto unfamiliar word *chador* seems likely to enter the vocabulary of Australians, but it too is set to have variable pronunciation (not surprisingly, since there are several spelling variants). Dictionaries currently list it with the anglicised pronunciation [CHAH-duh], but already we're hearing some broadcasters pronounce it [chuh-DAW], and [CHAD-uh] is also to be expected.

On a lighter note, SCOSE members responded with chuckles of approval when presented with this memorable simile: *His serve was as long and deep as a Proust novel*. SCOSE meetings are never dull! □





From the Editor

The writing of dates – whether dd/mm/yy or vice versa – seems to touch most people. Pat Naughtin's leader in the last issue of AS advocated using yy/mm/dd (i.e. working from large to small), and it drew a big batch of letters, some of which are reproduced opposite. Not everyone agreed on the order of elements, or what the underlying principles were. The order dd/mm/yy would reflect the way we actually say dates, thought Chris Christensen (QLD), while for Glen Marshall (VIC) it was a matter of immediacy and what was most important in a given situation. Others noted that the large-to-small system was much older than computers. Lawrence Kohn (VIC) found it on postage stamps sent from South Africa in 1979. It is standard in certain industries such as aviation as a continuous string of numbers e.g. 20020704; but Jim Goodsell (QLD) also noted that it would be clearer for the general reader (as opposed to intelligent systems) if there were slashes (or spaces) between the three components.

Verbal inventions seen and heard around the country are reported by several correspondents, including the first (and perhaps last) use of *paranoid* as a verb. This was overheard by Sheila Carrick (NSW), as one shopper said to another "She paranoids me"! On Radio National the term *counterparties* was used by an interviewee referring to the two parties involved in adversarial negotiations, as heard by Tony Smith (NSW). It isn't yet recorded in Australian dictionaries, and may be just a chance blend of *counterpart* and *parties*, but it would seem to be a useful term. New terms with the suffix *-age* provided amusement for Gary Wickham (WA), including *pourage* (rights) given to a cricket club sponsor, and *malparkage* (the offence which prompted a threatening letter to Homer Simpson). Only on television!

Trans-Pacific influence would explain the rise of *fiefdom* in Australia, as opposed to *fief*, which goes back to medieval England. Chris Fieggen (VIC) queried the matter, and although *fiefdom* means the same as *fief* it no doubt speaks more obviously about a domain of influence. In fact *fiefdom* goes back to the early nineteenth century according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989). American influence is also to be found in the growing use of *train station* (Mary Smith QLD), though it has yet to completely replace *railway station*. The use of *service station* is however probably older than the 1980s (AS 19, Feedback report). It was seen in Brisbane in the 1960s by Philip Kerr (QLD), and in northern New South Wales in the 1970s by Paul Gillian (NSW). Its appearance on signage no doubt precedes its appearances in the kinds of documents on which dictionary datings are based.

The AS questionnaire on verbs also moved people to write in about other verbal issues. Several wrote of school teachers' attempts to eradicate the use of the verb *get* from their students' vocabulary. The story of formal attempts to do away with *get* – by writing it on paper and having the class bury it – has been told many a time in Sydney, but a correspondent reported it from Newcastle (NSW) in 1932, and Geoff Baker (QLD) from the south of England.

As long as Australia has rolled on the sheep's back, *shear* has been part of the vocabulary; but usage is taking it forward, as the Feedback report shows. A Tasmanian correspondent reports her late father's words from the Ballad of 1891 (Shearers' strike): "This shed will be shore union, or it won't be shore at all".

We do appreciate the contributions of all those of you who write in with observations about the language around us in Australia. To the hundreds who sent

back questionnaires for Feedback 19, we are also greatly indebted.

Special thanks are due to the following groups, whose numerical contributions to the survey are indicated in brackets: Cathedral of Praise College, QLD (63); Judith Rodriguez at Literary and Communication Studies, Deakin University (60); Robyn Whiteley, friends and family (44); Lynne Webber at Psychology, Deakin University (39); Norman Talbot, NSW (26); the Lindleys at Corowa NSW (19); Kaye Nolan, Chisholm Institute, Dandenong VIC (18); Bill Bowie, Dulwich Hill High School (16); Holmesglen TAFE (14); Ruth Badcock, Clayton (14); Editing Students at Canberra Institute of Technology (14); the Malones and friends, Bilgola NSW (7); Beth Codling, Distance Education Centre, Thornbury VIC (7); the Sunset Coast Literati, WA (7); John Wellings and friends, Mosman NSW (5).

