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Australian hypocoristics: putting the *-ie* into Aussie

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Australian English is becoming well known for its quirky, larrikin, idiosyncratic creativeness, as can be seen from the growing number of books on Australian colloquialisms and slang (e.g. the *Macquarie Australian slang dictionary*, 2004), and on the dozens of websites on “Aussie slang” for travellers, tourists, and the linguistically curious. Phrases like *flat out like a lizard drinking* for “to be very busy” or *thin as six feet of pump water*, familiar to most Australians, strike other users of English by their originality and word-play.

A major strand in this intense creative layer of Australian English belongs to hypocoristics, also known as diminutives. These are the shortened or modified forms of words like *ambo* for “ambulance officer”, *fierie* or *firie* (the spelling is typically unstable) for “fire officer”, the older and now dated *beaut* as a cover-all term of approval, or *pav* for *pavlova*.

Jane Simpson’s 2001 paper analyzed hypocoristic Australian place names like *Brizzie* “Brisbane”, *The Isa* or just *Isa* “Mount Isa”, *Rotto* “Rottneest Island” (W.A.), and *Gabba* “Wooloongabba” (Qld), usually in the form *The Gabba* for the cricket ground of that name. There are more than a thousand

hypocoristics for place names in Australia, unlike other English-speaking countries, where place names are somehow above such indulgent, and perhaps disrespectful, word-play.

But Australian English goes much further than this. Most hotels have hypocoristic names which are the default with their regulars, and with locals who know the area well: *The Wellington Hotel* in Brisbane is predictably *The Wello*, *The Bouldecombe Hotel* in NSW is *The Bouldie*, *Young and Jackson’s* in Melbourne is *The YJ*, hotels called *The Criterion* are variously *The Cry* or *The Crit*, and *The Bavarian Tavern* in Hobart is *The Bav Tav*.

Sportspersons are often so honoured: *AB* for the cricketer *Alan Border*, *Warnie* for Shane Warne, the swimmer Ian Thorpe (*Thorpie*, *Thorpedo*), the footballers Alex Jezaulenko (*Jezza*) and Jason Ackermanis (*Acker*). A few politicians are part of the pantheon, but only a few: *Little Johnnie* (the Prime Minister, John Howard) or the former Premier of Queensland, *Gossie* (Wayne Goss).

To this we can add common nouns like *clippie* “tram conductor”, *muddie* “mud crab”, *schoolies* (the school leavers’ annual week of celebration), *reffo* “refugee”,

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cab-sav “cabernet sauvignon” (wine), *rhodo* “rhodo-dendron”, *fisbo* “fish merchant” or *K* “kilometre”.

The database that I have been collecting, with the help of Jane Simpson and David Nash, now stands at well over 4,000 headwords. These include around 1600 proper nouns, 2350 common nouns, 90 verbs (*to divvie up the spoils*), and 200 adjectives (*para* for *paralytic* or *paranoid*). Some of these, like *pollie* “politician”, are accepted into our national dictionaries. Others are still almost wholly part of the colloquial, spoken language.

Some words have multiple alternative hypocoristics. Apart from older examples like *Commo/Commie* “Communist”, we find “sandwich” with *sammie*, *sanger*, *sarnie*, *sando*, *sambo*, *sanbo*, *sango*, *sandie*, *sangie*, *sammo*, *sammidge* and *sangwidge*; or “afternoon” represented by *arvie*, *arvo*, *sarvo*, *aftie*, *arve*, *arv* and *afto*.

Overseas visitors are often puzzled by this apparently profligate creativity, which seems to some to suggest children’s language. But hypocoristics have some deep-seated relevance for Australian speakers. Two of the principle features are solidarity and playfulness.

Wierzbicka (1984) has identified hypocoristics as a solidarity code, a way of speaking which marks the in-group belonging of Australians. We use hypocoristics among ourselves as a way of indicating a good-humoured, but also quite serious, sharing of social space. Foreigners using hypocoristics can sound intrusive: hypocoristics require Australian phonology to be consistent and fully solidaristic. Furthermore, not using customary hypocoristics will sound formal, stilted or unnatural: once I have established with a mechanically gifted friend that I know enough about a carburettor to call it a *carb*, it would be inconsistent to use the full form *carburettor*.

A second and equally deep-running layer of meaning in hypocoristics has to do with playfulness, sometimes wilful; with the Australian laconic leg-pull, the tendency not to take ourselves too seriously. We play with language creatively, and share this playfulness, at all levels of society. What other country would use *pollie* for both politicians and parrots? Or *aspro* for “associate professor”; *barbie* for barbiturates, Barbie dolls and barbecues; or *flattie* for flathead (a fish), flat-soled shoes, flatmate, flat tyre, or a flat-bottomed boat? Such homonyms are part of word-play. They seldom cause problems of communication, and when there are collisions, they present welcome opportunities for punning. I have called this tendency “ludicity”, from the Roman *ludum* “game” (Sussex 2004).

Hypocoristics are a creative and open-ended part of the morphology of Australian English. The earliest example is *croppie*, a convict with a cropped head, reported from 1800 in Amanda Laugesen’s *Convict words* (2002). Among the more recent is *Peej* for *PJ*, the initials of one of the characters in Channel 7’s series *Blue Heelers*.

