

## EDITORIAL

*OZWORDS* has a modest aim — to promote discussion of our official language, *genus* English, *species* Australian, and its dozens of subspecies.

There are, of course, plenty of people who earn a living from a study of Australian English, working in linguistics departments in our universities. We hope to keep readers up-to-date with some of the more fascinating aspects of their work. But in general these people are reporters rather than news makers. The news is *made* every day by those who write or talk, which means virtually all of us.

If all of us make the language by using it, there are a few real *creators*, those who coin new words and new usages. Somewhere, there must exist the person who first mouthed the phrase *electronic funds transfer at point of sale*, and another who derived from it the acronym *eftpos*. It was not a beautiful word, nor (in Darwinian terms) one which seemed particularly fitted to survive, but survive it did. So we have *eftposes* (or *eftposses*, or *eftpi*) everywhere. Perhaps it is best to refer the matter to Prof Dame Leonie Kramer, who represents the standards of Aust Lit on the board of the ANZ bank.

Against the regiment of neologists and circumlocutioners there battles a small band of conservationists and promoters of plain language. This magazine is a mite worried about linguistic conservationists. Concern about a deplorable decline in linguistic standards is at least two thousand five hundred years old, and is probably as pointless and inappropriate now as it was then.

By contrast, we are very much in favour of plain language. This is why we have chosen as our theme article for this first issue an introductory essay on plain language in the law. Future issues will visit other jungles where the plain language folk are at work with their machetes. And, of course, we hope to hear from you, our readers, about your own interests and concerns. #

## THEME ARTICLE

# Speaking Plainly

by TONY LANG

The former High Court judge and Governor-General, Sir Ninian Stephen, recently attracted front page publicity when he condemned the Australian Citizenship Act as a "masterpiece of legislative incoherence". An article in the *Melbourne Age* on 27 August quoted Sir Ninian as saying, "If we are going to encourage pride in what we have created by statute, that is in Australian citizenship, the first step must surely be to make the statutory language comprehensible, which it is not at present." The particular provision cited by Sir Ninian (which he said was typical of the legislation as a whole) was subsection 39(20) of the *Australian Citizenship Amendment Act 1984*:

A person who, immediately before the commencing day or the day fixed for the purposes of sub-section 2(2), was, or had ceased to be, an Australian citizen by virtue of the Principal Act repealed by this Act, does not cease to be, or again become, as the case may be, an Australian citizen by reason of the repeal of that provision but nothing in this sub-section affects the application of section 8 of the *Acts Interpretation Act 1901*.



*I think he said 'A suspended sentence for ambiguity'.*

Surely Sir Ninian is right. Acts of Parliament and the regulations made under them are rules with which we are all expected to comply. We are entitled to be able to understand the rules, without the need for translation by lawyers. This is particularly so of legislation which directly impacts on ordinary people like the *Commonwealth Tax Act*, the *Social Security Act* and the *Family Law Act*, and of State Acts, such as tenancy, consumer protection and planning legislation.

Unfortunately, much of this legislation is even more badly drafted than the Citizenship Act which a High Court judge found so unintelligible. Worse, many, if not most, lawyers are actively opposed to any change. Typical of this attitude is a statement in a new textbook on copyright, patents and trade marks by two senior legal academics, "This tends to confirm the view, held in some quarters, that reforming legal language achieves little or nothing, since those who understand it already do not need 'plain English',

whereas those who do not will not be helped by modernisation of language which requires judicial pronouncement before its meaning is revealed." (McKeough and Stewart, *Intellectual Property In Australia*, Butterworths 1991).

And it's not just the lawyers. As the editor of *OZWORDS* pointed out when he suggested I write this column "There is a popular belief that a document is in some way invalid unless it is in legalese...". Sad, but true. I have sometimes thought of having a thick border around each page of my drafting in a suitably Old English type face of the whereases, hereinafters and aforesaid I have left out, in order to give the document the legal gravitas which some clients seem to expect.

Why is it that lawyers continue to write in a style which is "pompous, convoluted and often unintelligible to ordinary people"? Why is it that their clients continue to put up with it? These are two of the questions which will be explored in my next column.

