



# AUSTRALIAN STYLE

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## Sea Words: A Historical Study from New Zealand

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One domain of New Zealand English which generates new usage from the earliest days is that of harvesting the marine environment. It reflects the fact that our first English-speaking settlements were prompted by the sealing and whaling industries. It is also an area of continued commercial and cultural significance. The strong role of Maori in the harvesting of the marine environment and the political battles to protect indigenous rights to the resource, along with the continual change from the early days of lawlessness to the intense regulation imposed by the quota management system (QMS), have ensured that this is a fertile ground for New Zealandisms.

One important role of the historical dictionary is to preserve words which may otherwise be lost, creating “treasure troves of forgotten words” (Kate Burridge, *Blooming English* 2004). Yet historical study also has the potential to reveal a dynamic, living language that illustrates linguistic and cultural change. A methodical trawl through some 150 annual Fisheries Reports (published in the *Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives* (AJHRs)) captures interesting changes in marine language.

Firstly, various changes in fish names reflect increased commercialism. Early New Zealand settlers

were noted for having limited taste for fish, but after World War Two, with food supply a priority, a wider range of fish started to be consumed. New names are found for everyday fish to enhance public perception of them.

Take *dogfish* (Australia’s *rig*) which is first mentioned in 1869. There are numerous references to this fish as a pest which when “caught in the nets tore them considerably” (AJHR 1935, H15:21). Dogfish were clearly not viewed as eating fish until the 1940s, when they appear on a table of fish caught for sale but with a name change to *pioke*. The Maori name has none of the connotations which “dog” brings to mind for a canine-friendly English speaker. When this fish began to be increasingly popular as a frying fish, it underwent a further change of name and was exported (along with *elephant fish*) as *white fillets*, a label which appears to deliberately hide the origin of the species (AJHR 1962, I 19:84). While *dogfish* served adequately to label a fish considered a net-tearing pest, it does not survive the fish’s transformation to a valuable commercial item.

Similarly, *leatherjacket* is frequently referred to in the AJHRs from 1903. Initially it was not much esteemed, but figures show its growing commercial value from the 1940s. The

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label *creamfish* is introduced for it, and by 1957 is the exclusive label being used in the official documents. Likewise, *butterfish* begins to dominate over the less appetising *greenbone* and *kelpfish*. It would be hard to deny that “fillet of creamfish” conjures up a more appetising dining experience than “plate of leatherjacket”. An exotic *surimi* salad is likely to sound more appealing than one of “processed fish bits”.

While there appears to be growing commercialisation of New Zealand’s marine resources (the catch of finfish doubled within five years in the 1970s (*AJHR* 1979, C6: 5)), there is also an attempt to downplay the exploitation by adopting language which distances the reader from seeing fish as living creatures. In the early *AJHRs*, fish are frequently *caught* and *killed*, seals and whales are *slaughtered*, and there is *destruction* of oyster populations. These are direct references to fish as living creatures. In later volumes the language used removes the idea that fish are living at all. Fish are hidden within the label of *quota*, which construes the fish as a piece of property, and those caught accidentally are *bycatch*. Rather than being killed, they are *processed* and *produced* – a label usually reserved for man-made resources. A fish species whose numbers are falling is exploited at, or near “the *maximum sustainable level*” (*AJHR* 1980, C6: 5). As the political concern for conservation has increased, so has the use of terms which distance us from the activity of fishing, while serious depletion of fish life continues.

Maori borrowings also show interesting developments in this field. In the first period examined (1856-1885), Maori words constituted 40% of the New Zealandisms identified and they were all fish names. Unsurprisingly early settlers, faced with a new landscape, adopted many

names already used by skilled Maori fishers. The reports from 1886 on yield very few new Maori borrowings. However, in the final period examined (1976-2005), Maori constitutes 35% of all new New Zealandisms identified, but only one is a fish name. The other words relate to cultural concepts and systems of management, such as *rahui*, a temporary ban on taking fish, and *taiapure*, a fishery of traditional significance. The following sentence, which may be difficult for English speakers outside New Zealand to follow, shows the extent of the borrowing:

“Tangata kaitiaki/tiaki and tangata tiaki/kaitiaki are individuals or groups who can authorise customary fishing within their rohe moana<sup>1</sup>, in accordance with tikanga Maori<sup>2</sup>” (*AJHR* 2000, C20: 434).

Emerging together are the renewed presence of Maori in the fishing industry and an increasingly diverse range of Maori loanwords to describe features of the industry, especially how it is managed. Australian and Canadian English also show the renaissance of indigenous lexical innovation. Yet the specific lexical items coined reflect local conditions, for example, *PRESA*, (pre-settlement assets), and *kaimoana* (seafood) *regulations* are born of the ongoing acknowledgment of the treaty signed between Maori and settlers in 1840. This ensures that despite observations that the homogenising forces of globalisation may reduce regional lexical variation, there are mitigating factors which promote ongoing innovation at a local level. □

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Tribal authority over a coastal area

<sup>2</sup> Maori culture, custom or habit

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# Gunzel

In the June edition of *Australian Style*, Tony Wheeler drew our attention to a British term for a trainspotter, *gricer*. The origins of the word are obscure. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (online edition) gives its origin as “uncertain” but traces its earliest use to members of the Manchester Locomotive Society. A usage note suggests that it could be a “humorous representation of a ‘received’ pronunciation of *grouser*” based on a supposed resemblance between trainspotting and grouse-shooting, although this is not entirely convincing.