All of you helped to extend the reach of the questionnaire, and enhance its representativeness. The collective results summarised on page 11 will show you how your responses fit into the larger patterns. □



Letters to the Editor

Food for thought:

Why has English “thrown” away perfectly good words: Why displace a single “yonder” with the phrase “over there”? Are we becoming disenchanted with single words when two or three will do? Is “now” to suffer the same fate with its substitute the frequently used “at this point in time”, so beloved of politicians and other pompous idiots? When one considers that the French haven’t even got (there I go – should have said “possess”) a word for “now” (only hand-holding), we should realize how lucky we are to have such a precious word and keep it alive, not waste it.

And what about “fain”; I would love to use this word occasionally; there is no substitute for it and it is so short and simple. “Fain I would climb but I fear to fall.” – “If thy mind fails thee, climb not at all!” (Etched on glass somewhere on a castle window in the UK the first sentence by an earl with ambitions, the riposte by Elizabeth the first.

Geoff Baker
Jindalee, QLD

Dear Pam,

With regard to Pat Naughtin’s interesting article about the order of date figures, I have the feeling that while he offers a certain arithmetical logic, it doesn’t necessarily follow that the same emphasis is given to the transmission of information.

For most of us, the important numbers in a date are the day and possibly the month. Most of the time we know the year we are in, or that we are referring to. Pat writes of the broader use of figures starting with the larger number and being followed by the smaller – whether dollars and cents, feet and inches, or any large units to small. However, in all of these cases it is the largest number that tends to be the most

significant to our grasp of the information. We need to know how many dollars more immediately than how many cents, how many metres before how many millimeters, how many hundreds before how many tens. But with chronology, most of us in diurnal conversation and communication want to know the day first and foremost; then the month and if we are referring to longer periods, the year. It is not a function of habit, tradition or “stuffiness” to argue for maintaining the current day/month presentation. It is simply a question of getting the information most of us need most of the time as immediately and simply as possible.

Peter Farmer
via email

Dear Pam,

Regarding “3 month anniversary”, each time I see it I mentally translate it as “third luniversary”. Not strictly accurate for calendar months, but “mooniversary” would be untenable! The solecism of using “anniversary” in the context of months could not be perpetrated by anyone with a smattering of Latin.

Ted Webber
Buderim, QLD

Dear Pam Peters,

Thank you for the front page article in Vol 10 No 1 (“Is 07 04 2002 the 4th of July?”). I write to you on another SI matter. SI is a great improvement over previous systems but there is room for improvements.

The basic unit of mass is the kilogram, symbol kg. What a strange system that has the basic unit named as 1000 times a non basic unit (the gram, symbol g). To make things more consistent, here is my suggestion: let us call the basic unit the kag, symbol k, (you might like an alternative simple name to this). The gram now becomes the millikag (symbol mk). The tonne becomes the kilokag, symbol kk and we can get rid of the name tonne which doesn’t fit into the system.

I could suggest some other minor changes for the better, but this one is enough for now.

Jack Oliver
Nambour, QLD

The things our taxes help to fund!
Photograph sent in by Lois Grosse
(Lyons, ACT)



Oxford Dictionary of Rhyming Slang

James Lambert, editor of the *Macquarie Book of Slang*, reviews the Oxford Dictionary of Rhyming Slang, ed. John Ayto, Oxford University Press 2002; RRP. \$36.95

Rhyming slang “dictionaries” are usually nothing more than basic glossaries, with a *rhyming slang to “straight”* section, and the same list reversed into a *“straight” to rhyming slang* section. These are fun, but small in both size and content, and usually not based on solid academic research. Previously the only exception to this was Julian Franklyn’s *A Dictionary of Rhyming Slang* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: 1960), still being reprinted, though last revised in 1961.