In the meantime, actions speak louder than words. Here's my translation of subsection 39(20):

The repeal by this Act of a provision of the Australian Citizenship Act does not affect whether any person is, or is not, an Australian citizen.

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Tony Lang is a partner in Slater & Gordon, Solicitors.

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## PEDANTS' CORNER

**Cross-section** It is worth remembering that a cross-section is a cut across something to show internal structures, especially trees and other biological specimens. What you see depends on the location of the cross-section. If a cross-section of the population is taken low down, you will find nothing but feet. In short, the phrase should not be used as a synonym for *random sample*.

*Readers' contributions to this corner will be welcomed.*

## MAILBAG

*We welcome readers' comments on their recent observations of Australian usage, both positive and negative, and their queries, particularly those which are not easily answerable from the standard reference books.*

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*Letters should be addressed to  
The Editor, OZWORDS,  
GPO Box 2784Y,  
Melbourne 3001*

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*This first batch of comments and queries was not addressed to OZWORDS, since it didn't exist until this moment. It has been extracted from letters, often long and scholarly, addressed to sundry OZWORD-related people.*

### **May and Might**

I wonder if *might* will soon be regarded as an aberrant verb form, since one hardly ever hears or sees it used any more.

Is this a peculiarly Australian tendency?

Anne Riddell  
Canberra, ACT

We suspect that you are right – *might* is being superseded by *may*, at least in sentences like "If the government had acted, the problem *might/may* not have arisen". Here, *may* is now far more common. It has even received, as we understand it, the official blessing of the ABC.

Those who listen to RPH in the middle of the night, when it relays the BBC Overseas Service, will know that the Poms are moving the same way, though they seem to be a few laps behind.

Should we be sad? To many of us, *may* sounds odd in the sentence quoted, but the sense seems to remain totally clear, which removes the only solid objection.

However, in some closely related usages, the two words seem to retain significantly different meanings:

*The fun we might have had* refers to lost opportunities;

*The fun we may have had* refers to events which we will neither confirm nor deny. We suspect that this distinction is still widely understood, so perhaps *might* has a few more years to live.

Significantly, all the questions relate to statements about the past. This may give

a clue to the source of the problem, the hoary issue of the sequence of tenses. However, to say that the new usage breaches the sequence of tenses is unlikely to impress anyone. Nor should it.

### **A Stranglish question**

Is it true that Stranglish-speaking grammorticians talk about adnouns and proverbs? Stranglish gives me many useful words. My favorite original is 'lethargetic'.

Bill Whitby  
Phuket, Thailand

Some do and some don't. To the best of our knowledge, no Stranglish grammortician has yet achieved (or asserted) the authority to define the new syntabulary.

The Stranglish tradition (that is, of coining words by stringing together hints of existing words, generally in ways which lack etymological purity) is not new. If the resultant word makes unequivocal and useful sense, like *camelopard* and *Reaganomics*, it survives, at least for the nonce. It seems to us that *adnoun* and *proverb* are equivocal and useless, like *incentivation*, and hence unlikely to catch on.

Yes, *lethargetic* is a good word, with its nice hint of being the antithesis of *energetic*. Our favorites remain, however, the Myer Emporium's brilliant early contributions, *Outdorium* and *Toytoria*. Nevertheless, if you will help us to popularise our own *syntabulary*, *OZWORDS* will do the same for your *lethargetic*.

### **El Niño**

A foreigner that Australians need help with is *El Niño*. I have heard Australian radio announcers say *ell nee-no*, perhaps because their script left out the tilde that is the essential clue to the correct pronunciation. I believe that there is a case for re-spelling it in English either *El Ninio* or *El Ninyo*. We would then have to re-spell *señor*, too; but re-spelling worked with *canyon*.

Stephen Calder  
Willoughby, NSW

You must listen to very superior radio stations, because ours *invariably* seem to say *El Neeno*. In fact, we suspect that, irrespective of the Spanish, this is now the received (and hence sooner or later correct) Oz version. This has happened

despite the fact that all the dictionaries agree with you.