Australia has its own unique term for trainspotter – *gunzel* – with its own peculiar history. Like *gricer*, its earliest use is associated with a particular group of enthusiasts, in this case the Sydney Tramway Museum. It was adapted from the American slang word *gunsel*, meaning “gangster”, in the mid-1960s, to refer to particularly obsessive rail devotees.

The connection between gunwielding criminals and trainspotters is not entirely clear. One theory (from Bob Merchant of the Sydney Tramway Museum, pers. comm.) is that there was a marked similarity between the trainspotter attire of the times – a shabby overcoat and hat – and the dress of a character called Wilmer in the film *The Maltese Falcon*, who is called a “gunsel” by Humphrey Bogart. Another is that gunsels were rather inept and would shoot indiscriminately, just as trainspotters use a camera to shoot anything that moves.

A further underworld connection is made by David Bromage (pers. comm.), who provides a list of Australian railway slang terms at <http://dbrimage.omni.com.au/slang.html>. According to him the word was commonly used in the American TV series *The Untouchables*, which was a particular favourite among members of the Tramway Museum because it often showed remnants of US tram systems.

Even the gangster sense has obscure origins. *Gunsel* originally derives from the Yiddish *genzel*, meaning “a

gosling”, and was first used in the sense of a “naïve youth”, more particularly a young male kept for sexual purposes by an older man. Apparently the transference of meaning was a direct result of a piece of trickery perpetrated by the crime writer, Dashiell Hammett. Erle Stanley Gardner, a fellow contributor to the pulp magazine *Black Mask* told the following story in *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 1965). Hammett, annoyed at being censored by his editor, included the word in a story, intimating that it meant gunman. As a furphy, he included the phrase *gooseberry lay* in the same story – an innocent enough expression in tramp’s slang for their practice of stealing washing from a line – which the editor took to be vulgar and duly removed.

This explanation sounds a bit too convenient to be true, but it’s possible that the story referred to was an early version of Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon* (1929) where *gooseberry lay* does appear, and Wilmer is described both as a gunsel and a gunman. He is also associated with an older man, Gutman, and their relationship is hinted to be sexual.

The change in meaning could have started here, or in the film of 1941. The earliest unequivocal use of *gunsel* as gunman is recorded in the OED in 1950, and this is the sense that has become most common. However, the original meaning survives, sometimes covertly as in the American prison drama *Oz* where a young college graduate by the name of Adam Guenzel becomes a sex slave in jail.

Clearly *gunzel* has a chequered history. Despite all the negative connotations attached to it, the word has been reclaimed so that, according to a recent *Sydney Morning Herald* article (*Good Weekend* 7.10.06), it is now accepted within the trainspotting community to refer to any rail enthusiast. □

*Adam Smith is a researcher with Style Council and executive editor of AS. This is an extended version of a column he wrote for Campus Review (Strictly Speaking, 25.10.06)*



# Australex 2006

Dr Ghil'ad Zuckermann is the author of *Language Contact and Lexical Enrichment in Israeli Hebrew* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and *Australian Research Fellow at the University of Queensland*. He reports on *Australex 2006* and his contribution to the conference.

The annual Australex (Australasian Association for Lexicography) conference took place in the beautiful campus of The University of Queensland on 6 July 2006. Its theme was *Dictionaries: Uses and Users*. Dianne Bardsley (Victoria University of Wellington) gave a perspicacious keynote speech on the topic of *Serving Several Masters: New Zealand's Lexicographical Landscape*. Deanna Wong discussed guides to pronunciation, María A. Barrios Spanish combinatory dictionaries, and Chris Mulhall idiomatic expressions in bilingual Italian-English dictionaries. David Moore and Bill McGregor reviewed dictionaries of Aboriginal languages from the 1930s-1960s, Kimiyuki Nishide Australianisms in English-Japanese dictionaries, and Te Awanuiarangi Black reported progress on the monolingual Maori dictionary.

Many of these presenters included discussions of word-formation, borrowing and other sources of lexical enrichment: Katherine Quigley explored New Zealand *bureaucratese*, Cherie Connor discussed marine vocabulary [see lead article], and Michel Wauthion focused on recent French lexical innovation in New Caledonia. A further event was the panel on

assimilation of loanwords, with panellists Petek Kurtböke, David Moore and myself, Ghil'ad Zuckermann.

In my own presentation, I discussed loanwords in Israeli. Israeli rather than Hebrew?

## Hebrew vs Israeli

Well, Hebrew belongs to the Canaanite division of the northwestern branch of Semitic languages. Following a gradual decline, it ceased to be spoken by the second century AD. The failed Bar-Kokhba Revolt against the Romans in Judea in AD 132-5, in which thousands of Jews were killed, marks the symbolic end of the period of spoken Hebrew. But the actual end of spoken Hebrew might have been earlier. Jesus, for example, was a native speaker of Aramaic rather than Hebrew. For more than 1700 years thereafter, Hebrew was not spoken. A most important liturgical and literary language, it occasionally served as a lingua franca for Jews of the Diaspora, but not as a mother tongue.

The genetic classification of "Israeli", the language which emerged in Palestine at the end of the nineteenth century, has preoccupied linguists since its genesis. The still prevalent traditional view suggests that Israeli is Semitic (Biblical/Mishnaic) Hebrew *revived*. The revisionist position defines Israeli as Indo-European: Yiddish *relexified*. Thus Yiddish, the "revivalists" mother tongue is the "substratum", whilst Hebrew is only a "superstratum" providing the vocabulary.