There are two lists of hypocoristics on the Web: Jane Simpson’s list of placenames at the University of Sydney: <http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/departs/linguistics/research/hypocoristic/placenames.html> and a subset of my own database at <http://www.cltr.uq.edu.au/language/talkback/Projects/Diminutives-list.html>

Hypocoristics are found in all Englishes, especially in personal names. But no other English runs Australian English even close when it comes to creativity and usage of hypocoristics, which are pushing ever more vigorously into the written language as well. □

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Style Council 2004

The “hamburgerisation” of Australian English was the way that Lex Icon, from the Society of Pure English (SOPE), aka comedian Rodney Marks, described the current state of the language at the opening of Style Council 2004 (we were after all in the McDonalds Room of the State Library of NSW). His amusing browse through the conference program gave him the ammunition he needed to demonstrate our love of buzzwords. Liberally sprinkling his ramblings with such gems as *knowledge management, scenario planning, value propositions* and *corporate governance*, he well and truly set the scene for the two days of input, throughput and output leading to a holistic totality on public and professional discourse – yes, really!

The overall theme of the conference was “Public and Professional Discourse”, with reference to Don Watson’s book, *Death sentence: the decay of public language* (Sydney, Knopf, 2002). The keynote speaker, Neil James of the Plain English Foundation, while not totally agreeing with Watson, did concede that public discourse was definitely not healthy. Symptoms of the poor health of “officialese” include the use of poor narrative structures, plenty of passive voice and an abundance of Latinate words. Did you know, for example, that Latinate words comprise about 22 per cent of everyday English

language, but generally there are more than 50 per cent of them to be found in officialese?

Subsequent speakers explored this theme from a wide variety of angles, as politicians, journalists, lawyers, academics, business writers and editors. NSW state government politician Andrew Tink gave us examples of political speak to demonstrate that public language has been used for centuries by those in power to attack, defend and criticise. At the same time politicians use this language to avoid risky commitment by boring and stupefying the reader with jargon and waffle.

Other presenters drew our attention to the shifting meanings of words. Heather Forbes, of ABC News Radio, talked of how words such as *terrorist* can be used to manipulate the perceptions of the audience by legitimising one side of a conflict and demonising the other. Alan Jones from Macquarie University talked of *ecospeak* and *greenwash* – the practice of giving products an implicit association with the natural environment to soften their image. He gave examples of big business (i.e. oil companies) using terms that were vague (*disposable, biodegradable*), polysemous (*development, growth, resources*) or just plain misleading (*spillage, labour-saving*), to ensure “strategic ambiguity”.

Other highlights included:

- the panel discussion that

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centred around the contentious statement that “all prose can be improved by a good editor”. Panellists were Bruce Heilbuth (Businesswriters), Pamela Hewitt (NSW Society of Editors) and Bill Krebs (Bond University)

- the experiences of best-selling author Matthew Reilly, when he agreed to publish online his sixth novel *Hover car racer* with free downloads, before the print version became available

- a comparison of the different levels of language used in court by the various protagonists – police to suspect, lawyer to client, judge to jury, counsel to witness, and so on – presented by Roland Sussex of the University of Queensland

- some interesting discussions based on the language of research theses, firstly by Janet Mackenzie on the recently ratified policy on editing theses developed by the Council of Australian Societies of Editors (CASE) and the Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies (D-DOGS); then by a panel of academics from the University of South Australia who have set up a pilot program to work with research students to improve their writing skills.

So what solutions, if any, were offered, to stem the tide of jargon, waffle, clichés and other distracting verbiage? Encouragement to use editors (hurray!), advocacy of the Plain English movement, even the re-introduction of the study of classical rhetoric and critical thinking, were suggested. For those of us whose livelihood revolves around words, Style Council 2004 proved once again to be a must to attend and a timely reminder to make each word count. □





Book Notes

The Cambridge Guide to English Usage

Kate Burridge, Professor of Linguistics at Monash University, reviews *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage*, by Pam Peters, Cambridge University Press 2004, RRP \$75.00.

On the main shelf of my study library, I have a number of wonderful English language reference works that I regularly consult. My most recent acquisition – *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage* – is fast becoming one of my favourites.

Its impressive 4,000 entries cover matters to do with word choice (e.g. *while* versus *whilst*), semantics (e.g. what is the difference between *malevolent*, *malicious*, *malignant* and *malign*), grammar (e.g. *burnt* versus *burned*), spelling (e.g. when to double those final consonants) and punctuation (e.g. everything from apostrophes and em dashes to square brackets). There is even the occasional foray into pronunciation. Some readers will be delighted, for instance, to find the pronunciation/spelling of *mischievous* (versus *mischievions*) discussed here. Also included are many entries that deal with linguistic terminology, both traditional and modern. If you want to know about the dative, determiners, mood and modality, the intricacies of gerunds and gerundives, or if you simply want to know what nouns and verbs are, you can consult this book. Particularly useful are the sections that examine aspects of discourse organisation, such as *information focus* and *topic*. These entries provide clues as to

how skilled speakers and writers go about packaging their messages.

I feel that what makes this book particularly successful are the years of experience Pam Peters has had in addressing people's concerns about the English language. Not only does she know how to answer their questions, in a scholarly but also accessible manner, she understands what it is they want to know about the language – in other words, not just the usual matters of grammar, vocabulary and style, but those real curiosities of usage. For example, why does Tolkien use *Elvish*, not *Elfish* for the language in *Lord of the Rings*? Should we spell the word *licorice* or *liquorice*? *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage* covers an extraordinary range of issues and I was constantly astonished and delighted at the entries I found.

