AUSTRALIAN STYLE

Extreme Lexicography

Dr Bernadette Hince, of the Australian National University, presents her work on polar dictionaries. A version of this article was originally presented at the Australex 2005 conference.

Sixteen years ago, in 1989, I began a historical dictionary of Antarctic English (*The Antarctic Dictionary* CSIRO/Museum Victoria, 2000). During the process, it became increasingly obvious that the English of the other polar region, the Arctic, was a fundamental part of the history of southern words. Early Antarctic explorers – men like James Cook, James Clark Ross and Roald Amundsen – had travelled in the northern seas and become familiar with published accounts of Arctic voyages before they ventured into Antarctic waters. As a result, words like *growler, mukluk, sennegrass, sastrugi, nunatak, right whale, killer whale, ice island* and *iceberg* migrated south with them, weightless passengers across the equator.

Even that most iconic of Antarctic birds, the *penguin,* is directly linked to the northern regions. Though today's penguins are the birds of the family Spheniscidae, the first "penguins" were northern birds, the now-extinct great auks *Pinguinus impennis,* whose common name survives in the name of Newfoundland's Penguin Islands. Like the modern southern hemisphere penguins, the great auks were large black and white flightless seabirds.

The two polar regions have much in common climatically and geographically, as well as lexically, though in some ways they differ fundamentally. The Arctic is the world's smallest ocean, a frozen sea surrounded by land that has been permanently though sparsely inhabited for thousands of years. Antarctica – a frozen continent surrounded by the vast Southern Ocean – is only temporarily inhabited, and recently (basically during the last century).

Polar English is one of the many regional forms of English, some already documented in historical dictionaries – among them Australian, New Zealand, South African, Jamaican, Newfoundland, United States English, and (soon) Canadian and Sri Lankan English. While Antarctic English is more or less contained by the continental boundaries of Antarctica, the geographic coverage of the Arctic is huge and multinational. It includes the United States (Alaska), Canada (Northwest Territories and Nunavut, Nouveau Québec, and Labrador), the nations of the former Soviet Republic, and the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland and (through the semi-autonomous Danish provinces of Greenland and the Faroe Islands) Denmark.

The dictionary of Polar English will combine the English of Antarctica

Continued from page 1

with that of Arctic English, defining 10,000 words (*The Antarctic Dictionary* has about 2000). Like its predecessor, it will contain words for snow and ice – which made up perhaps a tenth of the headwords in *The Antarctic Dictionary* – clothing, housing, food, transport and navigation, dog sledging, weather, slang, and the plants and animals of the two regions. Remarkably, though Antarctica is even colder in absolute terms than the Arctic, there are almost no words in Antarctic English for the cold – perhaps a reflection of the lack of any indigenous population.

What kinds of words exemplify polar English? Italian humanist and professor of literature Celio Calcagnini wrote in the 1530s:

> Words uttered in the winter straightway turned to ice on account of the intense cold, and were not heard until with the advent of summer they melted and so reached the ear.[1]

Almost five centuries later, and with the Arctic melting away daily, many readers of this newsletter would know some Arctic-related English words for clothing (*anorak*), transport (*kayak* and *Eskimo roll*) or housing (*igloo*). Others – such as *komatik* (a box-type sledge) or *maktak* (chewable whale-blubber) – are only encountered if we read about or travel in the Far North (and of course *Far North* itself is another northern term). Journeys of exploration and those of missionaries, as well as other literature – fiction, science, science fiction, the social sciences – will provide the evidence of Arctic words that dictionary-makers need.

What are the differences between Antarctic and Arctic English? Antarctica has no indigenous population, and a significant difference between the regions exists in the North's cultural words – *kabloona* (white man), *angarkok* (roughly, sorcerer) and *inukshuk* (cairn or statue in human form) – all remind us that the Arctic *is* an inhabited place, where indigenous culture has arisen and persisted, however tenuously, on the rim of the frozen Arctic Ocean. No-one disputes that the Arctic is at the extreme limit of habitability. Moving north from the swampy *taiga* (Russian for marshy pine forest), we come to the treeless *tundra* (the word exists in Russian and Finnish as well as Sami).

The inhabitants of such a hostile environment now mostly call themselves Inuit or Innuit (Eastern Canadian Arctic, Nouveau-Québec, Labrador, and Greenland), but also use the names Yupik (in Siberia), Inupiat (Alaska), Eskimo (Alaska and Central Canadian Arctic), or Inuvialuit (Mackenzie Delta/Beaufort Sea areas and Western Canadian Arctic). An "Inuit" today is an aboriginal resident "of the Circumpolar Arctic from Siberia eastward to Greenland, whose ancestors traditionally occupied territories along the Arctic Coasts and above the tree line".[2]

We can see the history and geography of any country or region in its words, and map their spread. By illuminating the history of the polar regions, the dictionary of Polar English will remind us that – even at the extremes of our globe – language is still "the archives of history".[3] □

Footnotes

1. Quoted on p 97 of Wilson, Edward M and Rickard, P (1956) Frozen words. *Polar Record* 8(53): 95–108.

2. source http://www.ualr.edu/~alpatenaude/page22.htm accessed 26 September 2005

3. In his essay "The Poet", Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in 1844: "Language is the archives of history … The etymologist finds the deadest words to have been once a brilliant picture." (http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/essays/poet.html accessed 17 June 2005).

Turning VB into Kava

News Ltd, Australia's biggest newspaper group, publishes papers in every state and territory, and has closely affiliated companies in Papua New Guinea and Fiji, where we publish the PNG *Post-Courier*, the *Fiji Times* and other papers. This wide geographic and cultural stretch means our 130-something mastheads reach people who follow Aussie rules football or rugby, and sometimes both; who talk about Paterson's curse or salvation Jane, but seldom both; and who drink Victoria Bitter or kava, but never both.