Zuckermann's *mosaic* (rather than *Mosaic*) hypothesis is that genetically modified Israeli is a semi-engineered multi-layered language, which is a Semito-European, or Eurasian hybrid, i.e. both Semitic (Afro-Asiatic) and (Indo-)European. It is based simultaneously on "sleeping beauty"/"walking dead" Hebrew, and Yiddish (both *primary contributors* rather than substrata), and other languages. Therefore, the term "Israeli" is far more appropriate than "Israeli He-

brew", let alone "Modern Hebrew" or "Hebrew" *tout court*.

Almost all revivalists, e.g. the symbolic father of Israeli, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, born Perelman, were native Yiddish-speakers who wanted to speak Hebrew, with Semitic grammar and pronunciation, like Arabs. Not only were they European but their revivalist campaign was inspired by European nationalism. Although territory and language were at the heart of European nationalism, the Jews possessed neither a national territory nor a national language. Zionism could be considered a manifestation of European discourses channelled into the Holy Land – cf. George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876).

However, the revivalists could not avoid the Ashkenazic mindset arising from their diasporic European cultural background. Their attempt to belie their (more recent) roots, negate diasporism (which was considered weak) and avoid hybridity (as reflected in Germanic Yiddish itself) failed.

## The Limited Lexis of Hebrew

The main problem the revivalists faced was that of Hebrew *lexical voids*, which were not semantic voids but cases in which purists tried to supplant unwelcome guestwords, foreignisms and loanwords. As the purists tried to use internal sources of lexical enrichment, they were hampered by a paucity of roots.

- The number of attested Biblical Hebrew words is roughly 8000, of which some 2000 are *hapax legomena* (one-offs). The number of Biblical Hebrew roots, on which many of these words are based, is roughly 2000.

- The number of attested Mishnaic Hebrew words is less than 20000, of which (i) less than 8000 are Mishnaic, i.e. they did not appear in the Old Testament (the number of new Mishnaic Hebrew roots is roughly 800); (ii) around 6000 are a subset of Biblical Hebrew; and



# Sources of Lexical Enrichment

(iii) several thousand are Aramaic words which can have a Hebrew form.

- Medieval Hebrew(s) added more than 6000 words to Hebrew.
- The approximate number of new lexical items in Israeli is 17000 (cf. 14762 in Avraham Even-Shoshan's dictionary, 1970: vii:3062).

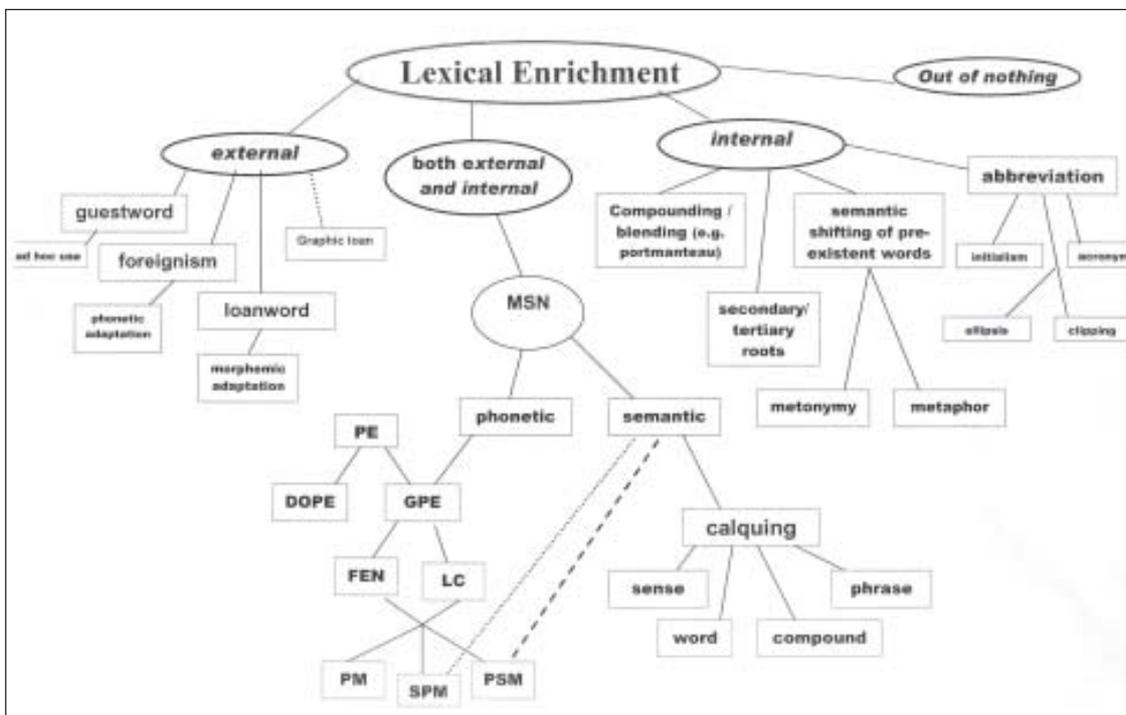
With the inclusion of foreign and technical terms I estimate that the to-

tal number of Israeli words, including words of Biblical, Mishnaic, Medieval and Maskilic descent, is more than 60000. Even-Shoshan (1970) lists 37260 words. The later Even-Shoshan (1997), the most comprehensive dictionary of Israeli, lists slightly more.