The accounts in each of these entries are based on a vast array of different source material, including various corpora of spoken and written English (with databases from the main varieties of English), a range of different dictionaries, grammars and style guides, as well as the findings of linguists. What is therefore unique about this usage guide is that it is truly “glocal” – it addresses the necessity for an international form of written English (with its international English sections), but at the same time it supports the needs of local communicators, by identifying regional differences in usage, grammar and style. The global village wants a uniform world language. Individual nations want a national voice. This book addresses both the homogenising and differentiating pressures of globalisation. Particularly impressive is the inclusion of results from speaker surveys from around the world. These sorts of questionnaires are extremely helpful in pinpointing

regional and sociolinguistic trends, which can then give us some indication of where the language is heading.

This is also a work that successfully bridges the gap between traditional grammar and the modern linguistic approach. In particular, it manages to steer a sensible course between prescription and description. Pam Peters makes recommendations. She advises editors and writers on those points of usage where they need guidance. But the entries are so much richer and more informative because they also draw extensively on corpus evidence and the insights and achievements of theoretical linguistics. This means that writers, for instance, can tailor their style to their own particular needs.

This is a superbly structured reference book. The explanations are well organised with various points of entry and cross-referencing throughout. There is a full bibliography provided and an impressive collection of nine appendices, covering such things as the International Phonetic Alphabet for English sounds, a perpetual calendar (1901-2008), formats and styles for letters, memos and email, and details of the margin squiggles used by editors and proof-readers (which I will find especially helpful).

To conclude, I cannot recommend this book highly enough. It offers a very scholarly treatment of the language and at the same time maintains an entertaining style throughout. It is an indispensable reference work for writers, editors, teachers, students and all those who love language – and that seems to be just about everyone! Even if you don't happen to have a burning question to do with English language usage, this is an immensely readable book. □



A Wave of Spelling

Following the phenomenal success of Lynne Truss's funny book on punctuation, *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*, the next linguistic topic that is no longer a no-no for general publishing is spelling. A whole cavalcade of books on spelling have been published recently: linguist Vivian Cook's entertaining miscellany, *Accommodating Broccoli in the Cemetery*; Masha Bell's *Understanding English Spelling*, a readable and thorough account plus 148 exhaustive pages of analyses; Niall Waldman's *Spelling Dearest: The Down and Dirty, Nitty-Gritty History of English Spelling*, with its relentless detail, a superb caricature of the major historical personality in each chapter and a title intentionally resonant of Joan Crawford's ironic *Mommy Dearest*; and the new edition of the *Bloomsbury English Dictionary*, now including the 1,000 words which cause most spelling problems and slip-ups. There is still room for another funny book that explores even further. Look out for *The Book of Spells and Misspells*, 2005.

As an example of these riches, what can we learn from Vivian Cook's new little bestseller (bestspeller) with its cover showing a broccoli in a symbolic graveyard of spelling? Certainly the content fully answers its subtitle – “*Why can't anybody spell?*” Most readers will never be able to spell *broccoli*, *accommodating* or *cemetery* correctly again. Its hilarious collection of current practices and past history shows that, for the average adult, English spelling is in an even worse mess than might be imagined, that the system is somewhere under an immense mass of brambles needing to be cleared up, and that English spelling is not necessarily petrified, it has changed and is changing. People who can only remember bits

of the classic alphabet *A for Orses, B for Mutton* will be glad to have the whole of it, although a list of tongue-twisters does not include the deadliest – “Slowly by the stern the sinking steamer sank.” And to rub it in that not many people can spell, there are 23 pages of rueful jokes about spelling mistakes.

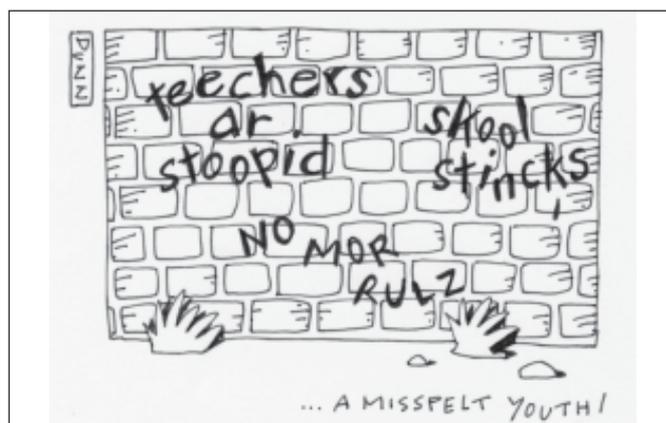
Professor Cook tries to be even-handed about spelling. On the one hand he admires its “rich and fertile creation”, deploring disastrous attempts to meddle with it in the past, and giving the mistaken impression that Noam Chomsky would oppose change. On the other he admits that “English spelling is fiendish” and “probably only one in a hundred people have truly mastered it.” “Thankfully, English lends itself to innovation.” For some spelling mistakes, the writers may need help, “or the spelling system itself may need modifying”. Spelling is not to be seen as “carved on tablets of stone”, but “we should try to understand and develop this amazing resource.”