You are clearly right, too, in identifying the tilde as the source of the problem. The dictionaries print the word with the tilde; but this is not going to make newspapers print tildes, especially in headlines. Hence your suggestion about adopting *ninio* or *ninyo* makes practical sense. If you had spoken out when the phrase first appeared in our language, it might have worked; but now that an anglicised spelling (and, if our ears are right, matching pronunciation) have become established, it is going to be very difficult to dislodge them. Nevertheless, we wish you the best of luck.

### Connection/connexion

What's wrong with *connexion*? I use this regularly, as the poor 'x' gets little use in English, and typing 'x' gives the weak fourth finger a good work-out (workout?) on the keyboard.

Claire Pillar  
Bondi NSW

There is nothing wrong with *connexion*. It is etymologically superior, i.e., better Latin (though, curiously, *conexion* would be better still). The *OED* (1893) had an entry "Connection: see connexion"; the *Macquarie Dictionary* (1991) entry starts "connection = connexion", and the *Australian Concise Oxford* (1992) has "connection (also connexion)".

This paints for us a picture of a spelling which is spiralling downward into oblivion at a rate which will see it become extinct some time around August 2031. Unless, that is, you do something about it.

We suggest that you approach all the leading secretarial colleges, arguing for them to make *connexion* compulsory on medical grounds, as you outline in your letter.

### Whose/That's

Would you like to comment on the following, culled from the *SMH* pink pages, June 30 1993:

"The troupe visits a village that's livelihood is tobacco".

V. Ackerman  
Greenwich, NSW

The writer was probably following the widely-accepted 'rule' to use *that* rather than *which* for defining relative clauses.

(Continued on page 8)

# Taboo in Language

by GARY SIMES

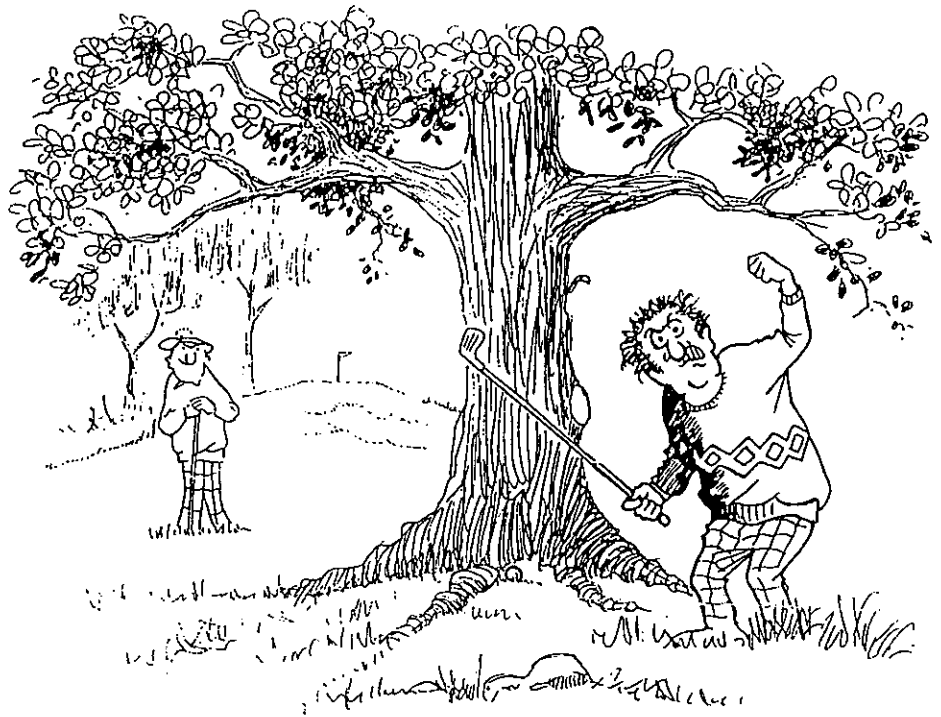
Earlier this year Chatto & Windus, an old and respectable firm of publishers, put out a novel called *Fucking Martin*. It was displayed in the windows of some bookshops, and reviewed in the press just like any less titularly spectacular book.

We need to remind ourselves how much and how quickly things have changed. Ten years ago the title would have been possible only for an underground publication. Thirty years ago it was not possible to publish the word at all, let alone contemplate thrusting it into a title. The word was taboo, and with a few exceptions it had not been openly printed for over two hundred years.