## Classification of Sources of Lexical Enrichment

Borrowing is just one source in the ensemble of sources of lexical enrichment. After all, there are many

non-external sources of lexical enrichment, as demonstrated in the comprehensive, albeit non-exhaustive, chart below, which uses the following abbreviations: FEN = folk-etymological nativization, GPE = generative popular etymology, LC = lexical conflation, MSN = multisourced neologization, PE = popular etymology (i.e. etymology), PM = phonetic matching, PSM = phono-semantic matching, SPM = semanticized phonetic matching. □



## Style Council 2007

Style Council 2007 will be held in Hobart on May 12, in conjunction with the National Editors Conference (May 9-12) at the Wrest Point Casino. The Style Council theme will be “New trends in Australian usage and style”, and it will feature speakers on current language issues from both sides of the Bass Strait. A panel and open forum will discuss the remarkable publishing phenomenon of popular usage books, such as Lynne Truss’s *Eats, shoots and leaves*, and Don Watson’s

*Death Sentence: The decay of public language*. For registration and more details about the conference see the website at <[www.ling.mq.edu.au/style](http://www.ling.mq.edu.au/style)>, and contact the Style Council conference administrator Adam Smith at <[adam.smith@mq.edu.au](mailto:adam.smith@mq.edu.au)>

The National Editors Conference in Hobart is the third biennial congress of professional editors from all Australian states. Its program will comprise three major strands: “From inspiration to publication” (a general strand), “Science and educa-

tion editing”, and “Corporate and public sector editing”, as well as a set of special seminars and workshops on Saturday 12 May (Style Council will be one of them). The conference will also facilitate meetings of the special working groups of IPED, the interim organisation of the Institute of Professional Editors. For further details, visit the Tasmanian Editors website at <[www.tas-editors.org.au](http://www.tas-editors.org.au)>. □





## From the Editor

Letters and emails from *AS* readers always bring in interesting points of language from around the country, and hundreds of responses to the regular Feedback surveys. Many thanks for all your correspondence and messages of support for our work on Australian English. We have enjoyed sustained support from the Department of Finance and Administration since 1999 in producing *AS*. But it is a real question where to turn if we have to look elsewhere. If *AS* were only available online, how would that affect you? Your ideas would be most welcome.

The meanings of *coo-ee*, raised in a letter published in *AS* (June 2006) brought in other suggestions on its use. Richard White (NSW), who is in fact writing a book on the subject for Melbourne University Press, shared some examples of its less well-known uses: (i) to say “hello” when entering a shop, and (ii) to express surprise (at the level of raunchiness in a TV program) – although in the second case the two syllables are probably pronounced with more level pitch than the first, where the pitch of the second syllable is “short, sharp, high”.

The origins of *coo-ee* were also discussed by correspondents. David Meagher (NSW) suggested that its use as an expression of surprise owes something to the British English exclamation *cool* and that British immigrants would have interpreted *cooee* as an Australian variant of it, with the classic Aussie ending. A correspondent from Argentina, Karl Henne, suggested that it might be an Indianism dating back to the Raj, picking up a note from the biography of Lachlan Macquarie (published by Angus and Robertson, 1972) which explains it as a means by which a visitor announced their arrival to the servants: “clapping one’s hands and calling *koee*”.

But according to the *Australian National Dictionary* (1988), *coo-ee* was a very early Aboriginal loanword, first recorded in the 1790s as an Aborigi-

nal calling signal meaning “come here”. (To some of us, it sounds like a tuneful imitation of the whip bird’s call.) Reports from Perth (1834) and Port Philip Bay (1841) suggest that it was used by Aborigines across the country, and also by settlers everywhere. An *AND* citation from 1872 reports that it was used by a colonial returning with his wife to London, when he was separated from her in a Fleet Street crowd.

So strong a chord did *coo-ee* strike in the nation that it figured in a World War I poster recruiting Australian soldiers for the war front in the Dardanelles: a digger cups his hands with the words “Coo-ee – Won’t YOU come?” A more controversial variant of this was published last Anzac Day in the name of raising the Australian birth rate. It appealed to couples in a stable relationship to have a(nother) child, using the line “Coo-ee – Won’t YOU help?” Meanwhile, a private publisher (Holly Smith, NSW) shared with us her children’s picture book titled *The Billabong Games*, in which Kooee Koala is a central character.

Colloquialisms are a core element of Australian English, and new ones pop up in everyday talk. Judith Rodriguez (VIC) found an example in an *Age* feature article about a strange personality who “just creeped everybody out” at the restaurant, in the view of a 21-year-old waitress. Clearly this isn’t based on the ordinary verb *creep* “move slowly”, because *creep out* has neither its meaning nor its (intransitive) grammar. Rather its meaning seems to come from the phrase “give (someone) the creeps” (i.e. “strike sinister fear into (someone)” and/or the adjective *creepy*; and its grammar from phrasal verbs such as *freak out*. Nothing like it is yet recorded in Australian dictionaries. We wait to see whether it gathers steam in Melbourne, and spreads to other Australian cities.

From Alice Springs comes *hosie* meaning “a hose operator”, heard

by Dick Kimber (NT) when a two-person team came to the house to refill the gas cylinder. The one who dragged the large connecting hose down the driveway was referred to by the other as “the hosie”. In occupational slang it’s not uncommon for people to be known by the tool or instrument that they typically use. Compare *chalkie*, used for a teacher (or in pre-electronic days, a stock exchange assistant).

Fresh coinage at the loftier end of the language scale was reported by Hans Colla (VIC), as he substituted the new fourth edition of the *Macquarie Dictionary* for an old first edition: it would remain the “dictionary emeritus”. □

### Feedback Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the following, who sent in batches of FEEDBACK questionnaires on behalf of others.