Wider interest in issues of spelling and literacy are evident in various quarters of the English-speaking world. In America the National Spelling Bee has had a boom revival, as evidenced by the popularity of the film documentary, *Spellbound*. The Great British Spelling Test on British ITV 1 on October 20 had 5.27 million viewers – 23.1%

Valerie Yule, researcher in literacy and imagination, formerly clinical child psychologist and academic, looks at some books on spelling, including *Accommodating Broccoli in the Cemetery*, Vivian Cook, Profile Books 2004, RRP \$24.95. *Understanding English Spelling*. Cambridge: Pegasus Educational, 2004. ISBN 1-903490-12-X. *Spelling Dearest: The Down and Dirty, Nitty-Gritty History of English Spelling*, 2004. ISBN Electronic Book 1418459062, Paperback 1418453307.

market share. This is to be followed by two television Spelling Bees and a BBC game show called *Hard Spell*, hunting for the nation's top speller. In Australia, the national competition Ozspell was televised last year.

I hope that this media attention will allow public discussion and academic research to turn to how English spelling can be developed without further uncoordinated chaos. Meanwhile, cross-cultural research demonstrates that English spelling really does handicap English-language literacy and access to the printed word. Books are still superior to the Internet as a medium for connected thought, yet borrowing from British libraries has declined by a third in the past eight years and is still falling. □



Australex 2004

John Lonergan is a journalist at Reed Business Information and works part time for the Dictionary Research Centre. He reports on the recent Australex conference.

The Biennial Conference of Australex (Australasian Association for Lexicography) 2004 was held at Sydney University on July 12. While most attendees were from Sydney and Canberra, they were joined by visitors from around Australia and presentations were made by academics from Venezuela and Cambridge. The organisation fosters a wide range of research and the topics covered reflected this mix.

Cliff Goddard (University of New England) launched the conference theme of “Lexicon and culture” with his examination of the meanings of “language” and “culture” in English. He explored to what extent they are loaded with senses that do not translate directly to other languages.

The idiosyncrasies of Australian English were the focus of several papers. Pam Peters (Macquarie University) presented on Australian similes adapted from northern-hemisphere originals. “Poor as a church mouse” was modified to fit with local wildlife, becoming “poor as a bandicoot”. In other instances the simile retained its form but shifted meaning. The phrase “like a possum up a gum tree” seems to have experienced the most jarring shift, being imported from America only to find its meaning shift from “trapped” right around to “escaped”. Gum trees are apparently a lot smaller in the States.

Roly Sussex from the University of Queensland has been cataloguing the Australian habit of whacking an

-o or -ie on the end of every word that can possibly support one (see lead article p.1). Do you say *arvo*, *aftie* or *afto*? Do you give a donation to the *Salvos* or the *Sallies*? These shortenings often have multiple forms, and while many are widespread, some are much more typical of particular social or professional groups. He has so far amassed a database of 4,000 of these shortened Australianisms and is preparing them for publication as a dictionary.

Gary Simes (University of Sydney) charted the history of sexual and excretory language in Australia. The first British settlers brought words pertaining to sex with them, and by the second half of the nineteenth century Australians had begun developing substantial numbers of their own.

Languages other than English were well represented too. José Álvarez (University of Zulia, Venezuela) tackled the challenges of constructing a dictionary of Guajiro/Wayuunaiki, a language spoken by about 400,000 people in Venezuela and Colombia. The language has thousands of possible forms for its verbs. He outlined techniques of finding the simplest infinitive form of a verb, as including all possible infinitives of every verb in a dictionary would be nearly impossible.

Inam Ullah outlined the practicalities of collecting and compiling a database for a dictionary of Torwali, one of at least twenty-four languages spoken in northern Pakistan that have remained unwritten and largely undocumented. Andrew Pawley (Australian National University) compared the size of the lexicons of Austronesian, Australian and Trans New Guinea languages as input to the question of whether Austronesian languages have the largest lexicons.

Ghil’ad Zuckermann (University of Cambridge) talked about the mixed parentage of modern

Hebrew or “Israeli” words. He argued that rather than being simply revived Hebrew, some have been influenced by English without directly borrowing from it. The “Israeli” word for dubbing is *dibúb/dibúv*, from the medieval Hebrew word for speech. A word with a similar sound and meaning to *dubbing* was adopted instead of borrowing the English word.

Challenges to lexicographers were thrown down by some presenters. The presentation by Deanna Wong (Macquarie University) was on backchannels, the *mms*, *ums* and *mhms* that listeners use to show they’re listening, express approval or disapproval, or signal that they want to speak. Their varying meanings make them difficult subjects for conventional dictionary treatment. Gavin Farrell (Macquarie University) suggested the use of glossaries to accompany travel supplements and classifieds sections, explaining culturally or scientifically obscure terms and abbreviations.

Trevor Johnston (Royal Institute for Deaf & Blind Children) has been involved in the development of Auslan SignBank, an interactive web dictionary of Australian Sign Language. Sign language is highly variable, has no written language and is used by a small, geographically-dispersed community. This has made it difficult to prepare a traditional dictionary. Rather than attempt to impose a standard, the site allows users to submit the details of a sign they know. The internet seems to lend itself to the creation of a sign language dictionary better than a traditional dictionary could hope to.

The conference drew to a close with a presentation by Flavia Hodges, Clair Hill and Jan Tent, describing the work of the Australian National Place Names Survey.

Full details about the conference and presenters can be found at the organisation’s website: www.australex.org □



The task of examining the sometimes conflicting expectations of listeners and broadcasters continues to provide new challenges for SCOSE. Is this listener too politically correct? Is that broadcaster a little too colloquial? Is this expression too old, or too new, a malapropism, or an acceptable alternative? In making its judgments, SCOSE often adopts a stance somewhere between the extremes of prescription and description. I'd call it a "verbal hygiene" approach (using the term coined by the linguist Deborah Cameron). It's all in the interests of cleaning up and improving the way English is used on air. See if you agree with some of the committee's recent decisions.