In saying this I leave aside illegally distributed pornography and the subversive London *Times* typesetters who on the 13th January 1882 had the Attorney-General saying in a speech: "The speaker then said he felt inclined for a bit of fucking. I think that is very likely."

Despite the scandal that ensued, later that year in June the same newspaper carried an advertisement for a book that read: "Every-day life in our Public Schools. Sketched by Head Scholars. With a Glossary of Some words used by Henry Irving in his disquisition upon fucking, which is in common use in those Schools... *Church Times* - 'A capital book for boys.' - 'The book will make an acceptable present.'"

In the avalanche of memoirs on World War 1, the authors, most of them middle- or upper-class, come back time and again to something that profoundly shocked them - I do not mean the senseless slaughter, but swearing by troops. These good ex-private-schoolboys found themselves confined in the trenches with working-class foot-sloggers whose every second word was *fucking* or *cunt*, and their reaction shows that they felt in some sense violated by the words, in spite of or in addition to all the death and suffering and hard-



...a small group of words, known to almost everyone  
and used regularly by at least some men...

ship around them. To illustrate what troubled them, I shall quote a famous specimen, partly because it also allows another point to be made. This version, which I take from Wayland Young's *Eros Denied*, is attributed by Young to an Australian, probably erroneously, to judge by the other features of the language.

I was walking along on this fucking fine morning, fucking sun fucking shining away, little country fucking lane, and I meets up with this fucking girl. Fucking lovely she was, so we gets into conver-fuckingsation and I takes her over a fucking gate into a fucking field and we has sexual intercourse. (Young 32)

I want to ask why it was that a small group of words, known to almost everyone and used regularly by at least some men, were banished from print; why grown men could be shocked by the discovery that other men used them with remorseless repetition.

Another way of posing the question is to see the issue as one of verbal taboo and approach it from that angle. In his *Anatomy of Swearing*, probably the most profound book on the subject yet published, the U.S. anthropologist, Ashley Montagu, wrote of the so-called four-letter words:

The emotional charges carried by some words are so great that they can make the difference between life and death and all the states of being in between. They can raise men up and strike them down, elevate and depress them, infuriate and amuse them, shock and physically repel them. Such words are dangerous, and so they become forbidden, tabooed. Both the individual and society must be protected against the unconscious, irrational anxieties that such words are capable of evoking so anarchically. (Montagu 302)

Words, it is true, do have the power, when marshalled effectively, to move and persuade and shock, but the appeal to some concept of an *id*, of dark forces waiting to boil over if they are not adequately repressed, to account for

verbal taboo in English is not very convincing. After all, the taboo in question has largely broken down since Montagu wrote in 1967, and the consequences that his concept would entail if it were true have not come to pass.

Verbal taboos of various sorts are found in many societies throughout the world, and various explanations drawing on the social and religious belief systems are offered by anthropologists and historians. But these taboos—women's vocabulary in Japanese, class-based lexis in Balinese, prohibitions upon saying the name of dead relatives, and so on—are not the same as the one we are dealing with. Our taboo consisted in a combination of two factors: holding sex and its appurtenances unclean, dirty, wicked, sinful; and banning

*'Our taboo consisted in a combination of two factors: holding sex and its appurtenances unclean, dirty, wicked, sinful; and banning the most natural words that refer to the despised, feared but alluring acts and body parts.'*

ning the most natural words that refer to the despised, feared but alluring acts and body parts.

The taboo seems to be a phenomenon of English, for it is not shared by other western European languages that I am familiar with and, moreover, did not always exist in English. I am not saying that the cognates and equivalents of *fuck* and *cunt* in French, German, Italian, Dutch and so on are not, some of them, strong words, with restrictions upon their use; but in no case, so far as I can tell, is the sense of taboo as pronounced, as developed as it was, and to some extent still is, in English. In none of these languages were the words in question literally unprintable. Yet that was the situation in English.

In January 1884 publication of the greatest and most comprehensive dictionary of English began, an enterprise based upon a conception and methodology of dictionary-making that remains fundamental to all other lexi-

cography. The *New English Dictionary* aimed to trace the history of every English word from its earliest record to its latest form or meaning.

