

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DICTIONARY  
CENTRE

Newsletter No. 6, 1992

### The difficulty with newsletters

Is keeping them going! The last newsletter went out late in 1991 and was the only one for that year. This looks as if it will be the only one this year: despite all the Editor's good intentions, there simply has not been time, and many of life's little courtesies have suffered. Please accept the Centre's apologies.

### The review

This is the fifth year of the Centre's existence. It was established for five years in the first instance, with the requirement that it be reviewed before the end of the fourth year (1991). A review committee, consisting of Professor Andrew Pawley (Chair), Department of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific Studies, ANU, Dr Bill Krebs, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bond University, Mrs Pam Peters, School of English and Linguistics, Macquarie University, and Dr Richard Campbell, Dean, Faculty of Arts, ANU, was appointed, its terms of reference being

1. to review the Centre's record of research and other contributions to the University;

2. to consider: whether the Centre should continue and, if so, whether it should continue in its current form;

whether there are changes that should be made in the direction of the Centre;

whether there are changes that should be made which will increase the effectiveness of the Centre;

aspects of the Faculty's strategic planning which are relevant to the review.

The review committee met on 9 and 10 October 1991, and recommended that, subject to certain changes in its *modus operandi*, the Centre should continue. There followed negotiations with Oxford, at the completion of which a revised agreement was signed by Sir Roger Elliott, Chairman of the Delegates, and the Vice-Chancellor, Professor L.W. Nichol on 25 June 1992. The Centre is thus relatively secure for another five years, beginning in 1993.

The main thrust of the review committee's report was directed towards the restoration of the Centre's research function. This had been declared at the outset - the Centre's twin aims were seen as 'lexicographical research and production' - but the pressure of the dictionary production side of the operation had meant that the research function had been increasingly neglected. This in turn meant that, despite the considerable advances made through the introduction of computerised systems - for handling new citations, for instance - the full benefits of

this technology for research were simply not being realised. The review committee therefore recommended that care be taken to ensure that the senior staff of the Centre had 50 per cent of their time and energy available for research, that the revision and refinement of AND material should be given primacy, and that 'the Centre, with its Advisory Committee, establish a set of achievable goals and objectives for the duration of the revised agreement'.

To this end the Advisory Committee has been expanded to include the Heads of the two Linguistics Departments in the University (Dr H.J. Koch and Professor Pawley), a representative of an outside publisher (Mr G. Grayston, Editor of the *Australian Government Style Manual*), and an 'outside' lexicographer (Dr B. Moore). Its new terms of reference are

(a) to advise the Head of the Centre and the Managing Director of OUPA on the Centre's research and production programme; and

(b) to monitor the Centre's activities, in particular the overall allocation of time and resources to research and production.

At its meeting on 25 June the Advisory Committee endorsed a set of achievable goals and objectives for the duration of the revised agreement, as well as noting the research plans of senior staff.

#### **The best-laid schemes**

Australian Research Council grants are becoming more and more competitive.

There seems also to be a shift in policy which works against data collection: the Centre at present has a two-year grant (of \$25000 per year) notice of which contained the ominous warning that 'funding for 1993 represents the final allocation to be provided for this research'. A direct appeal to the Minister for Employment, Education and Training drew a response from a senior adviser to the Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services which was plain enough:

'I appreciate your concerns regarding the financial future of the Centre, particularly with regard to the ongoing nature of the data collection and the need to maintain an impetus while the collection and analysis of data remain feasible. I regret to inform you, however, that there are no Departmental programs which directly provide ongoing assistance for specific research projects. I hope that your project will succeed in finding appropriate sources of funds to allow it to achieve greater self sustainability.'

Hardest blow of all was the ARC's rejection of a bid for a Collaborative Research Grant (with Oxford University Press as a partner) to undertake the building of a 100 million word Australian corpus - with the curt message that 'the panel regarded the proposal as more suitable to be undertaken as contract research' (though it has so far failed to define this) and that 'other proposals demonstrated more competitively that they were of economic or social benefit to Australia'.

There is perhaps a glimmer of hope in the Australian Academy of the Humanities' offer of moral support, its recognition that 'data collection, collation and related research was an ongoing process', and its view that 'to abandon the [AND] project at this time would be to negate the concept of a national dictionary'. But the plain truth is that the Centre will find it very difficult to meet both its research and production obligations on its present level of funding.

**Are lexicographers unusually chalcenterous?**

It was in June 1991 that the eighth edition of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* arrived here on disk - it was in July 1992 that the second edition of the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* was delivered to the publisher on disk. It sounds easy but it placed an enormous strain on our full-time resources (and made a nonsense of the 50/50 arrangement). ACOD is due for publication in November (1992) and we - both OUPA and the Centre - have learned about a lot of things the hard way. Two of us edited manually, with the help of a search and display mechanism which greatly simplified checking. But we still had to draft entries the old way. There is no short-cut to that! Then the changes we made (all 25000, of them, at a very rough estimate) had to be keyed in, the keying had to be checked, etc. Some changes (eg -ize to -ise) could be made globally, and a lot of the cross-referencing was checked by the programmer - but the disk we had received was sometimes intractable and the software often of the bent nail variety. Still, we were only a matter of days

outside our deadline - and only .05% over the agreed length.

