

# AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DICTIONARY CENTRE

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## Email lexicography

One of the joys of email is the readiness with which it assuages the loneliness of the long-distance lexicographer. The Centre has been in frequent touch with Penny Silva, of the Dictionary of South African English who contributed the following piece and Harry Orsman, of the Dictionary of New Zealand English. We have most recently established contact with Katherine Barber in Canada. The Centre has for some years been offering OWLS (the Oxford Word and Language Service). Queries come in at the rate of 3 or 4 a week. Most of them can be answered 'in-house', but a few require checking in Oxford, or in the other regional English dictionaries. This checking is done by email and is quick and efficient, providing a unique service.

## Dictionary of South African English

The Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles is to be published by Oxford University Press in 1994. It is estimated that it will contain between 900000 and one million words (about 750 pages). The Volume will be A4 in size, and will include about 6000 headwords.

In 1969 work began at Rhodes University on South African English lexicography, with a pilot study initiated by Prof W.R.G. Branford under the auspices of the Institute for the Study of English in Africa. A research grant from the Human Sciences Research Council in 1970 enabled the appointment of the first full-time professional assistant, and a

start was made on the collection of context-cards. The drafting of entries began in 1972 and by the end of 1973 the first 1000 entries had been written. From 1975 funding was granted by the Department of National Education for the compilation of a *Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles*, a further contribution being made by the Rhodes University Council. In 1976 a report was produced for the sponsors, called *Voorloper* - literally 'One who walks ahead'. This unpublished volume contained approximately 1000 entries. A sequel in four volumes, called *Agterryer* - 'One who rides behind' - was produced in 1983.

During these early years the Unit had a small staff with Prof W.R.G. Branford as Senior Author. Mrs Penny Silva was Assistant Editor from August 1970 to December 1973. Mrs Jean Branford (Dr Branford from 1976) worked part-time in the Unit from 1971-76, during which period she prepared her general reader's *Dictionary of South African English* (first published in 1978 by OUP, Cape Town, with three subsequent editions). Dr Branford was a full-time member of the Unit from 1977 until June 1989, with Mrs Margaret Britz as Assistant Editor (1977-91). Prof W.R.G. Branford edited the *South African Pocket Oxford Dictionary* in 1987.

During 1989/90, with the decision having been made to work towards publication in 1994, the staff complement rose from six to twelve, and the management of the project was

reorganized. In 1990, Mrs Penny Silva became full-time Acting Editor. Work began on a systematic final editing of completed entries, and the drafting of unwritten material was speeded up. The formalizing of a publishing contract with OUP was initiated.

From the beginning the Unit had been an ad hoc research body, with staff contracts renewable on an annual basis, and with continued existence never certain. However, the Unit's major funding agency, the Department of National Education, and the Council of Rhodes University were for several years involved in negotiations to bring about the Unit's permanent establishment as an autonomous research institute linked to the University, and in June 1991 the Dictionary Unit for South African English was registered as an association incorporated not for gain. Mrs Silva was appointed Editor and Executive Director.

### Dictionary of New Zealand English

Harry Orsman has completed the Dictionary of New Zealand English, coming in at 1.6 million words including bibliography. It is particularly strong on words from Maori, and the names of flora and fauna, and the possibility of being able to make close and detailed comparison with AND entries is that much closer. No publication date yet.

### Australian English

It was a matter of some embarrassment to discover that *Australian English* was used several times in AND in definitions but was not defined itself. Thus *Australian language* (1872) and *Australianese* (1902). Some comfort

could be derived from the dangerous exclusivity of the 1981 Macquarie definition - 'that dialect of English which is spoken by native-born Australians' (what about the one in four born elsewhere?), but this was rectified in the 1991 edition. And anyway the Macquarie had no historical information to offer.