John Ayto’s new work *The Oxford Dictionary of Rhyming Slang* (2002) strikes a pleasant balance between the purely academic and the purely popular work, and will no doubt become the new bible of this odd sub-vocabulary of our wondrous language.

Perhaps the first thing to be noticed about the book is that it is not strictly speaking a *dictionary*. The

arrangement of the terms is thematic instead of alphabetic. There are 27 themes, beginning with “People and the Human Condition” (where you will find *potato peeler* = sheila, *tin lid* = kid, *on your Pat Malone* = on your own) to “Numbers” (*country cousin* = dozen, and *Pattie Hearst* = first). Other sections include “In the Lav”, “Sport”, “Animals”, “Clothing”, “Work and its Lack”, and, of course “Sex”. This structure has the benefit of providing Ayto a textual space within which to *write* discursively, so that instead of a list of unrelated terms coupled with dry definitions, there is something to *read*. Happily Ayto writes extremely well. Interesting background and linguistic commentary is presented in a pleasant, easy-to-read style. Details of a term’s provenance, who was likely to use it, its PCness (or lack thereof), etc., give a sense of the linguistic milieu in which the term arose. Thus, instead of simply *dead horse* = sauce, Ayto informs us that it is “unlikely to be béchamel or ravigote” but rather “tomato and HP”.

For usability’s sake, an alphabetical list of every rhyming slang term is included in a 24 ½ page index, which refers the reader to one or more page numbers. *Mickey Mouse* scores

three separate entries (= Scouse, house, and, grouse). Unfortunately another 24 ½ pages weren’t spent to supply the reverse index. This is a great shame, for if one wants to know how to say *pie* in rhyming slang you have to go to the “Food and Drink” section (found either by flicking through the book, or via the contents page), then find the “In the Bakery” subsection (some 14 pages in), then find the listing for “Pie”. A bit too much like *Captain Kirk*, for my liking.

In terms of typesetting the page layout and choice and size of fonts is generally excellent. The sans serif bold for the actual rhyming slang terms makes them easily accessible at a glance. The running heads are section titles, and the page numbers (necessary for using the index), while small, are clear. Only the citations are a problem. These are set in a small, thin, sans serif font which is hard to read. They are also, however, very sparse. I counted 18 citations for 100 rhyming slang terms.

Anyone of a completist bent will of course be disappointed that there are only about 3000 rhyming slang terms recorded. With respect to selection Ayto points out that reliably authenticating the currency and endurance of rhyming slang usage is often impossible. Thus, aside from the core set of rhyming slang old-timers (the likes of *plates of meat* = feet, *daisy roots* = boots, *China plate* = mate), Ayto seems to have selected idiosyncratically from the super-abundance of less common terms. Here, it would appear that there has been a bias towards British items, for two “classic” Australian terms, *Kembla Grange* = (small) change, and *optic nerve* = perve, dating back to the 60s and 70s respectively, are not present. Still, even the best rhyming slangster at the local pub will not be able to top *The Oxford Dictionary of Rhyming Slang* with its thousands of never-heard-before, likely to never-be-heard-again, gems. □



Blooming English

Australian English appears to be one of the richest and most creative Englishes on the planet. Only in Australia, I suspect, would going to bed in your filthy work clothes at the end of long day be described as “black snaking it”. (And why? Because a black snake is an unpleasant thing to find in bed? As unpleasant as an unwashed workman in grubby overalls?) Along with this invention goes passionate debate about words and language.

For some years Kate Burridge, Associate Professor of Linguistics at La Trobe University, has been making a valuable contribution to that public debate – adding light to the heat – with a series of broadcast features for ABC radio. Those radio scripts have now become the basis for a book: *Blooming English*.

The dominant theme of the book is language change, and the broad range of material covered has been organised under a gardening

metaphor, providing “observations on the roots, cultivations and hybrids of the English language”. Mind you, the contribution of the professional linguist urging cool acceptance of language change (“today’s colloquialism is tomorrow’s Standard English”) is not always welcomed by a public passionate to defend usage they *know* is correct.

Burridge discovered this when she proposed abandoning the apostrophe-s (in “it’s” and similar contractions) because it is clearly the source of considerable confusion. It was as if she had proposed murdering our mothers. Such an outrageous suggestion was not just grammatically wrong, it was wicked! Abandon the apostrophe-s, respondents suggested, and it will be the end of civilisation as we know it.