It was not until 1893, with the fascicle *Crouchmas to Czech*, that the editor, James Murray, faced a severe test of his goal of all-inclusiveness. Would *cunt* go in? The answer was no, and likewise when it came time to deal with *fuck* (in January, 1898) that word was excluded. Why was it that a man with a complete commitment to scientific lexicography nevertheless balked at treating these two words and so failed in his duty to his craft? Make no mistake about it. The decision was crucial, and Murray fluffed it.

In 1890 another great (but uncelebrated) lexicographical project was inaugurated. John S. Farmer published volume 1, A-B, of his slang dictionary called *Slang and Its Analogues*. Joined by the feisty high Tory, W. E. Henley, as collaborator for the second volume, Farmer did not omit *cunt*, even though the word is not actually slang.

For his courage Farmer ran into problems with his printer who refused to set the word in print; so Farmer sued for breach of contract. The printer, Poulter & Sons, counter-sued and won, gaining damages of £114 from the shocked jury to whom defence counsel had read extracts from the disputed volume. In the event, the second volume was printed by Harrison & Sons, 'Printers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen', as is stated in the colophon. (Legman p. lviii) Fortunately, Farmer & Henley did not experience the same problems when they came to *fuck*; perhaps because by that stage they were employing a Dutch printer, H. C. A. Thieme in Nijmegen.

As a matter of fact, Farmer and Murray corresponded on the subject of the inclusion of tabooed words. Only Farmer's side of the exchange survives, and so we do not have the benefit of Murray's thoughts on the question;

all we know is that he decided not to, or was unable to, cover the words *cunt* and *fuck*, though he did deal with *arse*, *cock*, *prick*, *shit*, and so on. It seems likely, in fact, that *OED*'s citations on these words were passed on to Farmer, whose account of the words remains to this day the basis of all subsequent discussions of the topic – not that there have been very many.

The taboo has not always existed. The case is straightforward with *cunt*. *Fuck* remains problematical but I think one can say that to start with there was no verbal taboo. It was firmly in place by 1755 when Dr Johnson deliberately omitted the two words from his epoch-making *Dictionary of the English Language*. The other four-letter words have never borne the same level of taboo. In brief, they shared the fate of short direct words for sexual and excretory matters; they were deemed to be too blunt and so fell into the class of 'vulgaries', words not to be used in polite discourse or in the presence of women. *Arse* was the original English word for 'that upon which we sit' ('You mean a chair, Dr Johnson?'), and remained standard till the later 18th or early 19th century (Dr Johnson did not label the word vulgar). *Shit* lasted as long, while *piss*, having been used in the Authorized Version of the Bible, continued to be printed and a medical text of 1870 could talk about children's pissing their beds, although the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1907 labelled it 'not now in decent use'. *Prick* and *cock* never ceased to be used among men of all classes (and among some ladies? if one could but know) but dropped out of print in the 19th century. *OED*'s note on *cock*, with its resort to Latin even to advert to the subject of indecency, perhaps says it all:

The current name among the people, but, *pudoris causa*, not admissible in polite speech or literature; in scientific language the Latin is used.

Such excesses of verbal purity now seem merely comical and serve to emphasize the point with which I began, the distance we have come in a relatively short period in shedding two-and-a-half centuries of taboo. Yet we

do not, of course, even now enjoy complete verbal freedom. Restraints of various kinds are still operative. Many people who are quite happy to use *fuck* or *cunt* in their literal sense find distasteful the meaningless iteration of *fuckin* exemplified in the soldier's anecdote above – *fuckingsese*, as one U.S. writer has called it. *Cunt* as a term of abuse can in most Australian jurisdictions have serious legal consequences, and when a N.S.W. magistrate, taking into account all the circumstances, declined to convict a man charged with offensive language (to wit, having called a policeman a cunt), her decision was overturned on appeal.

The taboo, in the strict sense of the word, has collapsed, and a more complex situation-dependent set of rules governs our use of the words formerly proscribed. One of the considerations that comes into play in determining whether or not these words may be

deployed is profit. The title of the U.S. novel *Fucking Martin* is, I understand, of the author's own devising, but in his own country his publishers lacked the courage to issue the book with its correct title. In the U.S.A. the book is called, rather limply one may feel, *Martin and John*.