Despite this diversity there is little need to change content when copy moves from one state to another, from, say, the *Daily Telegraph* to the *Herald Sun*. Sometimes a local word or phrase will be changed, but thanks in part to News Ltd's national style, most of the text can stay consistent throughout the country.

Likewise with our staff training courses, which we deliver online. It doesn't matter if you are in Perth or Brisbane, Darwin or Hobart. You read the same content and do the same exercises. But when our courses are used overseas, the changing of content to make it understandable and relevant is imperative. Why should a journalist in Port Moresby do an exercise based on a commuter train crash when there are no trains in Papua New Guinea? Why should staff in Suva be confronted with an exercise on Prime Minister John Howard when they know perfectly well the Prime Minister is Laisenia Qarase?

I have recently been to Fiji to seek help from staff at the *Fiji Times* in localising our reporting and sub-editing courses. Here is a short list of the things that cropped up often and needed to be changed:

- References to states. There are none in Fiji.
- References to state governments.
- References to premiers.
- References to political parties. Fiji has a Labor Party, but no Liberals, Nationals, Greens or the rest.

Sport needed attention. Cricket or Aussie rules football matches had to be turned into rugby. Place names were straightforward: Canberra became Suva in political contexts, and others succumbed to random change. Newtown is now Nadi, Sandringham is Sigatoka and Lismore is Lautoka.

Grace Brothers or Myer had to become Morris Hedstrom. BHP Billiton is now the Fiji Sugar Company. The GST morphed into VAT and occupations peculiar to Australia were also localised. Kangaroo shooters became scientists in one scenario and, oddly, shoeshine boys in another. Abalone poachers became hunters of the rare and endangered kadavu parrot. Wheat farmers became cane growers.

Sometimes the changes were quick and easy. A reference to Australia's greatest television program, *Neighbours*, is now a reference to another thought-provoking half-hour, *Home and Away*, because Fijians are familiar with the latter, not the former. John Howard and Kim Beazley automatically changed into Laisenia Qarase and Mahendra Chaudry. And Victoria Bitter is now kava.

Others took a little more thought. An exercise involving what we call a running story – a story that constantly needs updating as new information comes in – was based for Australian students on a commuter train running into the back of a stationary train in a tunnel. With no trains or tunnels in Fiji, we decided on an air crash, with a commuter plane from Suva to Nadi colliding mid-air with a light plane going the other way.

I was left at the end with two conundrums.

The first was quoting people. Despite the *Fiji Times* being published in English, all its reporting and subbing staff are Fijian or Fiji Hindi. And in almost all circumstances, so are the people they interview to get their stories. So, not unnaturally, the interviews are conducted in either Fijian or Fiji

Hindi. But what, therefore, do the journalists do with direct quotations? Do they translate an interviewee's response, given in Fijian, into English and put quote marks around it? Does "E a levu rui dina na noqu osooso" become "I was really very busy", in quote marks? The speaker didn't use those words.

After I returned to Australia I decided the rules of the academy could never be justified in the daily press, and that a translation in quotes had to be allowed as long as it was as close as possible to a quotation that conveyed the speaker's exact meaning, though not necessarily a literal one.

The second was coping with the differences in morphology and syntax distinctive to Fijian English. Should our courses accommodate phrases like *"We should discuss about this problem", "You want me to on the alarm?"* and *"He has a lot of furnitures"*? Our answer is no. To do so would mean we would be teaching non-standard English.

So while we will accommodate the staff of our Fiji papers with Tamavua, not Terrigal, and cane-cutters, not drovers, we will continue to try to teach standard English. □

Kim Lockwood is New Ltd's national editorial online training manager, and a regular contributor to Style Councils. The following article is a version of the paper he gave at this year's conference in Melbourne.

Style Council 2005

Rosemary Noble is Faculty Client Co-ordinator for the Knowledge Media Division at Deakin University. She reports on the Style Council conference, 2005. This is a shorter version of her article previously published in the Society of Editors (Vic.) newsletter.

Following the highly successful editors conference, Style Council 2005 once again lived up to its promise with a selection of inspiring and thought-provoking presentations delving into the intricacies of English language in its many and varied forms.

The conference kicked off to a lively start with a cocktail party to launch the 4th edition of the *Macquarie Dictionary*. Thomas Keneally did the honours and gleefully told us about such new entries as *archaeon*, a microscopic organism that can survive without sunlight and at boiling temperatures around thermal vents at the bottom of the sea; and a host of other first-time entries such as *apoptosis*, *geocaching* and *zorb*, and sadly, such twenty-first century realities as *stun grenade*, *carpet bombing* and *smart gun*.

In her keynote address on *Taboo, censoring and the human brain*, Kate Burridge introduced her audience to *orthophemisms* (an expression in the middle of a scale that has euphemisms at one end and dysphemisms at the other: an example of all three would be *pass away, die* and *snuff it* respectively). Kate talked about how "inappropriate anatomical significance" was found in taboo words, resulting in a kind of default evaluation she calls "middle class politeness criterion". She concluded with a summary of some fascinating studies about human reactions to different types of taboo language.

Tony Wheeler, after a brief history of the amazing publishing success that is Lonely Planet, discussed the pitfalls of translating guidebooks. The title of his presentation, *Gricers, twitchers and "doing doughnuts"*, refers to the sections on birdwatchers (twitchers) that must be in some guidebooks but not others, the British obsession with gricing (trainspotting) and the perils of translating into French such Aussie male behaviour at "doing doughnuts".