Such passion is a good thing, but it needs the contributions of the professional linguists as participants (not as spectators on the sidelines). Kate

Kel Richards writes and presents “WordWatch” on the ABC NewsRadio network, and “Word of the Day” on Clive Robertson’s Classic FM Breakfast. He reviews Kate Burridge’s Blooming English, ABC Books, 2002; RRP. \$24.95

Burridge is to be congratulated for pitching into the m \acute{e} l \acute{e} e so effectively. Undeterred by the placard-waving, slogan-shouting mob, she offers cool comments in clear prose seasoned with a delightfully whimsical sense of humour.

Blooming English is a pleasure to dip into, and a well-argued, well-informed, hand grenade to pass on to that angry uncle who insists that dictionaries should be rulebooks, not report cards on the language. □

Poets Corner

When Tropes Trip

The scribe who wrote that Di’s confession
Made an outstanding (sic) impression
Gives me my cue to set down more
Examples of mixed metaphor.
Security was overhauled
When departmental leaks snowballed;
A father’s costly drug addiction
Produced long-festering family friction;
Health scheme reform will come about
When teething bugs are ironed out;
The junior Minister had his nerve
Well tested by a boots-and-all serve;
When medics reached the scene of the crime
They fought a frantic race against time...
And there are headlines one can cite,
Like CREDIT SQUEEZE BEGINS TO BITE.
Such tropological confusion
Leads one perforce to this conclusion:
A second thought about each metaphor
Is what it would be all the betaphor.

Ray Kelley, QLD



FEED BACK

—20—

BACK IN THE PAST

The modern English verb system is still changing. Some irregular verbs are taking on regular past forms, and some regular ones going irregular. Please consider what you would use for the *past* form of the verb given at the start of each of the sentences below; and write it in on the dotted line. In some cases it would be the *past tense*, in others the *past participle*, but the sentence itself gives you the cue. If your answer depends on whether the sentence is spoken or written, feel free to comment in the space at the right hand side.

1. **BESEECH:** A frightened child the visitor to stay.
2. **BURN:** The bush fire out of control for days.
3. **BURN:** To destroy the evidence they the vital papers.
4. **DREAM:** Last night I that I was in a hot-air balloon.
5. **DRINK:** They had their fill of excitement.
6. **FORGET:** With all there was to do, I had to turn off the computer.
7. **KNEEL:** There was no chair, so she beside him.
8. **LEAN:** After the explosion, the wall precariously over the street.
9. **LEAP:** Hardly believing their luck, they at the suggestion.
10. **LEARN:** In those two years they nothing of any use.
11. **PLEAD:** The defendant not guilty to the charges.
12. **PLEAD:** The judge noted that he had not guilty.
13. **SEW:** An inside candidate has the job up.
14. **SHOW:** Once again the president had his intentions.
15. **SINK:** They apologized when the dog his teeth into the visitor's leg.
16. **SINK:** Last night an oil tanker in heavy seas.
17. **SPELL:** The article had not their name correctly.
18. **SPILL:** The nervous waiter the soup on the table.
19. **SPOIL:** They told us the end of the story, which it for us.
20. **STREW:** Rubbish was all over the street.
21. **THRIVE:** After the rain, the gum tree again.
22. **WAKE:** The sun was up by the time Sam
23. **WAKE:** Noisy kookaburras had everyone.
24. **WED:** The couple were on Saturday.
25. **WED:** They had always been to the idea.

Would you please indicate your sex and age bracket:

F/M 10-24 25-44 45-64 65+

and the state in which you live:

ACT NSW NT QLD SA TAS VIC WA

Please return this Feedback questionnaire to:

Style Council Centre, Linguistics Department, Macquarie University, NSW 2109 Australia.

Alternatively, the questionnaire may be faxed to the Style Council Centre at (02)9850 9199.