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Gary Simes is currently President of the Australian Language Research Centre at the University of Sydney. He is author of the recently published *Dictionary of Australian Underworld Slang* (Oxford, 1993)

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*Due to shortage of space, the core of this article – a scholarly survey of citations of the two key words – has been omitted. The full text is available to readers sending an SAE and a printable contribution of one or more paragraphs to OZWORDS.*

## The trachle of SOED (2)

The brief was to produce a dictionary recognizably the *Shorter* but at the same time significantly new and different. We kept the historical principle (of course); the block structure with two different type sizes (even clearer in a new design); the general organization of each entry; and selective illustration with genuine quotations. We introduced dating of words and senses by date ranges, on the basis of which senses are now ordered chronologically; dates for derivatives as well as headwords; greater concentration on the history of modern English, by the exclusion of most words which became obsolete before 1700;

the International Phonetic Alphabet; twentieth-century quotations (of which there were very few in the previous edition); new words; fully expanded headwords in all contexts; and numerous other improving features.

The *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* represents (to use one of its Australian terms) thirteen years' hard yakka on the part of up to 25 editors, led by the Editor-in-Chief Lesley Brown. Here, Senior Editor Elizabeth Knowles reports on the process and the product.

Wider coverage of non-British English was a major concern. Our extended coverage of Australian vocabulary ranges from items from the natural world (*galah*, *mulga parrot*, *Tasmanian tiger*) to modern slang usages (*come the raw prawn*, *shonky*). A Victorian may be a native or inhabitant of the State of Victoria in SE Australia, rather than a person living in the reign

of Victoria, and we have the collocation *dream-time* as well as *alcheringa* for a golden age in the mythology of some Australian Aborigines.

We instituted a programme by which intrepid freelance researchers ploughed through historical dictionaries and the Dictionary Department files to unearth thousands of dating changes to *OED*. (Not all of the most dramatic were for the most exciting words – only a historical lexicographer could rejoice at an example of *panful* from the Middle English period, over 500 years earlier than *OED*'s first of 1874). As we pressed onwards we appreciated the force of the seventeenth-century citation supplied to us from their files by the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* for *trachle* (an exhausting journey):

*Birth's a doom, life's a trachle, death is needful.*

We laid stress on the collection of modern examples of core vocabulary, now a significant concern in the Dictionary Department's *Incomings* collection. The *New Shorter* quotes the *Beano* alongside Shakespeare, *Muscle Man International* as well as Dickens, and the list of over 7,000 Authors and Publications reveals a sheaf of newspapers including the *Sydney Bulletin* and the *Brisbane Courier-Mail*, and a crowd of Australian writers from Edmund Banfield and Rolf Boldrewood to Germaine Greer and Patrick White.

The *OED* text from which the *New Shorter* editors worked is from a different world: no viruses, no split atoms, very little air and no space travel, unselfconscious sexism, culturally more homogeneous English-speaking communities. And the world in which the project ended is different from that in which it was begun: no Soviet bloc, and new currency for the term *Balkanisation*.

Now that the *New Shorter* is published, we must leave it to the dictionary users to judge its contents – but we cherish the hope that the term *budgetee* might occur while riffling through its 3767 pages.

# *The who, where, why and when of* The Australian National Dictionary Centre

*by Bill Ramson*

The Australian National Dictionary Centre was established in 1988, initially for a five-year period. Like all university departments these days it was put through an intensive review process before embarking on a second five years, towards the end of which period it will produce the second edition of *AND*. It can thus look back with a certain amount of pride on what it has accomplished to date at the same time as it looks forward to the next five years of co-operation between the National University and Australia's largest scholarly publisher, Oxford University Press.

The major achievement during the first five years – apart from the publication of the *Australian National Dictionary (AND)* in 1988 – has been the editing of new editions of the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary (ACOD)* and the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary (APOD)*, editions which have been individually successful and which together have dramatically changed the reference landscape in this country. With its direct access to the data-base on which the *New Oxford English Dictionary*, scheduled for publication in 2003, and the recently published *New Shorter Oxford Dictionary* are based, the Centre is part of a genuinely international scholarly operation the like of which has only been dreamed of until now. Evidence collected in Canada, New Zealand and South Africa, in Australia and the British Isles, above all in the United States, is pooled and becomes part of a continually updated resource on which each national centre can draw. And modern publishing technology ensures that the resultant dictionary is rapidly available.