There followed a series of interesting papers on the joys and perils of publishing in English in other parts of the world. Kim Lockwood discussed issues in news reporting and the training of journalists in Fiji [see further on p.3]. Sue Butler, the publisher of the *Macquarie Dictionary*, is working on dictionaries of Indian English. She discussed the inclusion of words from Hindi and Urdu in common usage, as well as the editorial decisions concerning spelling, meaning, pronunciation and usage that vary from Australian English.

Eleanor Curtain Publishing has produced a large number of colourful beginning readers for overseas markets, including the US, UK, New Zealand, Canada, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Apart from the obvious adaptations of spelling in words such as *organize/organise*, and *color/colour*, US partners have very rigorous adaptation guidelines that must be adhered to. Strict balances of gender, ethnic and racial types, physical disability and use of animals, in the text and illustrations, are all prescribed.

Very specific language and style decisions for other situations were discussed by other presenters. Stefanie Pearce, as Communications Manager for the Australian Synchrotron Project, a major new science facility in Melbourne, described the challenges involved in explaining this complex and unfamiliar concept to multiple local and national audiences, and the strategic decisions involved in media releases and publicity documents.

Jennifer Blunden, from her experience of Sydney's Powerhouse Museum, discussed the framework in which she decides on the style of text used in exhibition notices. She examined the relationship between the language, content and the physical space, as well as the other layers of information provided via guided tours, print catalogues and interactive components.

Nick Renton and Valerie Yule provided fresh insights into style guides and dictionary pronunciation guides, while Nick Walker presented on publishing in Nigeria in the 1970s.

Overall, Style Council 2005 was a delightful change of pace from the National Editors conference, and for a word nerd like me, well worth the extra time and effort to get myself to the venue for the fourth day in a row. □

Thomas Keneally launching the 4th edtion of the Macquarie Dictionary

Kate Burridge and Michael Clyne at the Dictionary launch (both photos courtesy of Kerry Biram)

SCOSE NOTES

Let's look at some of the more thorny issues that SCOSE has dealt with in the past six months. Some broadcasters struck difficulty with several sets of related words, and wanted clear guidance on which word should be used. Easier said than done because dictionary definitions do not always provide neat solutions.

For example, what's the difference between *epidemic* and *pandemic*? The *Macquarie Dictionary* defines an *epidemic* as "a temporary prevalence of a disease". The adjectival form is defined as "affecting at the same time a large number of people in a locality, and spreading from person to person, as a disease not permanently prevalent there". *Epidemic* is also used in non-health contexts, eg *There's an epidemic of crime in the city. A crime rate of epidemic proportions.* The noun *pandemic* is used to mean "a disease or plague which affects a whole country or continent, or the whole world". For example, the Spanish flu of 1918 was a pandemic and a global disaster. Most ABC broadcasters appear to have opted for *pandemic* when referring to the current outbreaks of bird flu in many parts of the world.

In some reports on bird flu the terms *drug* and *vaccine* were used interchangeably, but SCOSE pointed out that there's a clear difference between the two. A *drug* is a chemical substance used to cure or prevent disease, or to improve physical or mental wellbeing, or to induce altered mental states. A *vaccine* is a virus or modified virus, alive or killed, used by inoculation to render the subject immune from specific viral diseases. As yet there is no vaccine for the H5N1 strain of bird flu, although two anti-viral drugs are available that can be used to treat infection or as prophylaxis.

During the 1998 Sydney to Hobart yacht race there was confusion about the weather references. At the inquest into the deaths of the six sailors who perished in the race, the duty weatherman at the Bureau of Meteorology said he revised the forecast an hour after the start of the race from a "gale" to a "storm" warning, the most severe alert. He was so concerned that he phoned the media centre of the race, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority and the Eden Coastal Patrol. But the storm warning was not broadcast until 8pm, and it was given no urgency. Some skippers and crews assumed, incorrectly, that a gale warning rated higher than a storm.

This misunderstanding highlights how important it can be to be aware of technical meanings of familiar words. A storm is rated by the speed of the wind. The words *gale* and *storm*, in their technical senses, refer to particularly strong wind force – a gale is a wind of Beaufort scale force 8, and a storm is 11 on this scale. The word *thunderstorm* is the odd one out, as it refers to lightning (and thunder) and not to wind strength. Lightning and torrential rain may each be present or absent in conjunction with a strong wind.

Some football commentators were heard to use *laconic* repeatedly, although they appeared to mean "lackadaisical" or "languid". The 5-syllable *lackadaisical* would be fine in more formal contexts but here you need *laid-back*. A *laconic* person is one noted for using as few words as possible.

Metaphors are dangerous to people who forget what they literally mean. A recent example was heard in the statement, "Since it was banned in Britain, Hizb Ut-Tahrir has been under ASIO's radar, but so far there's no evidence that it's been involved with violence in Australia". The expression *under the radar* means "undetectable", as when an aircraft flies very low to avoid detection by radar, which is the opposite of what was intended in this sentence. The writer no doubt meant that the banned organisation was under special scrutiny, ie *under the microscope*.

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

For people who like words to be used with precision, the phrase "daylight savings" suggests a piggy bank containing daylight, but the correct term *daylight saving* is hard to insist on when the Bureau of Meteorology gets it wrong on its website.

With all the recent talk about "preventive/preventative detention", the word *preventative* has attracted plenty of comment. Contrary to the claims of some, *preventative* is indeed recognised as an alternative to *preventive*. But for broadcasting purposes, *preventive* is the better choice – it's shorter and easier to say.