When OED2, or the Supplement, was consulted, the date of 1940 (for the earliest citation) seemed late - but there was a certain appropriateness in the user being Alex Mitchell and the occasion a call in *Southerly* for evidence of Australianisms. One pushed the date a little further back to the foundation of the Australian English Association in 1923 - but only spuriously as this was the Australian *English Association*. And there the matter rested until Julia Robinson chanced on the following exemplification from an article by John H. Garth entitled 'Some Australian Slang' in *The Australian Magazine* for 1 November 1908:

My friend and I laughed at the American who called a man a "hand-out" without explaining that he meant a tramp who calls at the back door and accepts whatever is "handed out" to him - yet the laugh would have been on his side if we had wanted to tell him that a football barracker hit a larrikin on the head with a billy-can just as he reached the humpy, for we would have said it in so many words, and not stayed to consider that it was Australian-English, and not the real thing that we were talking.

Then, though *Australian slanguage* is recorded in AND from 1899, one begins to wonder about *Australian slang*.

## Blood and bone

An entry in the making. Noticed in the draft of Orsman's Dictionary of New Zealand English (quot. 1975), and then in the first edition of the Macquarie (1981), and then in the second edition of APOD (1984). But not in the OED or its unpublished files. *Bone meal* does appear, from 1850, as 'the coarser siftings of ground bones, used as a fertilizer', but this dry-as-dust definition contains not a whiff of the pungent odour that drifted across from the vegie patch as a sign winter was almost behind us. Any advice on earlier sightings would be welcome.

## Seat belt, seat-belt, or seatbelt?

Dictionaries are conservative about the hyphenation. OED2 records *seat belt* from 1932, originally in aeroplanes. Following usual practice the adjectival use (*seat-belted*) is hyphenated. The most recent edition of the *Concise Oxford* (1991) prefers seat-belt, as does Chambers and Collins *Cobuild*. American dictionaries (Random House, Webster's) prefer the two-word form. *The Australian Concise* (1992) gives *seat-belt*, as does the *Australian Writers' and Editors' Guide* and the *Oxford Australian Reference Dictionary*. The Macquarie dictionaries stay with *seat belt*.

Now the Department of Transport and Communications has signalled one of those changes dictionaries record. In Determination No.3 of 1992, made under Section 7 of the Act of National Standards for Motor Vehicles (1989), an amendment to the definitions recognises *seatbelt* as an alternative to *seat belt* 'in accordance with increasing usage'. And *seatbelt* is used throughout in the amendments to the legislation gazetted on 4 November

1992, both as a free-standing noun and attributively, as in *seatbelt* assembly and *seatbelt* anchorage. The new edition of the Australian Pocket Oxford is out there in front!

## Mabo

This, the name of a Torres Strait islander who in 1992 won a High Court judgment on a land title claim, is without question the word of the year. It is hoped that journalists release their hold on it and that it settles down a bit before anyone has to define it!

## Native title

But the Mabo case has thrown up other lexical challenges, of which *native title* is one. The extraordinary thing about *native title* is that it seems to arrive in use with all its credentials taken for granted, being used without the explanation that usually accompanies a new word, or without any sign of its users having any conception of it as a new word. And it uses *native*, which no Australian would today, when *Aboriginal* is to be preferred. A publication of the Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action, of August 1992, describes *native title* as a title 'which has existed since time immemorial. The title arises out of the ancient traditions and customs and does not come from the introduced British law. The title carries rights and interests to land in accordance with traditions and customs. It is whatever traditions and customs say about that title. If the tradition says: you can hand this land to your children by showing them the boundaries and saying "when I die this land will be yours", or do not trespass on someone's land, then that is the title.'

Lexicographically, the interest is to establish a history of usage, the presumption being that this would go back to the 19th century, when *native* was used more freely. We checked first with John Simpson in Oxford who could find one 1990 quotation from an American source but with reference to third world countries generally.

A check with Penny Silva revealed that the expression is not used in South Africa, for the obvious reason that the term *native* is 'thoroughly tainted' there. And so to Canada, where Katherine Barber of Oxford Canadian Dictionaries provided numerous quotations from 1989 and 1990, along with the advice that *aboriginal [title]* was the preferred expression, replacing the older *Indian* and *native* but itself now in danger of being ousted by *first nations*, or *first peoples*. Evidence from Harry Orsman confirmed that *Maori title* was preferred in New Zealand.