With beheadings featuring in much recent news from Iraq, some ABC listeners remarked that they thought the term *behead* sounded old-fashioned and that *decapitate* should be used instead. However, SCOSE maintained that *behead* was an acceptable and self-explanatory word for the deliberate cutting off of a person's head, and that in some contexts it can be more appropriate than *decapitate* because it has a purely physical meaning and refers to a deliberate action, whereas a decapitation can be accidental. Another objection to *decapitate* was that it had recently acquired a military sense – in the rhetoric of going into Iraq, "decapitation" was the goal.

SCOSE was more interventionist or prescriptive with regard to the use of the word *execute*. Some journalists had been content to use *execute* as an alternative to *kill* or *murder*, particularly when referring to any hostages in Iraq who had been killed or beheaded. But SCOSE considered this colloquial use of *execute* to be inappropriate, despite its inclusion in dictionary definitions. The committee advised ABC journalists to use *execute* in its more formal sense, i.e. only in reference to the putting to death of a crimi-

nal according to a law or a decision of a court or judge, and to use *kill* or *murder* in instances where the killing was not sanctioned by law.

It's well known that some members of the police profession can't seem to bring themselves to use the word *dead* and will go to great lengths to avoid it. The latest fabrication is *extinct* – as in "his life was pronounced extinct" or "he was pronounced life extinct". The committee's response to this was – Don't even think of it – there's no place for this silly sort of jargon in ABC news reports.

In a strongly worded email, a female lawyer criticized the ABC for using the term *legal fraternity*. She claimed that the term was inaccurate and discriminatory and that it suggested the law was an exclusively male institution. But SCOSE rejected this view because the modern English sense of *fraternity* is not gender specific and indeed, according to current dictionaries, the main senses of *fraternity* do not carry any obvious traces of the original Latin word for "brother".

Can a person be "reticent" to watch an AFL final? Listeners have noticed that some broadcasters are using *reticent/reticence* in place of *reluctant/reluctance*. SCOSE will not be reticent about this! Broadcasters have been reminded that a person cannot be "reticent" to do something because *reticent* means reserved or disinclined to speak freely.

A more subtle distinction needs to be maintained between *exceed* and *surpass*. Some listeners are likely to have been distracted from the message when they heard the statement, "The death toll has surpassed one hundred." SCOSE members agreed that *exceed* should have been used instead of *surpass*. But it's one thing to realise that a word is wrong in a particular context and quite another matter to try to explain, in simple terms, why that's so. That's what I often find when I'm faced with preparing appropriate usage guidelines for the monthly SCOSE

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

report. It's never enough to tell people that a sentence or expression is incorrect in the context. You have to explain why, and do it in a way that makes it easier for them to choose the correct expression next time. But I'm digressing. *Exceed* means to be greater in quantity or degree. *Surpass* is generally used in a more abstract sense. It means to excel or to be superior in achievement or excellence. (As you can see, there's plenty of room for improvement in an explanation such as this.)

There was no reason to disagree with the nurse who phoned the ABC to point out that some broadcasters talk of patients being *released* from hospital but that it's usual to say that patients are *discharged* from hospital. Although it's not wrong to say *released*, it's better to say *discharged* and use *released* when speaking about allowing prisoners to leave jail.

In recent months, listeners say they think two verbs, *(to) extricate* and *(to) exact* are in danger of being supplanted by the one verb, *(to) extract*. A precis on the ABC TV website of a program about a young lawyer who was handling the case of a victim of domestic violence read: "Matthew can't understand why the woman hasn't *extracted* herself from a series of relationships". In one of several other examples, a producer corrected a script that called for *extricate*, only to find later that it had gone to air with *extract*. And according to listeners, more and more broadcasters say "to extract revenge" instead of the correct expression, *to exact revenge*. Are people's vocabularies shrinking? SCOSE faces the challenge of encouraging some broadcasters to expand theirs. □





From the Editor

The editor's mailbag contained a bumper crop of correspondence, with many people picking up a question from the June 2004 editorial on the currency of the expression "the boy of Jones", used to paraphrase "Jones's son". We now have evidence that it has been heard in Central Queensland (Allison Sharpe, NSW); in Newcastle (Stephen Jones, NSW); in central New South Wales (David Nash, ACT); north-west Tasmania (John Edwards, VIC) and in western NSW around Parkes (Pamela Nankivell, NSW). It's thus quite well dispersed up and down the eastern side of Australia. In all these cases of family or neighborhood use, the expression seems to invoke the father, like a patronymic. But it's also possible that in the school context, it simply identifies the family name of a boy whose first name is unknown, unavailable or not salient for the moment: see the letter from Nicola Stainlay reproduced opposite.