The Centre has in addition a research function which it expects to

become increasingly prominent in the second period. Firstly the enormous backlog of texts which has accumulated since the publication of *AND* needs to be coped with. A bibliographer works in the National Library of Australia 'sampling' the new accessions and noting those which are potentially useful. Then a reader comes along and 'Hoovers' her way through them, recording on cards those words which she thinks are interesting, or those illustrative sentences which she finds illuminating, along with the date and a bibliographical reference so that any reader can verify a piece of evidence. These cards come back to the Centre and are keyed in to the database in a standard form so that they can be called up and used as evidence of meaning, form, spelling, etc., at comparatively short notice and with minimal editorial interference. So, if a new edition is called for by the publisher, it can be produced with the speed of light and without the labour intensity of the past. At least, that is the theory.

Into this single, multi-purpose computer file go also the fruits of several independent research projects which are or have been Centre interests. These are regional projects, such as that about to be published on Western Australian English under the title *Words from the West*, or that under way on Tasmanian English, tentatively called *Tassie Terms*. Or they may be sporting projects, such as the projected glossary on the terminology of Australian Rules. Or they may be studies of important Australian English dialects like Aboriginal English, or studies of the shifting relationship between Aborigines and whites as revealed in the bureaucratic language that this relationship produced.



Also under way, and to be published under the Centre's auspices, are works that are germane to the subject of Australian English and which the Centre is sponsoring. These include Gary Simes' recent and highly successful *Dictionary of Australian Underworld Slang* and the *Bibliography of Writings on English in Australia and New Zealand* by Brian Taylor and Gerhard Leitner which, when published, will become an indispensable reference tool. In this category also is Bruce Moore's *Lexicon of the Cadet Language*, which the Centre is publishing independently, and June Factor's collection of children's rhymes and games, which the Centre hopes can be preserved and published.

These are primarily tasks of data collection. Another sort of data collection in which the Centre is engaged is the compilation of a corpus, a body of continuous text which can be subjected to search and analysis, and which to an extent eliminates the element of human randomness in quotation-based lexicography. The Centre has close links with the British National Corpus and plans to produce an Australian National Corpus modelled on it and of use in comparative studies.

The question of style is also being addressed, albeit in a low-key way. Shirley Purchase's *Australian Writers' and Editors' Guide*, compiled in the Centre in 1991 is an indispensable ready-reference companion now approaching a second edition. It has been followed by Nicholas Hudson's more discursive *Modern Australian Usage*, which bids fair to become an Australian Fowler.

Finally, there are studies which advance knowledge in a more interpretative way, like *Digger Dialects*, an examination of Australian first world war services speech based on a 1919 glossary, and *Australian Aboriginal Words in English*, an examination and description of the words of Aboriginal origin in *AND*, which contains the latest work in the very difficult area of Aboriginal etymology. At present the Centre is engaged in an ARC-supported project which seeks to examine and interpret the lexical evidence of Australian history and national char-

acter. This involves forming thematic grouping of words recorded in *AND*, and subjecting them to analysis in an attempt to decide what the major socio-historical emphases are.

All of these studies will come together in the second editions of *AND*, and in a sense that is the ultimate pur-

pose of everything that goes on in the Centre. Special studies may look like divergences – and may in fact be so temporarily – but there is a binding coherence in that each tiny step forward adds to our knowledge of the Australian language, and ultimately therefore of the Australian people.

## Inclusive Language in the Church: Some practical problems

John Cowburn

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*John Cowburn S.J. was recently a member – the other two were women – of a committee which revised the Style Book of the United Faculty of Theology in Parkville. The language of prayers and hymns has some problems of its own where inclusive language is concerned. Authors and editors working in other fields might be interested to hear about some of them.*

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In the Catholic Church, the words of consecration which are said by the priest used to be: "This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all men so that sins may be forgiven."

A long while ago the word "men" was officially dropped, so that the priest now says "for all, so that sins... etc.", and recent editions of the Mass books have that. But, in the Nicene Creed, which the whole congregation says, we still say "... who for us men and our salvation". It is hard to change something that most people say by heart.