Locally we have followed a trail suggested by Professor Garth Nettheim, who thought it might have originated in African cases decided by the Privy Council, a suggestion verified by Professor Richard Bartlett, of the University of Western Australia, whose advice was that *native title* was first used by the Privy Council in 1921 in a case involving Nigeria, apparently because of the inappropriateness of applying *Indian* to aboriginal inhabitants of Africa.

And there the matter might have rested if Harry Orsman had not been doing some trans-Tasman fossicking and come up with N.Z. quotations going back to 1847, in Privy Council documents but with a New Zealand reference. So we have our 19th century origin, even though the search is not finished yet.

## Economic rationalism

Is a phrase on everyone's lips - but, again, the question is where and when? And, particularly, is it Australian in origin? Certainly the Australian National University's Faculty of Economics has been described as representing an orthodoxy 'known as neoclassical economics in academe' but entitled 'economic rationalism in the public domain' and defined as 'that Anglo-American-descended school of economics that holds that the market system will generate better outcomes in terms of resource allocation, production and distribution than any other form of economic coordination known to man' (Alex Millmow, *Canberra Times* 26 May 1993, p.13). A quick query to the custodians of British, New Zealand, and South African English revealed that the expression was known to those Englishes but not thought of as belonging to them. John Simpson (OED) turned up a tantalisingly early quotation - 'Economic rationalism owes much of its growth to technical rationalism' - but the fact that that quotation comes from M. Epstein's 1915 translation of Sombart's *Quintessence of Capitalism* (p.182) suggests that it is a coincidental use. And the only other evidence held by Oxford is Australian, dated 1991. In fact there is no difficulty in finding contemporary evidence in Australian sources - it abounds. The difficulty is in pushing the date back and ascertaining the place of origin. John Quiggin, of ANU, has no doubt that it is Australian, writing that 'it first entered the Australian lexicon in the period of the Whitlam government and was used primarily in a positive sense by economic rationalists themselves' (S. King and P. Lloyd, ed., *Economic Rationalism*, 1993). And he has

produced what looks like a progenitor in a paper by A.S. Holmes in the *Economic Record* of March 1981 (p.1) - 'the struggle to get good sense (economic rationality if you like) into our economic affairs'. Other uses suggest that the phrase and its variants, is newish by putting all or some of it into quotation marks - 'economic rationalism' (1993), economic 'rationalism' (1989), 'economic rationalist' (1986), 'economic rationality' (1988), and so on. There is no doubt that the phenomenon existed earlier but the evidence suggests that the term was originally Australian and that it came into vogue in the Whitlam years. Can you help?

### The year's publications

The major task in 1993 has been the production of a new edition of the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary*. Bruce Moore (of the Australian Defence Forces Academy) has done a sterling job as editor, backed up by Margaret McNally (of ADFA) and the staff of the Centre. APOD was published in September.

Also published in September, and under the Centre's auspices, was Gary Simes' *Australian Underworld Slang* (OUPA). Bruce Moore's long-awaited *Lexicon of Cadet Language* will be published in December. *Words from the West*, by Maureen Brooks and Joan Ritchie, is with Oxford and expected early in the new year.

### Domestic Items

As many corresponding members already know, the Centre lost Harriet Michell, its first and so-far only full-time computer person, as the result of a car accident on New Year's Eve last

year. She has been sorely missed - both as programmer and as a person.

As some few members already know, Bill Ramson and Joan Hughes are taking early retirement from 30 June 1994. The position of Head of the Centre has been advertised and both the University and Oxford have committed themselves to the Centre's continuation - at least until the end of 1997 when the next review is due.

As anyone who has visited the Centre will know, we are now the pampered occupants of a 'heritage cottage' on the other side of the campus from our old premises in Kingsley Street. Any disadvantage resulting from the comparative isolation of the Centre is more than cancelled out by the cottage's lake views.

The Centre this year welcomed Monica Berko who, with Hilary Kent, has carried on the job of computerisation with flair and enthusiasm. We have been fortunate in attracting people who find the lexicographical side of the operation as fascinating as the lexicographers find the computing side!

Secretary of the Centre since February 1991, Jacqui Woodland has retired, to be replaced by Joan Levy (on a half-time basis).

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