Ray Forma, Methodist Ladies’ College, WA (172); Robyn Whitely, Shire Systems, VIC (140); Sienta van der Hoeven, University of South Australia SA (21); Jim Davey, Caterpillar Global Mining, VIC (17); Justus Angwin, Glengara Retirees Mostly, NSW (16); Veronica (Fin) McShane, Office of Post-compulsory Education and Training, TAS (14); Peter Last, SA (11); Audrey Hudspeth, TAS (11); Ann Nobles, SA (10); R G Kitchen, Rostrum Club 23, VIC (10); J Seaborn, NSW (9); Ivor F, Doonside Aero Club, NSW (9); Joan Lonudon, U3A Hobart, TAS (9); E Castle, Tungkillio SA (8); Teaching Support Centre, South West TAFE, VIC (8); Judy Allen, NSW (8); Hans Colla, U3A Nuts and Bolts of English, VIC (8); Persistent Vision, VIC (7); Sunset Coast Literati, WA (7); Lyneve Rapelle, TechWriter placements and services, NSW (6); A Creative Writing class, VIC (6); Aspley Classes for Seniors (French), QLD (5); Out-of-housers, QLD (5); Anne Gunter, VIC (3); Dornell Wylie, QLD (3).



# Letters to the Editor

Hi Pam,

Writing “cheers” as a way of signing off reminded me to point out this common usage, quite different to the usual sense of a toast to one’s health. I was first introduced to the use of “cheers” in this alternative sense by an English friend, who would always use it to end a phone conversation or when seeing you out the door. My brother, an air traffic controller, was introduced to it by English pilots, who would invariably sign off with “cheers” (usually pronounced in a toffy accent as ‘chers’) when acknowledging permission to take off, land, etc. This caused a deal of confusion among the less linguistically experienced controllers, who thought the pilots were saying “geez” in exasperation at the controller’s ineptness! I now use “cheers” commonly for signing off emails and letters in a friendly, casual way, and suspect it is creeping slowly into the Australian vocabulary.

cheers,  
David Meagher  
via email

Dear Pam,

There’s an interesting case of what may be phonological interference going on. *Incident* as in “occurrence” seems to be meshing with *instance* as in “example”. Sometimes fast speakers produce the solecism *incidences* as the plural. Although they usually pull themselves up and rephrase the utterance. Maybe it’s because *incident* and *instance* not only sound alike but have a similar reference in some cases. The noun *incidence*, of course, is usually used in a specific context – e.g. medical statistics – and has no plural.

Trevor Conomy  
Kotara, NSW

Dear Pam,

Being somewhat shocked by Roger Frankenberg’s article in Vol. 14 No.1 of *Australian Style*, I have spoken with Adam Furphy, Managing Director of the Shepparton company which supplied water carts to the Army. He assures me that his company never manufactured sanitary carts, a term commonly applied to purpose-built vehicles formerly in common use for collecting night-soil in unsewered areas. What J. Murphy & Sons did supply to the Broadmeadows Army Camp in 1914 was a small number of water carts which were placed near the latrines for troops to use as hand washing facilities.

It is unfortunate that War Historian Charles Bean chose to use sanitary as a synonym for hygiene; his choice of words has confused a number of people.

Likewise, Bean speaks of “scavenging through the lines”, again using an older (and mostly British) term. What he meant, in Plain Australian, was flushing clean in the interests of hygiene. See, for example, ACOD

scavenger 3.Brit. archaic. Frankenberg’s final paragraph refers to furphy as apparently a “default” version which arose during WWII, ignoring the many pre-1939 citations given by W.S.Ramson in AND: G.A.Wilkes in *A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms*, and Sidney J. Baker in *The Australian Language* (1986 rpt). Baker (p.76) also spoke of carts “for water and sanitary purposes” which may be misleading to some present-day readers unfamiliar with older terminology.

On a personal note, I well recall being sent from class in the mid-1930s to memorize the text cast in iron and attached to a FURPHY cart being used by road repairers outside the school grounds. My task was to report back “Good Better Best, Never Let It Rest etc”, following which the class was instructed by our ANZAC schoolmaster on the importance of the water cart to troops in Egypt and how furphies had been imported to the camp.

Keith Groom  
via email

'Foot Falcon'

Guided Walking Tours of Alice Springs

Stroll around the centre of town, an easy 2km walk, with long term local resident, Linda Wells.

Learn about this unique place. Indigenous History, Pioneering History, Stories, Poetry, the Todd River, Local Characters. Plenty of time for your questions.

This advertisement sent in by Dick Kimber (NT) features the term foot falcon used in Aboriginal English to refer to “going on foot” rather than using any other form of locomotion. It updates shanks pony to the automotive age.





## Lost for Words

Ruth Wajnryb writes the weekly WORDS column in The Sydney Morning Herald's Spectrum. Her forthcoming book, *Cheerio Tom Dick and Harry*. Dispatches from the Hospice for Fading Words (*Allen and Unwin, May 2007*) overviews a fading lexicon – words and phrases that the Baby Boomer generation have not been passing on to the next generations. Here she reviews *Lost for Words* by H. Lunn, ABC Books, 2006, RRP\$32.95 and *Gallimaufry* by M. Quinion (OUP, 2006) RRP \$42.95

For the last few years, we have seen the genre of books-about-language move from a fashion of the moment to a relatively steady production. Without any hard core evidence, I tend to put this down to the fact that for a long time now – in NSW since 1966 – cohorts of young people are leaving school having undergone twelve years of education containing very little formal grammar. Hence the nostalgia

(for what they could've had but didn't) as well as the massive over-attribution (I can't write because I didn't "get" grammar). All in all, a ready market of readers of books-about-language.