"Twenty-oh-six"? On the question of how to read out the years of the 2000s, back in 1999 a Style Council survey showed that the respondents clearly preferred the "two thousand and five" pattern over the "twenty-oh-five" pattern. But now that we're in the 2000s, the impracticality of using the longer version has become evident, and some broadcasters have adopted the "twenty-oh-five" pattern. Both versions are attracting listener disapproval, so ABC staff were anxious for some guidance. SCOSE held that it's inevitable there'll be a switch to the "twenty-oh-five" pattern as we approach 2010. The advantage of this pattern is that it's quicker, easier, and consistent with the usage for the 1900s. So start getting used to the new shorter pattern, and expect some variation in the meantime. □

From the Editor

First, to thank everyone who wrote or emailed us, commenting on articles and letters in the winter issue of *AS,* and on language happenings around them. We appreciate also having the hard evidence – clippings, advertisements, photographs of signs etc. – and special thanks go to those who sent them in.

The lead article on "Figuring out Numbers" (13.1), in which Robert Eagleson argued for writing all numbers as figures, drew a variety of comments. Writers such as Jack Oliver (QLD) threw down the gauntlet by suggesting that figures could replace words even further: Why apply this only to cardinal numbers and not the ordinal numbers? Why not have "the 6th edition" and "in the 1st place"? Syd Curtis (QLD) raised the spectre of writing of Einstein's fourth dimension as "4 dimension". Others however found it problematic to apply the principle even to all cardinal numbers. Paul Gray (NSW) found difficulties in using the figure 1 at the start of the sentence, and Gilbert Case (QLD) takes this issue further in the letter reproduced opposite.

Other correspondents wrote of the use of dual numbering systems within their professional areas. Scott Humphreys (NSW) noted that as an engineering consultant, his practice has been to show both the word and the figures when showing it in narrative, even small numbers such as "two (2) and one (1)". He comments that the number style used in preparing tenders may be dictated by overseas clients such as the World Bank, which are beyond the reach of Australian legislation. Jenny Armour (NT) who writes instructions for patchworkers, explained the value of having figures for dimensions alongside words for the numbers of items: e.g. four strips 12 x 4, eight strips 8 x 2… It keeps separate the two different sets of numbers involved. So there are arguments for allowing writers/editors some discretion over the representation of numbers, depending on the different quantities mentioned in the text.

A different problem with numbers was raised by two AS readers: how to say the individual years of the new millennium. Both David Guillinane (email) and Martin Usher (NSW) wrote in favor of "twenty-O-one" rather than "two thousand and one", suggesting there may be some dispute over it. In fact the Feedback survey (No.13) carried out back in 1999 showed that most respondents (almost 80% of them) expected to refer to the second year of the twenty-first century as "two thousand and two". Crossing the threshold into the new millennium assumed particular significance then. Remember the dreaded Y2K bug? But as we move on into the twenty-first century, it seems less important, and it would be natural for "twenty-O-" to quietly resume its place before "two thousand and eleven" is upon us. [cf. SCOSE Notes, p.5 col.3]

Some abbreviations take more than one form, and may be relatively unstandardised. ACT correspondent Rob Biggins drew attention to this with the word *Commonwealth,* where there are various possibilities: *Cwlth, C'wlth, Cth, C'wealth, Cwlth., Commw., Commonwth,* according to dictionaries of abbreviations and acronyms. The Australian Government *Style Manual* (6th ed.) recommends *Cwlth* over *C'wlth*. Research by Adam Smith confirms that the use of *Cwlth* is widespread on the internet, but that *Cth* is also very common, appended to the names of Acts on legal sites.

Another abbreviation with more than one form is *c/o*, noted by Don Crawford (QLD). As an initialism for "care of", it has historically had an "o". But in Australia *c/-* is also used for the same meaning, especially on envelopes, according to *New Oxford* (1998).

The use of apostrophes with abbreviations was queried by Amar Germani (NSW), who noticed the use of *unis* (for "universities"). Had it been *uni's,* it would of course have been the possessive form. What has muddied the waters in the past was the use of the apostrophe for the plurals of acronyms: so *MP's* meant "parliamentarians", rather than "belonging to an MP". But the use of the apostrophe in such plurals is discouraged by the government *Style Manual* (6th ed.), and no longer so widely used – except perhaps by the proverbial greengrocer.

A further point of interest noted by two AS correspondents is the number (singular/plural) of nouns ending in *s* such as *apparatus* and *contents* (of a book). In the first case, noted by a QLD high school science teacher, *apparatus* is both singular and plural. That's the way it was in Latin, and it would be too cumbersome to have it as "apparatuses" in English, though it's sometimes heard.

Can *contents* be a count noun, as in "The book has a comprehensive contents", asks Karl Wolf (NSW)? The use of "a" with a word ending in *s* is normal in examples such as "a means to an end", "a grounds for divorce", and appears also in rarer cases such as *a stairs*, *an earnings*, *a headquarters*, and *a contents*, discussed by Mark Wickens (1992) *Grammatical Number in English Nouns*. ☐

Letters to the Editor

On Figuring out numbers

Dr Robert Eagleson (*Australian Style*, 13.1, pp.1-2) argues for the adoption of figures in all contexts in the place of numbers spelt out. He sees current convention as inconsistent and unnecessary. I am not one to argue that either convention or inconsistency is always a bad thing, and I believe that there are some issues relating to the use of numbers instead of words that require further examination.

First, Eagleson notes that the "punctuation at the end of 1 [*sic*] sentence is an adequate marker that what follows is a new sentence" (p. 2). Logically this may be so, but psychologically it may not be. The end of a sentence is marked (usually) by a full-stop, a space, and a following capital letter. The reader identifies the set of this co-occurrence.