FEED BACK

Report

Feedback 19 (Into the Past) has raised an enormous amount of interest, with over 1100 responses and still counting. Many thanks to all the groups who sent in batches of questionnaires, listed on page 6 (From the Editor). Among the responses there were 347 in Age 1 (10-24), 149 in Age 2 (25-44), 336 in Age 3 (45-64), and 256 in Age 4 (65+). The data were processed with the help of May Heemskerck and Adam Smith at the Style Council Centre. With all this material we now have a very solid picture of the variation in some of those unstable verbs, to show where things are going in Australia in the twenty-first century.

Overall the most consistent trend was for younger respondents, especially in Age 1, to prefer the same form for the past tense and the past participle. This is what happens in regular verbs such as *call* (*called*/has *called*), but it has not always been so for some like *own*, *saw*, *shear*, *strive*, among those listed on the questionnaire. *Mown* and *sawn* are well established past participles, as is *shorn* for *shear* and *striven* for *strive*. Though they are still in the majority for the whole population, the younger respondents were much more in favor of regularising them than their elders, as shown in the percentages in the first section of the table.

The same tendency, for younger respondents to prefer using just one form for the past tense and past participle shows up even more strongly with the set of verbs *shrink*, *sink*, *spring*, *stink*. Age 1 respondents were much more inclined to use *sbrunk*, *sunk*, *sprung*, *stunk* than the average, with results anything from 23% to 29% higher, as is visible in the second section of the table.

English usage has already settled on having just one form for verbs like these, in examples such as *fling*, *sling*, *sting*, *string* (in “string someone along”). The set of similar verbs tested in Feedback 19 are destined to go the same way, if younger people’s usage prevails.

Other very striking findings of the questionnaire were those in relation to the verb *get* and its past participle *got*(*gotten*). Two sentences provided contexts for it, and there was a remarkable difference between them, with *got* very strongly preferred for one, and *gotten* being acceptable to many in the other. In the first sentence (*she had never ... so*

angry before) the verb has no object, and in this (intransitive) context, 45% of our large body of respondents endorsed *gotten*. Among Age 1 respondents *gotten* was endorsed by almost 70%; and Age 2 gave it a majority of 58%.

However its popularity slips with Age 3 (35%) and Age 4 (17%). The results are very clearly stratified according to age: younger people are comfortable with it while older ones are not.

But the second sentence involving *get* (*I haven’t ... a hotel booking yet*) presented a transitive context for the verb, and here there was overwhelming agreement among young and old, that the participle

should be *got* not *gotten*. The rate of endorsement for Age 1 dips only slightly from the average. So although it isn’t open slather for *gotten* in the Australian community, it seems to have established a limited role for itself in intransitive constructions, at least for younger Australians.

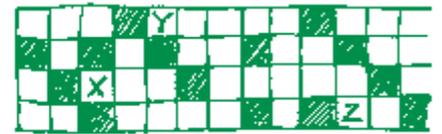
The verb *get* was a somewhat emotive target of English teachers a generation or two ago (see From the Editor p.6). Though they tried to discourage it, *get* is too useful to speakers and writers of English to be suppressed. This survey shows some remarkable fine-tuning of its use.

	Total	Age 1	Age 2	Age 3	Age 4
mown	66%	48%	64%	79%	76%
mowed	34%	52%	36%	21%	24%
sawn	89%	74%	89%	96%	96%
sawed	11%	26%	11%	4%	4%
shorn	82%	52%	81%	94%	96%
sheared	18%	47%	19%	6%	4%
striven	63%	29%	54%	81%	90%
strove	4%	9%	4%	2%	0%
strived	33%	62%	41%	18%	10%
shrank	56%	31%	45%	69%	79%
shrunk	44%	69%	55%	31%	21%
sank	63%	34%	53%	78%	87%
sunk	37%	66%	47%	22%	13%
sprang	53%	24%	48%	65%	76%
sprung	47%	76%	52%	35%	24%
stank	73%	49%	64%	86%	93%
stunk	26%	49%	35%	14%	7%
stinked	1%	2%	1%	0%	0%
got	55%	31%	42%	65%	83%
gotten	45%	69%	58%	35%	17%
got	93%	87%	93%	97%	98%
gotten	7%	13%	7%	3%	2%