Many of these books focus on new word coinage (eg. Dent *The Language Report* (OUP, 2006); Crozier, McKeown & Summers, *I Smirt, You Stooze, They Krump* (Collins, 2006); Wajnryb *Funktionary. A Cheeky Collection of Contemporary Words* (Lothian, 2005)). This is not surprising considering we're living through a particularly prolific phase of word development in English. However, the two books being reviewed here mark a departure. *Lost for Words* by Hugh Lunn and *Gallimaufry*, by Michael Quinion are both concerned with old words leaving the language.

*Gallimaufry* is subtitled *A Hodgepodge of our Vanishing Vocabulary*, and is written by that lexically erudite linguist, Michael Quinion, he of website fame ([www.worldwidewords.org](http://www.worldwidewords.org)). On the front cover, a man is walking along carrying a large dictionary, looking stalwartly ahead, oblivious to the fact that his dictionary is steadily leaking words. The ones falling out are "rosolio" (a medicinal cordial), "loggets" (an outdoor rec-

reational game that involved throwing heavy sticks about), "flummery" (a porridge-like dish typically served with honey or milk), "billycock" (a fashionable hard round hat), "orpharion" (a popular 17<sup>th</sup> century musical instrument) and "doublet" (a short padded jacket worn by men), all of which shout "obsolete". They're but a sample of what's to follow.

Quinion doesn't claim to be exhaustive. He picks his words from a small number of categories meant to reflect important aspects of ordinary everyday life: food and drink; health and medicine; entertainment and leisure, transport and fashion; names, employment and communications. And all the while he is mindful of why words fall into disuse (very few actually totally vanish): we have new ways of talking about things ("bosoms" are now "breasts" or "boobs"); literal meanings give way to figurative ones (a "harbinger" was the man sent ahead of a traveling party to organize lodgings); the things that words refer to no longer exist ("penny", "mile", "liberty bodice").

Hugh Lunn's is a very different book. Subtitled *Australia's Lost Language in Words and Stories*, it's a zealous recreation of a yesteryear. If Quinion writes with the cool detachment of a lexical historian, Lunn writes with the passionate yearning for a world and a language that used to be. He goes back to the colourful phrases of urban Australia in the 1940s, 50s and 60s and bemoans their passing, blaming American-influenced television, educational shifts and rapid cultural change. He says: "Language tells us who we are: because we are the words we use"; and he's right. We are no longer a mid-twentieth century nation, and it shows. *Lost for Words* is a treasury of fading words, a collection of lists, vintage photography, and a purpose-written radio



## The Fight for English

David Crystal's latest book on the English language, designed for the general market, embodies several aims. Its subtitle shows its interest in explaining the great success of Lynne Truss's book on punctuation (*Eats, shoots and leaves*, 2003, reviewed in *AS* 12.1). Crystal's explanation for the Truss phenomenon is to set it within the long history of language-critiquing to which English has been subjected – more than a millennium of commentary on the rights and wrongs of the language.

Crystal's first twelve chapters profile the succession of linguistic anxieties and oppositions recorded since Anglo-Saxon times. He begins with Aelfric's concern over the divergences in Old English manuscripts between regional dialects, variation which translates centuries later into the issue of city v. country dialect faced by Caxton as the pioneer of printing in England. The opposition acquires a sociolinguistic edge in Elizabethan times, when courtly, civilised language is contrasted with unlettered, rustic language in the plays of Shakespeare and others. It morphs into the modern interchange between stylistic alternatives, between lofty, erudite styles and plain, natural language closer to everyday speech, which have gone in and out of fashion to the present day.

With each century, Crystal notes the key players in these linguistic contentions: the authors, censors and

protectors of particular points of English – the long line of language pundits to which Truss belongs. But his more fundamental aim is to highlight the continually changing state of the language, and to help people “understand it, come to terms with it, and thus manage it” (p.89). His passion for it occasionally erupts, to defend those who are “conned” or made to feel inferior by “a linguistically brainwashed boss ... or teacher” (p.122) over a split infinitive.

Crystal's chapter 13 signals a shift in the latter part of the book, from the historical phases of language commentary, to pervasive issues such as the quest for authority, and the concern with appropriateness and other abstracts such as “perspicuity”, “purity”, “propriety”, “precision”, the p-words which became watchwords for C18 grammarians and later usage commentators. These thematic chapters are each written around a particular usage crux, such as the roles of *will* and *shall*, prepositions-at-end-of-sentence, restrictive relatives, dangling participles, with judicious commentary on them. Crystal provides brief overviews of contemporary issues in punctuation, spelling and pronunciation, with interesting comments on the current status of RP (“received pronunciation”). It was once Britain's most prestigious accent, but spoken now by less than 2% of the population.

Despite his frustration with the language pundits, and being labeled an “anything goes” man, Crystal ulti-

*Pam Peters is editor of Australian Style and director of the Dictionary Research Centre at Macquarie University. She reviews The Fight for English: how language pundits ate, shot, and left by David Crystal (Oxford UP, 2006) RRP \$32.95*

mately finds grounds for optimism. The fact that some language pundits, including Lynne Truss, write with humor is a saving grace – especially if they “shoot and leave”! Revisions to the English language curriculum ensure that British schools are now encouraged to balance the formal study of language structure with that of language use in all its diversity. Broadcasters (= BBC) can now relish the variety of English accents, instead of denying their existence.