Of the three elements, the most noticeable is the capital letter: the full-stop may require acuity of vision, and the space may be made irrelevant by justification of the type – as in the columns of *Australian Style*, which often has longer spaces between words within a sentence than at the end of the sentence. The presence of a figure, to which "concepts of upper and lower case do not apply" (p. 2), where a capital letter had been expected, may not assist the rapid reader.

Secondly, Eagleson does not address the issue from the point of view of the writer, in an age where more people than ever before are using electronic print (e-mail, word processing) instead of handwriting. My single keystroke error in a word will either be noticed (courtesy of a spell-check program) or else may still provide meaning to the reader.

If, however, I make a single keystroke error with a figure, nothing will alert me to that, and I may well "see" on the screen what I believe I typed. (That phenomenon is well attested.) It is not surprising that banks require both words and figures on documents such as cheques, although they are often more flexible with their demands in respect of deposits.

Thirdly, to insist on figures instead of words will require writers to develop further skills as grammarians: "1 swallow does not make a summer" but not "1 does what 1 can"? Is any 1 suggesting that?

Finally, are only cardinal numbers to be "figured"? Will any 1 be found to 2nd a motion to extend the debate to the ordinals and to fractions? Whoever is the 1st, will others follow 2nds later? Will dissidents like me run the risk of being hung, drawn and ¼ed?

I hope these thoughts are helpful in the continuing debate.

Gilbert Case
Carseldine Qld

Dear Dr Peters/Pam

In reading the particular words and phrases in Ruth Wajnryb's contribution, I still well recall the greater use of the expressions. I am 65, and still use "shoot through" (or "shot through like a Bondi tram") at least a few times every year; "bung" if talking about a "bung eye" but very rarely the older and more general use; and – contrary to the comments – still quite often use "Stone the crows!", "Starve the lizards!" and "Stiffen the wombats!", as well as "Blind Freddy" (Freddie). I grew up with the first two as common enough in my boyhood in the town of Barmera, S.A. in the period 1944-1953, and as I recall read "Stiffen the wombats!" sometime after that and enjoyed it as an expression of similar nature, so added it to my used expressions. I would rarely go a fortnight without using one or other of them in a natural way (for me), and know that I used "Stiffen the wombats!" only last Thursday, while talking with some visitors. I would definitely use the first two most commonly, though, and I also use all three strung together about once or twice a year to give emphasis to a point. I used "Blind Freddy" in a letter last week too. My wife (born in Melbourne and aged 60), son (aged 25) and daughter (aged 22), and several of my friends, clearly consider them archaic, but I think I would hear the first two used every now-and-again by people in their 50's and older. I suspect it is a "country thing", and it may have more continuing usage in country South Australia than other parts of Australia, though that is pure speculation. (Certain radio shows had a major impact in my youth, and some of the expressions may have had currency in the "Dad and Dave", Mo McCacky, "Take it From Here" and other shows. I very, very occasionally use "Wacko the goose!", that I think derives from Mo McCacky). My son and daughter occasionally use "Stone the crows!" and "Starve the lizards!" in a friendly ribbing take-off of me, but don't use them at all outside of the family or when long-term friends are also present. They are most unlikely to continue the usage after I drop off the perch.

Dick Kimber
Alice Springs

Dear Pam Peters

The letters to the editor in the June 05 edition were addressed in four different ways: dear Pam Peters, Hi Dr Peters! dear Pam, and one letter without a salutation.

Lately, I've been using the former wherever I can, as it avoids guessing with gender and titles, and is a step between the more formal title + surname, and informal first name only. But, when I suggest the first name + surname salutation for my work place's correspondence, the vote was a no – "we're not ready for that yet!".

Does anyone else out there feel a salutation change coming?

Vanessa Weiss
ACT

Book Notes

The Macquarie Dictionary - 4th Edition

The 4th edition of the Macquarie Dictionary was released in November. Here is an abridged version of Thomas Keneally's Foreword to the dictionary, published with the kind permission of the author.

I remember the joy and outright enthusiasm with which the *Macquarie Dictionary* was greeted when it first appeared in 1981. Here was a dictionary of English as it was used on this great, eccentric continent, a continent located at a huge distance from the Northern European sources of the language. Because we were just starting to congratulate ourselves, perhaps a little too loudly, on our escape from post-colonial cultural ignominy, we tended to see the emergence of the dictionary as a great nationalist monument, a visible sign of our maturity as a society, a validation of the normal coinage of Australian idiom. It bespoke the particular people that Australia, so drastically alien in so many aspects from the environments where English had its birth, had made us. In our view then, it defined and validated the English we spoke at home and work and school, and to have *that* language defined and taken seriously was something we just weren't used to. I remember the novelty of looking up the word *mullygrubber*, and there it was, and so was *skite*, a common insult employed by my generation of schoolchildren. I, and many others, relished the novelty of seeing such words in august print. The *Macquarie* paid the antipodean tongue the great compliment of taking it seriously.

Rightly or wrongly, we saw it too as a bastion for the preservation of our quirky and often earthy usages, and we were still twitchy enough to be grateful for that. All this quite apart from the humbler but most significant fact that the *Macquarie* served as a tool, by becoming the most apposite guide to usage and spelling for people living here.

So, if the first edition of the *Macquarie* took within its ample covers all the language heritage and usage we Australians wanted, why do we need a fourth edition? Is it a matter of marketing, or necessity?