Another issue from June 2004 on which we received a batch of comments was the spelling of the word *jewel(le)ry* in Feedback 23. Written on the anonymous questionnaires, we are unable to acknowledge the correspondents, but glad that they raised the question of its spelling and pronunciation. Most thought that *jewelry* was un-Australian, and it is marked as "Chiefly US" in the *Macquarie Dictionary* (1997). In fact *jewelry* is far older than *jewellery* - by four centuries. It's one of those interesting cases where American English preserves the older spelling, while British English has introduced the new form in the last two hundred years. The first record of *jewellery* is in 1786, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989), and it only becomes the regular spelling in the later nineteenth century. According to Fowler's *Modern English Usage* (1926), *jewellery* was the "commercial and popular form", whereas *jewelry* was "rhetori-

cal and poetic"! The primary pronunciation in the *Oxford Dictionary* still correlates with the earlier spelling, and is indeed the only pronunciation mentioned in the *Macquarie*. If you like spelling to reflect pronunciation, *jewelry* works best.

Punctuation was at stake for several other correspondents, and for Stephen Gard in the "dwindling interrogative" in polite requests that are phrased as questions: "Could you please switch off your mobile phone." The inverted order of subject and verb makes it a question, grammatically speaking, yet the function of the total sentence is ask that something be done, not whether the person reading it will consider the possibility or not. No one would take that sentence as allowing a choice, which is why the question mark gets left off. It's a case of the sentence function taking over from its grammatical form. So in polite requests the question mark is a "going-going-goner", as Stephen suggests - and as the latest Australian government Style Manual (2002) notes (ch. 7: Sentence Punctuation).

Apostrophes are a matter of doubt generally for some writers, as Vivienne Mawson (TAS) notes. If it's the son of Jones, should it be Jones's boy or Jones' boy? The rules on this have been quite contradictory, and though there are supporting rules for both styles, the first is in line with with the broader pattern. Yet in a Feedback survey carried out in 1996, a majority of 60% of respondents went for James', without the additional *s*. For a gratuitous apostrophe see the signage reported by Syd Curtis (opposite).

Instability in pronouns can be heard (not so often seen) in "between you and I", though it's probably an interesting case of hypercorrection, as Stephen Jones (NSW) commented. A parallel example: "apparent to we journalists" shows the same surprising use of the

subject pronoun, though Allison Sharpe (NSW) who reported it thought it might come from implementing a fixed phrase like "we journalists" in any and every circumstance.

The reflexive pronoun for "they" is also somewhat variable, in that *themselves* is certainly on the rise. It might have flabbergasted Rex Mossop, as Dick Sanders said, but was indeed there in sixteenth century English, and now a necessary consequence of using the pronoun *they* to refer to a singular person. We do just this with *yourself*, so why not *themselves*? Perhaps the Queen uses *ourselves*.

□

Feedback Acknowledgements

Feedback 23 on "Verbal Options" was greatly helped by hundreds of respondents, and especially the following people who sent in batches of questionnaires on behalf of their groups, named and unnamed: Dr Robert Smith, Southern Cross University, NSW (11); The Tertiary Preparation Certificate Class at Nowra TAFE, NSW (13); Rosemary Montgomery, Students and Staff from the Tertiary Preparation Course at Illawarra TAFE, NSW (14); SBS Radio, NSW (28); Writing Class U3A Northern Rivers, Lismore, NSW (5); Glen Coulton, NSW (6); Brian and Val Stewart, NSW (8); Lorraine Sushames from the School of Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Charles Darwin University, NT (11); Students of the Diploma of Editing and Publishing at Southbank Institute of TAFE, Brisbane, QLD (12); A. Hudspeth, TAS (5); Dr Peter M. Arndt, VIC (10); Rosemary Milne, VIC (13); Hans Colla and the U3A Nuts and Bolts of English Class, VIC (15); Robyn Whitely, VIC (16); F. Triglone, WA (31); The Sunset Coast Literati, WA (7)



Letters to the Editor

Dear Pam,

A colleague and I are putting together a style sheet for the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Flinders University. As part of this process, we had a session with a number of staff yesterday to go through our draft. We had written a section on time which included the twenty-four hour system which our students and lecturers use constantly. Following the sixth edition of the Style manual (p.173) we had said that midnight was 0000. This was hotly contested with our lecturers insisting that midnight is 2400 and that there is no such time as 0000. Any clarification would be appreciated!

Rebecca Miller
Email

[Ed. Please let us know at *Australian Style* which of the two ways of indicating midnight are used in your institution.]

Dear Prof. Peters,

I wonder if other readers have noted the confusion between the \$ and c symbols (i.e. dollars and cents), particularly in handwritten signs in shops? If I wanted to sell something for 25 cents, I would advertise it as either 25c or \$0.25, but frequently I see signs advertising an item for sale at the price of 0.25c, i.e. a quarter of a cent. Unfortunately, I have not been able to buy four of anything for a cent for about 35 years, but hope springs eternal. Naturally, shop assistants give me odd looks when I muse aloud how I am going to get four cents in change, or whether I will have to buy 20 items for five cents instead!

Stewart Unwin,
Canberra, ACT

Hi Pam,

I first heard the phrase “the girl of Clark” in our staffroom at Murwillumbah High School in 1970. I even remember that the person who said it was a teacher called Mr Haydon. (“A teacher of Haydon” perhaps.) I was amazed as I’d never heard it before and along with my name being pronounced with a “haitch” for the first time ever, 1970 stands out! The use of “the girl of Clark” though, wasn’t used in a possessive sense at all, as you imply in your Editor’s letter; it was simply her surname. I would have said “the Clark girl” perhaps.

Nicola Stainlay
Email

SIGNAGE

A real estate agent’s sign on the house next door to Syd Curtis (email)

SOLD
yours next

1. STAFF WANTED APPLY WITHINN
2. COFFEE WITH SANDWHICH
3. THESE PREMISES ARE UNDER CONSTANT SURVEYLANCE

Captured by Deanna Wong in the suburbs of Sydney.