With its sequence of short, readable chapters and accessible accounts of some of the more recherché controversies of the English language, the *Fight for English* will serve the wider reading public well. Those familiar with the medieval and modern literature on English usage will also find insights through Crystal's fresh framing of the material. □

*Continued from page 8*

(sorry, wireless) serial. But it exaggerates – “if we adopt the language of another society, we lose our rights of memory in our own kingdom” – and ultimately, the stance detracts from a volume of considerable historical and lexical interest.

If nostalgia is a function of rapid social change, then these two books about disappearing words might be explained by the times we live in. Then again, they might simply be part of the renascent interest in language that has spread across the

English-speaking world in the last decade. Or if you like, we can attribute it to those cohorts of grammarless school-leavers wondering what they missed. □



# FEED BACK

—28—

## VERBAL VARIANTS

Verbs give sentences their muscle power as well as their flexibility. All the verbal constructions below can be worded in more than one way, with more or less the same meaning. Looking at each of the pairs below, please (a) indicate which version you are more likely to use by ticking the relevant box; and (b) note whether you would use them in the same context (e.g. when speaking, or when writing).

1. Yesterday's avalanche in the Austrian Alps has killed three skiers.   
Yesterday's avalanche in the Austrian Alps killed three skiers.
2. They were divorced after three years of marriage.   
They got divorced after three years of marriage.
3. That clock needs mending.   
That clock needs to be mended.
4. The company tried to prevent them from taking a class action.   
The company tried to prevent them taking a class action.
5. When did they start working on it?   
When did they start to work on it?
6. The school will help them find a work placement.   
The school will help them to find a work placement.
7. Our visitor likes to sing in the shower.   
Our visitor likes singing in the shower.
8. He may have died if the ambulance hadn't arrived.   
He might have died if the ambulance hadn't arrived.
9. I prefer driving without the air conditioning.   
I prefer to drive without the air conditioning.
10. The children tried to ice-skate on the frozen fields.   
The children tried ice-skating on the frozen fields.
11. The device will start buzzing when your food is ready.   
The device will start to buzz when your food is ready.
12. The first goal has been scored by Cavallero.   
The first goal was scored by Cavallero.
13. Without the dog barking, the burglar may have escaped.   
Without the dog barking, the burglar might have escaped.

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

Negative statements and questions can usually be expressed in more than one way, and Australians responding to the survey showed that they make something of most of the options. Only when the choice is between a contracted negative and a contracted modal verb (*I won't v. I'll not*) is there an overwhelming preference (95%) for the first construction, in the two sentences tested.

In other cases, the pattern of preference was less marked. When it came to the choice between using *no one* and *nobody* in two sample sentences, the majority (73%, 69%) plumped for the first, in keeping with the dominant preference worldwide. In the northern hemisphere, *nobody* is more often found in speech, but there was little evidence of it in the comments added.

When two or more negative items are correlated with *neither*, traditional grammar had it that the second (and subsequent items) should be prefaced by *nor* rather than *or*. This was endorsed by 75% of respondents overall when there were just two options, although within that majority there was a very strong age gradient, so that only 48% of those in Age 1 favored *nor*, as against 90% in Age 4. When the sentence presented three options, the preference for *nor* was less marked overall (66% for the second item; 54% for the third). Again those figures mask the fact that those in Age 4 were more than twice as likely to endorse *nor* than those in Age 1. As one (presumably older) survey respondent noted

Feedback survey 27 ("Putting it in the negative") received a bumper crop of responses from 802 readers. Special thanks go to those who shared the questionnaire with friends, family, colleagues and students, whose input is acknowledged on the Editor's page above (p.6). Altogether there were 217 responses in age group 1 (10-24); 85 in age group 2 (25-44); 248 in age group 3 (45-64); and 233 in age group 4 (65 and over). The data were carefully processed by Style Council research assistant Yasmin Funk, and computer-analysed by AS's executive editor, Adam Smith. [PP]

	Total		Age 1(217)		Age 2 (85)		Age 3 (248)		Age 4 (233)	
	no	any	no	any	no	any	no	any	no	any
There <b>is no/isn't any</b> answer	65%	35%	62%	38%	64%	36%	69%	31%	66%	34%
There <b>are no/aren't any</b> short cuts...	62%	38%	43%	57%	58%	42%	69%	31%	73%	27%
...authorities say there <b>aren't any/are no...</b>	59%	41%	42%	58%	61%	39%	67%	33%	66%	34%

ruefully: "It was dinned into us. I would probably choke if I tried to say *neither...or!*"

Age differences also showed up in the choice between *is/are no* and *isn't/aren't any*. The majority preference (around 60%: see table above) was for the first structure in all three sentences which presented it: *is no answer, are no short cuts, are no breeders*. In the second and third cases there was again an age gradient with only 43% (42%) of Age 1 respondents endorsing *are no*, and 73% (66%) of those in Age 4. Grammarians might comment that the constructions with *no* have it integrated it into the noun phrase, which to some seems more seems more elegant and literary.

In another set of examples, the choice between *no* and *any* was coupled in with a choice of auxiliaries, creating the three possibilities of *have no, haven't any* or *don't have any*. The first of those has been regarded as the British preference, and it was the winner in that three-way contest for two of the three sentences in which it was available *have no respect, have no option* (see table below). The second preference in each case was *don't have any*, the general American

preference. But in one of the three sentences, *don't have any (real reason)* outscored the *have no* construction, reversing the rankings. The difference here may have been occasioned by the presence of an adjective in the noun phrase following *any/no*. In none of these three data sets was there any age effect.