It's plainly a case of necessity. For the truth is that the *Macquarie* was designed not only to explain Australian idiom to the world, but to explain what could be called World English to Australians, and equip them to use it. The *Macquarie* is only in part a dictionary of words bred in isolation from the world. To be more than an act of nostalgia, it must be the great lexicon of words used by Australians *in* the world, in communicating with the world of science, politics and culture. And since all these areas of human striving have exploded into new manifestations of language at a rate that would spin the head of a mid-twentieth century lexicographer, we need all of the chief usages mediated to us by a new edition. Without it, we have less chance of being informed citizens of the world in this new, lumps-and-all century.

An eloquent example is the word *archaeon*, making its first appearance in this new edition. An archaeon is a microscopic organism which can survive without light from the sun and at boiling temperatures in the earth's depths or around hydrothermal vents at the bottom of the sea. The existence of such creatures on earth, opening up entirely new and urgent possibilities for biological research, and suggesting the likelihood of life in space, had barely been postulated, the word barely coined, when the *Macquarie* first appeared. Even recently, the scientific implications of archaea had not been seen as important enough for the word to make it into the third edition of the *Macquarie*.

Another new technological word, *biomimetics,* the system of engineering which looks to living creatures to provide structural models, similarly achieves its first cap in this new edition. *Biomimetics* might not carry the imaginative lustre and directness of such earlier technological words as *stump-jump plough*, but it may figure hugely in our twenty-first century lives. As Donald Horne said in his introduction to the second edition, "A dictionary is not a museum of old, departed meanings… It must tell us what words mean *now*, whether we like it or not."

I'M IN THE MACQUARIE DICTIONARY! THEREFORE, I AM!

A STRANGE NEW WORLD
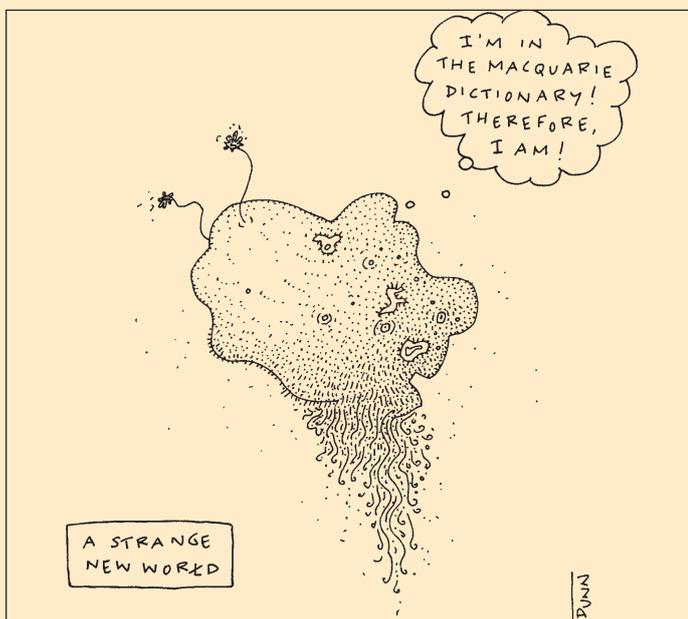
Australia's Language Potential

Michael Clyne's latest book assesses Australia's language potential, its realization and – perhaps most importantly – ways of collaboration that might make it easier and more pleasurable for Australians to become bi- or multilingual. The book starts from the premise that Australia embarked on a path to empowering people who have another language in addition to English by legitimating and valuing Australia's multilingualism through the development of a national language policy in the last quarter of the 20th century. This step has been acclaimed by leading international scholars on bilingualism and while language policy is no longer high on the agenda, Michael Clyne reports that overseas visitors are still impressed by some of the icons of multilingualism in Australia, such as SBS Television, ethnic and multilingual radio, the large number of languages accredited for the year 12 examination, the Telephone Interpreter Service, and the multilingual holdings of local public libraries.

However, all is not well with Australia's state as a multilingual society. The 2001 Census figures show that a significant proportion of the Australian population, particularly in the cities, is bi- or multilingual and half of the top 20 community languages used in Australia fall into the group of most widely used languages other than English of the world, namely: Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish, Hindi, Arabic, German, French, Italian, Korean and Vietnamese. But

how does this impact on the rest of the population? Michael Clyne suggests that "it sometimes seems as if there were two worlds, the multi-lingual one-third and most of the other two-thirds who are happily and proudly monolingual." Australia's language resources do not appear to be utilised very much in the business sector where an international survey conducted in 2000 found that Australian business executives averaged proficiency in fewer languages than those of any of the other – mainly OECD – countries sampled. It is also obvious in the education sector where, in 2003, Australia wide, only 13.4 per cent of students in year 12 took a language other than English.

Michael Clyne describes this paradox between the language resources available in Australia and the inadequate use of those resources as a feature of "the monolingual mindset": "The greatest impediment to recognizing, valuing and utilising our language potential is a persistent monolingual mindset. Such a mindset sees everything in terms of monolingualism being the norm, even though there are more bi- and multilinguals in the world than monolinguals and in spite of our own linguistic diversity." Not only has the monolingual mindset succeeded in creating the myth of the overcrowded school curriculum that has no space for any language other than English, it has also led to the "great monolingual English fallacy" where it is assumed that English has become such an effective global language that others no

longer need to be learned except by native-speakers in countries where it is the national language. But multilingualism is playing an ever greater part, as English is used by more than a billion second language speakers, who employ it as multilinguals. It is therefore vital for English native speakers to understand intercultural communication and English as the instrument of such communication.

Weighing up the costs of multilingualism and monolingualism, Michael Clyne comes to the conclusion, that it is monolingualism that Australia cannot afford "because it denies some people social justice, and all of us (and especially our younger generation) social, cultural, economic and cognitive benefits that the population of most of the rest of the world have. In today's world, one of the important skills is to understand a message underpinned by the cultural values transferred from another language."