And now APOD. Bruce Moore, of the Australian Defence Force Academy, has been invited to edit a new edition of the *Australian Pocket* and has started off with admirable enthusiasm (the rest of us being sadly jaded). He is now proceeding down the same track - the experience of having done the *Concise* will make many things easier. But his handwritten entries still have to be keyed in (by Jacqui Woodland), and checked - the whole business is very labour-intensive for a unit of this size. There is no doubt that we can produce better dictionaries by using computer technology, but there is no doubt also that the Centre is bearing a lot of the costs formerly met by the publisher. The dream had been of machine-readable copy leaving the Cottage and being miraculously transformed into printed pages - and this remains a dream.

Once APOD is published the Centre will have established a lexicographical lineage that looks back to OED2 and AND - as well as having supplied OUPA with its bread-and-butter lines. What else has there been?

Following Shirley Purchase's highly successful *Australian Writers' and Editors' Guide* (1991) came the *Australian Reference Dictionary* (1991), edited by Anne Godfrey-Smith, Janet Hadley Williams, Joan Hughes, and Shirley Purchase. This was a new venture for the Centre, being an encyclopaedic dictionary - which required the drafting of entries for a substantial list of Australian people,

places, etc. It seems to have been a success, some 9500 having been sold.

#### **And there is more imminent**

Of the sort of publication that the Centre is uniquely fitted to produce or to support. Bruce Moore's *Lexicon of Cadet Language* is finished, but delayed by publication difficulties. It should be available early next year. Orders can be placed with Bibliotech, Australian National University, GPO Box 4, Canberra ACT 2601. Gary Simes' *Australian Underworld Slang* is with Oxford and scheduled for April. Brian Taylor and Gerhard Leitner's bibliography of writings on Australian and New Zealand English is coming up the final straight and will be published by the Centre. Jay Arthur's *Aboriginal English* (also to be published by Oxford) is well under way, as is Maureen Brooks and Joan Ritchie's *Words from Western Australian Newspapers*. And of course APOD.

#### **And the other activities?**

Bill Ramson is at last able to go through the Reject File (containing all those words that did not find a place in AND first time around) and is culling second time possibles. And sometimes certainties, like *amar*, an earlier and unrecognised form of *namma*, and *kangaroo foot*, a less elegant version of *kangaroo paw*, antedating the latter by some thirty odd years. Joan Hughes has begun on the Australian National Library backlog and is slowly making her way through possible sources for names of flora and fauna. (The Centre has lost

Pauline Fanning, who has finally retired as its bibliographer, but has found a replacement in Kay Walsh, who assisted Pauline in producing AND's Select Bibliography, and who is keeping those bibliography entries coming in). Harriet Michell is working on the corpus project (see below), setting up a system for producing specialised dictionaries (WA words and Aboriginal English) with minimal manual effort, and recovering from the last days of the production of ACOD. Julia Robinson is processing those myriads of suggestions and references that have come in over the past five years and preparing them for entry into the composite file. And Dorothy Savage is keying away vigorously - she (and Betty Warner before her) having keyed in some 25,000 citations, mostly from regional sources but increasingly from updating sources. The aim is to get the updating program to the point at which it is routine maintenance, and to have AND2 ready for the publisher's call.

#### **An Australian National Corpus, or the Australian Magpie Corpus?**

Notice of the Centre's interest in a corpus project was given in Newsletter No.2, 1990. Since then efforts have been made (through Australex) to make this a genuinely cooperative venture, and a bid made for a Collaborative Research Grant (see above). In the meantime Harriet Michell and Hilary Kent are collecting the readily collectable and trying to suss out what else is available. It is intended that the corpus will contain specially selected written and spoken texts representative of the varieties of English used by

Australians from all sections of our community. It will include a diverse collection of language such as that used in newspapers and magazines, community newsletters, speeches, novels, short stories, essays and lectures, parliamentary debates and transcripts of court hearings, broadcast material, interviews and reminiscences. The texts will be stored electronically and searched and should yield valuable information about grammar and language structure, new words, new meanings, spelling, and usage.

Hilary Kent has contacted a variety of community, business and government organisations and so far has a respectable 33% favourable response (there are no negative responses). Shortly the process of incorporating this material into the corpus will begin in earnest. At the moment a tiny 330,000-word corpus is being used to try out a variety of search techniques. If you know of any transcribed interviews or suitable written material please contact us. Our aim at this stage is to collect regardless of balance, the only constraint being that of cost, and eventually to model ourselves closely upon the British National Corpus, with which the Centre's relationship is in the process of being formalised.

### **Dictionary Research Centre, Macquarie University**

The Centre is to be congratulated on winning a substantial grant from the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia to promote wider community participation in its now well-established Style Council. As a gesture of goodwill

this Centre is distributing *Australian Style* to its corresponding members.

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