Lines written on reading in a newspaper report that “The emotion over the decision to give Tendulkar out LBW will louden the call for further technology”.

Ray Kelley, QLD

Louden my laugh at another’s joke, Lord;
Drollen my telling a joke of my own;
Braven my conduct in a crisis;
Kinden my nature when asked for a loan.

Gentlen my manner visiting Grandma;
When I’m with elders, wisen my words;
Blonden my hair to youngen my countenance
And suaven my speech when I chat up birds.

Tallen my stature, prouden my bearing,
Brisken my step to a rendezvous;
Biggen my salary, smallen my tax bill,
Swiften my refund if one is due.

Moren and even galoren my virtues,
Fewen – no zilchen! – my vicious acts;
Uptothemarken my technical know-how,
Hotoffthepressen my grasp of facts.



FEED BACK

—24—

GRAMMATICAL CONUNDRUMS

Despite what we all know about grammar, there are a number of constructions where more than one might be possible. People vary, and the choice may depend on the surrounding words to some extent. Below are a set of puzzles we'd be glad to have your answers on. Please tick the one you would use, or both, if they both seem reasonable. In the latter case, you might like to say if they go into different contexts, e.g. speech and writing.

- 1(a) We'd like to take a walk.
(b) We'd like to have a walk.
- 2(a) I'd not want to be there in an earthquake.
(b) I wouldn't want to be there in an earthquake.
- 3(a) A number of persons was seen leaving after midnight.
(b) A number of persons were seen leaving after midnight.
- 4(a) They'll not be here on time.
(b) They won't be here on time.
- 5(a) There's three bedrooms and a bathroom on the second floor.
(b) There are three bedrooms and a bathroom on the second floor.
- 6(a) A large number of students of French has visited the centre.
(b) A large number of students of French have visited the centre.
- 7(a) Anyone who comes late must let himself in through the back door.
(b) Anyone who comes late must let themselves in through the back door.
- 8(a) The number of appeals is down this year.
(b) The number of appeals are down this year.
- 9(a) A person without a ticket must introduce themselves to the lecturer.
(b) A person without a ticket must introduce themselves to the lecturer.
- 10(a) They haven't any opportunity to go there.
(b) They have no opportunity to go there.
- 11(a) Do you have any answers to the question?
(b) Have you any answers to the question?
- 12(a) You should have a look at that document.
(b) You should take a look at that document.

Would you please indicate your age bracket and sex:

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

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 23 featured questions about how we phrase our verbs – questions which are on the agenda for the Australian English grammar project. We're very grateful to the more than 500 people who returned the questionnaire, and in particular to the groups mentioned on p.8 from whom we received multiples. The data have been carefully processed by Style Council research assistant Deanna Wong and computer-analysed by *Australian Style's* executive editor Adam Smith.

Subjunctives

Though the subjunctive has been declared dying for centuries, it survives in two forms in modern English, to which Australians are contributing.

The present subjunctive is still relatively active when used in what linguists call “mandative” constructions, as in “They insisted that the complaint be presented in writing”, and “She expressed the wish that her jewelry be given to charity”. Both these were endorsed by a two-thirds majority of respondents (68% and 66% respectively). The sentences with the past subjunctive won smaller majorities (55% and 62%), for “Many would take advantage of the system if it were available in the country”, and “The seat had a strange effect on her, as if she were suspended in space”.

There was little sign of age differentiation for the present subjunctive, but a definite age effect for the past form *were*: respondents aged 65 and over were much more inclined to use it than those younger. The results make interesting comparison with those from similar questions run in Feedback 2 (1993), where support for the present subjunctive ran at around 80%, and for the past subjunctive at 62/63%. It seems that Australian support for the subjunctive has slipped somewhat during the past decade.

Passives

The standard form of the passive uses a part of the verb *be*. But constructions with *get* are also used as in “got arrested”, and they seem to carry the suggestion (a) that the subject has somehow contributed to the process, and is not simply

passive in it; and (b) that there is something negative about it. The two sentences tested both set up negative circumstances, yet in neither case did the majority endorse the *get* passive. Instead they voted for the passive with *be*: “If I am phoned by the bank...” (80%), “Andrew was struck by lightning...” (86%). There was however a very strong association between the *be* passive and its use in writing, noted by the 40 or so respondents who commented, whereas *get* was strongly associated with speaking. The results also showed that younger people (under 45) were more comfortable generally with *get* than those older – despite all the dramatic ways in which primary school teachers have tried to discourage them from using it.

The -ing participle

English has seen a steady increase in the use of continuous/imperfect forms of the verb over the last four centuries. In the twentieth century they have been creeping into more kinds of verb than ever before, and providing extra nuances not previously noted. One of the two test sentences: “Next the people will be asking for cake” was strongly endorsed (79%), and the -ing seems to suggest an inescapable process or “the future as a matter of course” as some grammarians have it. But the other test sentence, setting up a clumsy passive construction with -ing was voted down. A bare 2% could countenance “A shuttle bus system could be being introduced in the next few weeks”. Perhaps it sounded too much like your government speaking.