This book is not only a pleasure to read – full of facts, figures and arguments for a truly multilingual Australia. It is also bound to stimulate the discussion about the position of languages in primary, secondary and tertiary curricula and is essential reading for all parties interested in language education. ☐

Through Macquarie's reading program, its corpus (Ozcorp), and through various consultant specialists, illustration of the meanings of terms from such published sources as novels and newspapers is a method much more widely used in this new dictionary than it was in the third edition. Macquarie and the ABC

have already cooperated to produce Australian Word Map, an interactive website which identifies regionalisms in Australian English, and many of these regionalisms are also found here. The dictionary has also sensibly recognised that phrases are themselves unitary items of language currency, and so explains idioms like

"the life of Riley" and "picking the eyes out of something" both in terms of meaning and origin.

Those who possess this edition will possess the fullest record to date of English as used by Australians in their unique location on earth, and in their increasingly complicated discourse with the world. ☐

FEED BACK 26

IN COMPARISON

Comparing this with that finds quite a few points of variable English grammar: the choice of pronoun (*I* or *me*) after *as* or *than*; the choice between *-er* and *more* for some comparative forms of adjectives, especially those with two syllables; and the selection of particular determiners, prepositions and adverbs in other cases. Each of the sentences below presents a choice for English-speakers (and writers), and we'd be interested to know which one you would be more inclined to use. Please circle your preferences. If you might use either/any of them from time to time, in different circumstances, could you please indicate the reasons in the space on the side.

1. Bob's approach was different *to/from/than* Joe's.

2. Rain did not fall *as/so* heavily as in previous years.

3. Around here the noisy miners are *commoner/more common* than sparrows.

4. There were far *less/fewer* jobs advertised in the metropolitan paper.

5. Jamie is less inclined than *I/me* to walk the distance.

6. The last creek flowed in a different direction *than/to/from* the others.

7. With *fewer/less* interruptions, the speaker can hold the audience.

8. The new recipe is far superior *than/to* the old one.

9. We had *less/fewer* than ten applicants this time.

10. The punishment was more *cruel/crueler* than it needed to be.

11. He can't be much older than *me/I*.

12. There couldn't be a *riskier/more risky* way to invest money.

13. It's great *so/as* far as we're concerned.

14. I live *fewer/less* than four hours drive from the sea.

15. Her partner was different *to what/from what/than* they expected.

16. The music they play is *more mellow/mellower* than before.

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

FEED BACK Report

Many thanks to the 560+ *AS* readers who responded to the Feedback 25 questionnaire on Levels of Agreement. Special thanks go to those who canvassed opinions from friends, family and students over the issues, whose names are gratefully acknowledged on the Editor's page above (p.6). Altogether there were 158 responses in Age group 1 (10-44); 208 in Age group 2 (45-64); and 197 in Age group 3 (65+). They provide a rich database of views on whether to construe various common English words and constructions in the singular or plural. The data were carefully processed by Style Council research assistant Yasmin Funk, and computer-analysed by *AS's* executive editor, Adam Smith. [PP]

Collective nouns

Many collective nouns denote groups of people, and so they may take either singular or plural agreement, according to whether the speaker/writer is thinking of them as a set or as individuals. The Feedback results for *army, government, committee, family* showed majority preferences for a singular verb or pronoun in agreement, in descending order: 93%, 85%, 74%, 71% – suggesting perhaps the extent to which those groups work according to a common agenda. The results also show the power of "formal agreement", allowing the grammar of the noun (singular) dictate the grammar of the verb/pronoun.

By contrast, the results for *staff, orchestra, team* showed majority endorsements of plural agreement: 64%, 61%, 58% respectively. These represent the preference for "notional agreement", i.e. allowing the grammar of the verb to be dictated by the sense that the subject noun is plural. (Any *staff* or *orchestra* consists of a sizable group of individuals.) Results for the collective noun *panel* were on the cusp, with the singular/plural vote split almost evenly: 52%/48%. Interestingly, *panel* as well as *team* and *committee* were all tested via pronoun agreement, with less pronounced results than those tested via verb agreement (the others). But as a set, the results show Australians making use of both notional and formal agreement, depending somewhat on the word.

Notional agreement in singular with plural expressions

Some expressions which are formally plural represent a singular concept or entity, and therefore speakers/writers may be inclined to use a singular verb with them. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) did this with *bed and breakfast* (despite it being a coordinated [=two-part] subject); and a majority (63%) did it with the name *Woolworths,* which is unmistakably plural in form. However only 45% did it with *drycleaners.* Closer inspection showed that respondents aged 45 and over were quite ambivalent about notional agreement for *drycleaners,* while the under 45s definitely preferred plural, allowing the plural form of the word to dictate its agreement. (See Table below)

Notional agreement in plural with singular expressions

Words singular in form such as *team* have already been mentioned as examples where notional agreement takes over for many Australians. An extra dimension on this provided by the Feedback data is that younger respondents (under 45) are much more likely than those 45 and over to prefer the plural/notional agreement. Compare the Table's results from the three age groups for *team* and for *panel.* Clearly there's a generational factor in the respondents' willingness or otherwise to use notional agreement.

Agreement with complex subjects

Feedback 25 provided several examples where a postmodified noun phrase was the subject of the verb. Three of them involved quantification, which tends to neutralize regular patterns of agreement, as usage research has shown. The results for *any of the paintings (you see)* were on the cusp (47% singular/53% plural), but with stronger preference for plural among the under 45s (see Table). Arguably their choice was partly driven by the proximity of *paintings* to the verb slot.