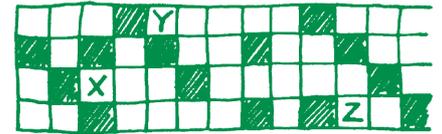
Yet in a related pair of options, between *do you have any?* and *have you any?* there was a clear age gradient supporting the first construction, historically regarded as the American preference. Overall it scored a majority of 83% with *do you have any photos...?* and 74% with *do you have any recollection...?* But the endorsements of Age 1 were respectively 92% and 91%; as against 61%/56% for Age 4. It seems then that the interrogative *do you have any?* construction is very much on the rise with younger people, while the declarative equivalents *don't have any/have no* are relatively stable alternatives right across the age spectrum. □

	Total			Age 1 (217)			Age 2 (85)			Age 3 (248)			Age 4 (233)		
	don't	haven't	have	don't	haven't	have	don't	haven't	have	don't	haven't	have	don't	haven't	have
I <b>don't have any/haven't any/have no</b> respect for him.	39%	8%	52%	59%	6%	35%	45%	2%	52%	36%	9%	55%	30%	13%	57%
We <b>have no/don't have any/haven't any</b> option...	36%	14%	50%	53%	7%	41%	43%	9%	48%	32%	14%	54%	21%	22%	57%
I <b>haven't any/have no/don't have any</b> real reason to go.	47%	15%	38%	63%	6%	32%	59%	9%	33%	45%	15%	40%	33%	25%	42%



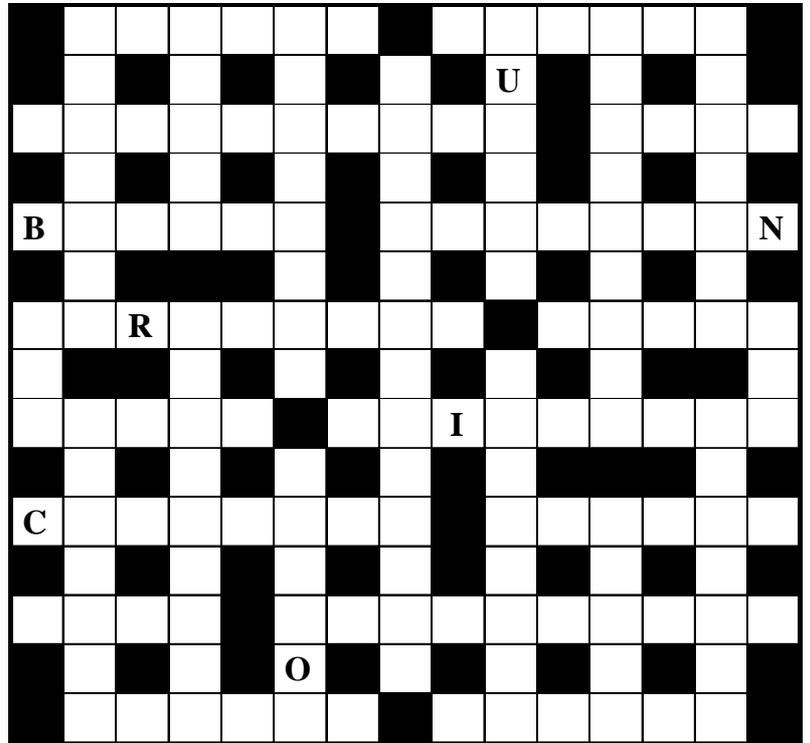


# RUBICON

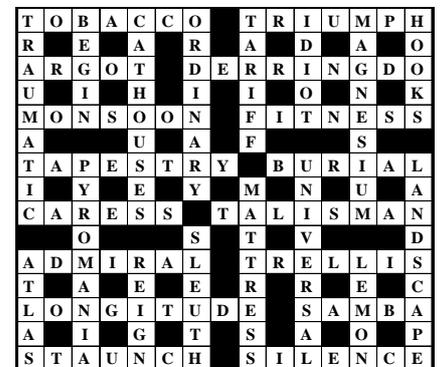


RUBICON, devised by David Astle, is a hybrid of crossword, jigsaw and acoustic. First, solve as many clues as you can and begin to fit the answers inside the grid. (The scattered letters of RUBICON should give you a toehold.) When the grid is completed, arrange the *clues* from the first Across to the last Down – their 31 initial letters will spell a category. As a bonus, which six of your answers belong to the category in question?

- Individual devoted to outrageous gossip (13)
- Registering at a motel (8,2)
- Rife misnomer encasing a graphite core (4,6)
- Attention-seeker's aim (9)
- Embellished sheets for domestic surrounds (9)
- It describes parrot speech (9)
- Scandinavian (9)
- Apertures (8)
- Interloper in the altogether (8)
- Notorious baby-kissing period; military operation (8)
- Upwardly mobile pig of Animal Farm? (8)
- L-platers in the boudoir? (7)
- Mysteriously I COHERE for so long? (7)
- Term expressing surprise; skies (7)
- Zero-year-old? (3-4)
- Acquired illegally (6)
- Any CD's songs; footprints (6)
- Eensy-weensy crustacean? (6)
- Extras or The Office (6)
- Goblet-like flowers (6)
- Our nearest sultanate (6)
- \_\_\_\_\_ State Building (6)
- Verily everything in existence (6)
- Altogether (5)
- Middle-man (5)
- Model suited to family road trips (5)
- Sudden terror (5)
- Insistent feline sounds; stables (4)
- Tonal signal on an answering machine (4)
- Nonce (3)
- This little piggy... (3)



**Solution to Rubicon in last issue**  
 ENGLISH WORDS THAT DERIVE FROM ARABIC: Monsoon, talisman, admiral, tariff, mattress, lemon



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#### By Phone:

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.