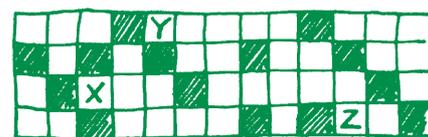
The -ed participle

Variation in the use of the perfect form of verbs has been observed in modern English, particularly when they are combined with certain adverbs of time. The test sentences provided combinations of the perfect with different adverbs such as “ago”, which was resisted by almost 90% of respondents in “That problem has been solved long ago”. But there was much less conviction when the adverb was “just”, and a small majority (57%) voted in favor of “Alex has just spoken to her”, rather than “Alex just spoke to her”. In fact “just” isn't simply a time adverb but expresses a kind of immediacy which probably fosters the use of the perfect. The use of “just” with a simple past verb is also a known regional difference between American and British English, and at this point in time Australians still just prefer the British construction. When it comes to questions, Australians strongly prefer the perfect form of the verb (“Have you...?”) to the periphrastic form of the past (“Did you...?”). This emerged in “Have you ever lived in France?” (84%) and “Have you told them the news yet?” (91%). A slight age differential could be seen with the second sentence but not the first. There is thus little evidence among the general public of the “here and now” use of the perfect noted in media reporting, as in “An avalanche has killed 14 people...” □

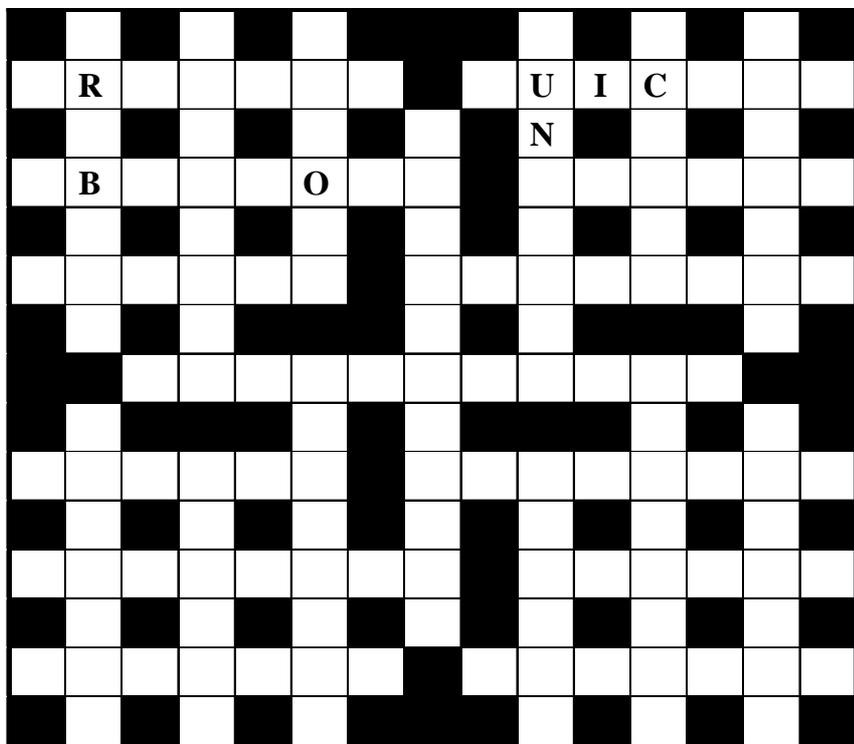




RUBICON

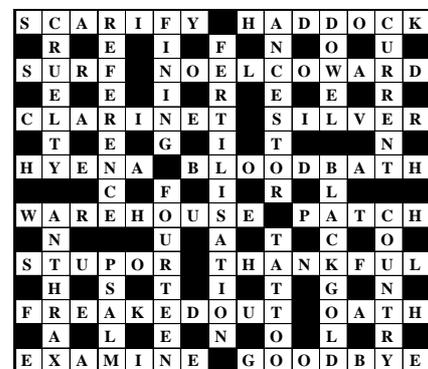


RUBICON, devised by David Astle, is a hybrid of crossword, jigsaw and acrostic. First, solve as many clues as you can and begin to fit the answers inside the grid. (The scattered letters of RUBICON should give you a toehold.) When the grid is completed, arrange the *clues* from the first Across to the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



- Musical based on Shaw's Pygmalion (2,4,4)
- State boundary (10)
- Amazing sight (3-6)
- Clapped (9)
- Motherland for most of us (9)
- One snared by an autumn prank (5,4)
- Natal arrival, or a googly possibly (8)
- Thoroughly cooked (4-4)
- A Jolley novel and film (3,4)
- Abiding ad infinitum (7)
- Couture gets sulkily strutted here (7)
- Describing land with more inclines (7)
- Had tickets on oneself (7)
- It hangs handily for a hungry horse (7)
- Nerve bundles (7)
- Office escape? (7)
- One language unique to a geographical corner (7)
- Over-the-shoulder rocket launcher (7)
- Pamphlet (7)
- Porcupine down under (7)
- Potter's fantastical art (7)
- Revere (7)
- Roast wrap (7)
- Tennessee neighbour (7)
- Glued with fear (6)
- The subzero mass surrounding either Pole (6)
- Falls of Venezuela; heavenly being (5)
- Newest thing in fashion (5)
- Passing your peepers over (5)
- Reefer's contents (5)
- Animal featured in Free Willy (4)
- Kong, say (4)

Solution to Rubicon in last issue
WORDS THAT FORM NEW ONES
 WITH CROSS: Patch, Examine, Reference, Fertilisation, Current, Country



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Call direct on 02 9850 7693. If there's no one in the Style Council Centre office, your call will be received on an answering machine and returned as soon as possible.