Proximity and notional agreement probably worked in combination for the majority of respondents, to produce the 61% preference for singular agreement with *six days of rain (in the sunshine state),* a quantitative concept. Among the under 45s the vote was even higher (70%: see Table). It was not however the majority preference among Queensland respondents where it registered its lowest support (47%). The complex subject *a spate of well-publicised terrorist attacks* also elicited singular agreement from the majority (71%). Here the under 45s were rather more in favor of the plural (see Table), suggesting that the proximity effect of *attacks* (plural) and/or the status of *a spate of* as an indefinite quantifier may be stronger for them.

Notional agreement is clearly in play for both older and younger Australians, with collective nouns and complex subjects. But its force in complex subjects may be underscored or counteracted by the number of the final noun (whether it is singular or plural in form). □

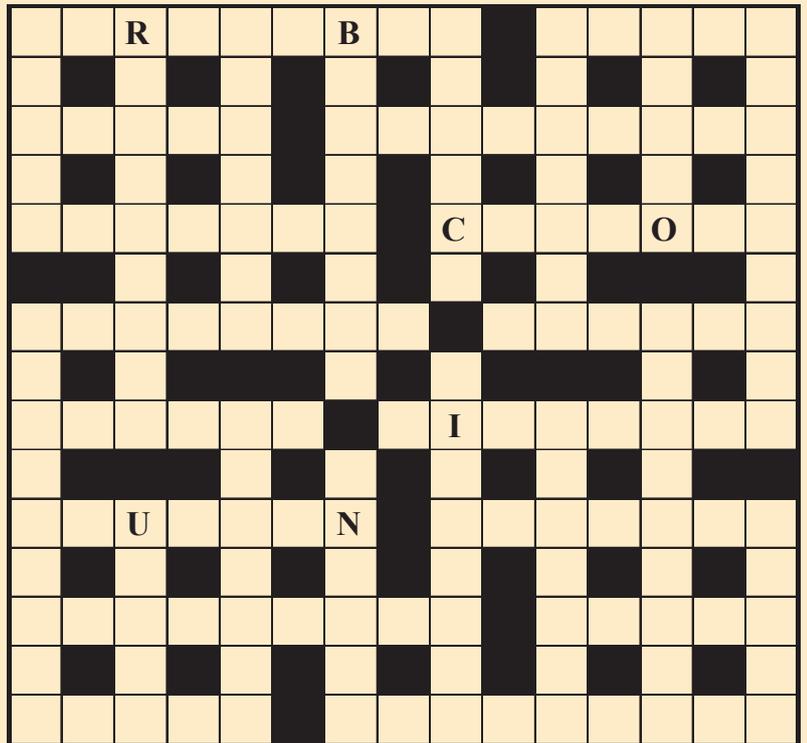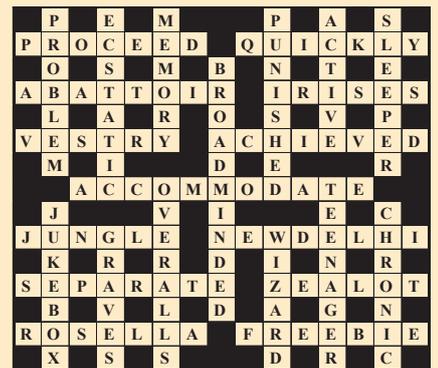|	Total		Age 1(158)		Age 2 (208)		Age 3 (197)	
	Sing.	*Plural*	*Sing.*	*Plural*	*Sing.*	*Plural*	*Sing.*	*Plural*
the dry cleaners is/are	45%	55%	37%	63%	50%	50%	47%	53%
the team...its/their	42%	58%	33%	67%	52%	48%	56%	44%
the panel...it/they	52%	48%	36%	64%	53%	47%	64%	36%
any of the paintings...is/are	47%	53%	25%	75%	54%	46%	57%	43%
six days of rain was/were	61%	39%	70%	30%	63%	37%	50%	50%
a spate of...attacks has/have	71%	29%	54%	46%	77%	23%	79%	21%

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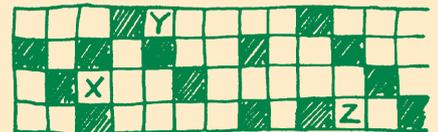
RUBICON, devised by David Astle, is a hybrid of crossword, jigsaw and acrostic. First, solve as many clues as you can and begin to fit the answers inside the grid. (The scattered letters of RUBICON should give you a toehold.) When the grid is completed, arrange the *clues* from the first Across to the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

Cabernet opener (9)
Device employing logarithmic scales (5,4)
Employer (and saviour) of Jews in Nazi Germany (9)
Escape from your own inflicted fatal? (3,3,3)
Lavatory fixture (9)
Nuclear bomb component (9)
Object designed to measure downpours (4,5)
Tiny zeppelin (9)
Eastern taxi (8)
Eternally appearing, often unwelcome, acquaintance (3,5)
Maiming (8)
Rudimentary to the max (8)
Before Adam was a boy (4,3)
Grommet's attachment in surf (3-4)
Gun-toting cash withdrawal? (7)
Old-fashioned spirit (7)
Pacific city north of Sydney (7)
Rich protein source occurring in cones (4,3)
Suds swiper at a manual car-wash (7)
Your foremost skittle (7)
A petrol pump (6)
Delectably offer (6)
Directs (6)
More than adequate (6)
Energetic Bohemian dance (5)
Entities; apartments (5)
Holly word? (5)

Instruments of torture (5)
Little wooden pin (5)
NSW's XPT, eg (5)
Vile (5)
Yard: foot, for one (5)

Solution to Rubicon in last issue
CLASSICALLY MISSPELLED WORDS: accommodate, abattoir, achieved, ecstatic, separate, proceed

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