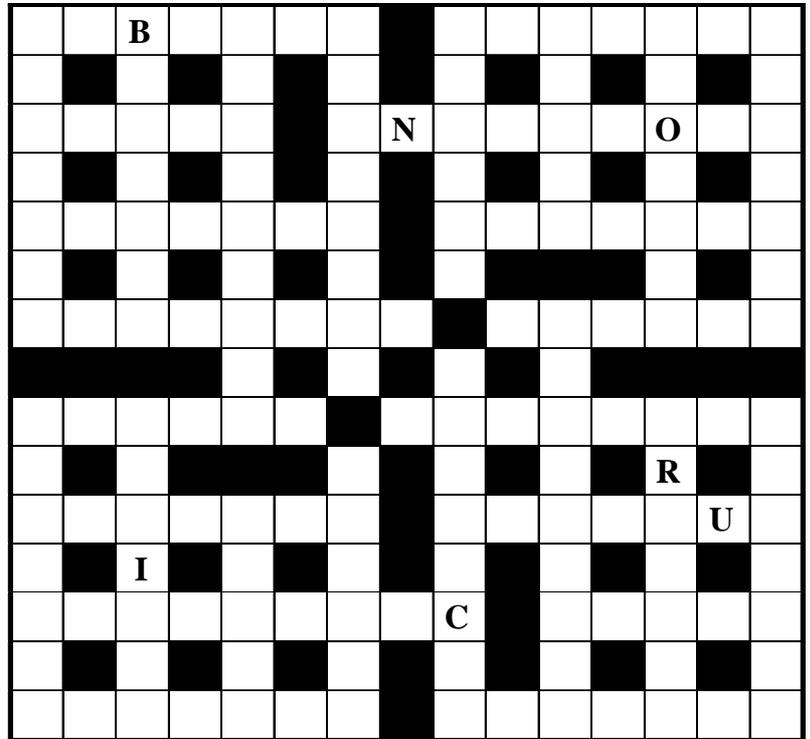


RUBICON

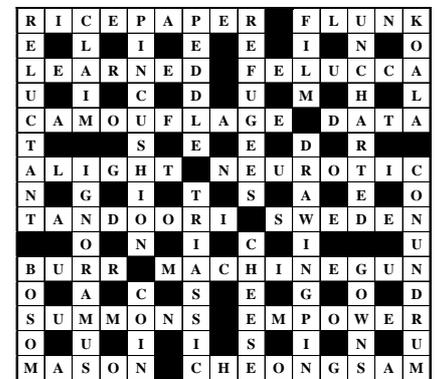


RUBICON, devised by David Astle, is a hybrid of crossword, jigsaw and acrostic. First, solve as many clues as you can and begin to fit the answers inside the grid. (The scattered letters of RUBICON should give you a toehold.) When the grid is completed, arrange the *clues* from the first Across to the last Down – their 32 initial letters will spell a category. As a bonus, which six of your answers belong to the category in question?

- Extreme Scandinavian (9)
- Received with closed arms? (9)
- Upside-down sleeper (6,3)
- Within set paradigms (9)
- Interim fence around a building site (8)
- Ne'er-do-well created by Reg Smythe (4,4)
- Showing hostile tendencies (8)
- Sound of a giant approaching? (8)
- Elegant anklet of convict days? (3-4)
- El Prado stuffed cat (7)
- Halidor of letters; flaccidity (7)
- Lacking courage (7)
- Like a cliff drops (7)
- Named by comedian Bob Burns, this tube is a blast (7)
- Onomatopoeic tramp through mud (7)
- Pea-soup-on-pie (7)
- Smallest amount (7)
- Social document outlining rights and purposes (7)
- Suggestions on starts to basketball games? (3-4)
- $T = 2x + y$, eg (7)
- Tress treatments (7)
- Trials by posse? (7)
- Tuxedo aperture (7)
- Understory? (7)
- Disturbance (6)
- Earthbound feet of seesaws (6)
- Equivalent of sirs among the fairer sex (6)
- Unpleasant impact of corporal punishment? (6)
- Inlet of Oslo (5)
- Pull down the tab (5)
- Redden (5)
- Rhythmic Bohemian dance (5)



Solution to Rubicon in last issue
VARIOUS ENTITIES COMMONLY
PROCESSED: cheese, film, claim,
refugees, data, summons



How to contact *Australian Style*

On editorial matters

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