Then there are the hymns. Imagine that we are singing "All creatures of our God and king". On my left is a person whose prime commitment is to the moral right of authors to the integrity of their texts, and who therefore sings:

*Thou fire so masterful and bright  
That givest man both warmth and  
light...*

On my right is one whose prime commitment is to inclusive language, and who therefore changes *man* to *us*.

I look ahead and I find

*And all ye men of tender heart,  
Forgiving others, take your part*

"How will they deal with this?" I ask myself. My own pragmatic answer is that if inclusive language can be substituted without damage to the rhythm and sense of the original, it should be done; but if not, I let the original stand.

Then there is the question of the pronoun for God. We can use "he" and "him" of Christ, who is a man, but should we use it of God? The question arises a few moments later, when we come to the refrain in that same hymn, and I sing:

*O praise him, O praise him,  
Alleluia, alleluia,*

and I hear the person on my right sing:

*O praise God, O praise God...*

Here, none of the usual solutions to the problem of the missing inclusive pronoun will work. Thus the only recourse is to repeat the original noun. But the word *God*, with its two strong consonant sounds, does not fit happily into the melody, and what can be done with

*We are his children, he is our God*

There are many occasions when a similar change can be made without any problem. Thus, there is a place in the Mass where the priest says: "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God" and the people answer "It is right to give him thanks and praise". Some now say "It is right to give God thanks and praise." It sounds odd to me, but that is probably because I am used to the earlier version. But substitution is less satisfactory in the following:

*God sent his Son to redeem us, his people...*

If this is changed to "God sent God's son to redeem us, God's people", then I protest.

There is, of course, another solution to the problem of the conflict between respect for an author's text and the need to use inclusive language. A Catholic theologian in Sydney told me that something he wrote was accepted by an American publisher, but when he got the proofs he found that in all his quotations, whenever the original author had used non-inclusive language, the editor had put in "(sic)", so his quotations were spattered with (sic)s. He crossed them all out and said why – but I'll bet they remained.

In any case, this device is unlikely to help us solve the problem of non-inclusive language in hymns:

*A mighty stronghold is our God,  
A sure defence and weapon.  
He(sic) ll help us out of every need...*

## MAILBAG

(continued from page 3)

However, on the subject of defining *versus* non-defining relative clauses, we are in agreement with the comment in Hudson *Modern Australian Usage*, pages 408-409. (This is not surprising, since we wrote it.)

Hudson points out that it is hard to follow this rule in cases where the relative pronoun is attached to a preposition. He could, had it occurred to him, have quoted the possessive relative pronoun as another problem.

If we are to obey the *that/which* convention, we either have to accept the *Sun-Herald's* version or rewrite as

*The troupe visits a village that tobacco is the livelihood of*

a version which is substantially more diabolical than the original.

However, the problem may well have arisen not because the writer was slavishly following the *that/which* convention, but because he or she was unhappy about using *whose* as a possessive form of *which*, and realising that

*... a village which's livelihood is tobacco*

was totally unacceptable, fell back on *that's*.

Either way, our conclusions remain the same:

- (a) *whose* is the normal possessive form for both *who* and *which*;
- (b) *that's* (as a possessive relative) is almost as unacceptable as *which's*; and
- (c) although the clause is a defining one, *whose* would have been the best word to use.

## Who is "mentally challenged"?

In Canada, the Provincial and National "Associations for the mentally handicapped" have become "Associations for Community Living". I wondered out loud how individuals served by such associations would be known following such change.

I was – and still am – irritated to find that the term in general use is "mentally challenged". I have always thought that for a fair period of my life, this term applied to me and, for that matter, you.

John McLeod  
Saskatoon, Canada

We share your concern. Obviously the motives of those who change the names are the best: every time a name becomes associated with stigma, they invent a new one (effectively a euphemism) in the hope that the stigma will disappear along with the name. But we cannot think of a single instance in the past where this has worked. The stigma is merely transferred to the new name, and the cycle begins again.

At the same time, we suggest that the name *Association for Community Living* has one immense merit, and it stems from the point you mention as a problem: that it does *not* suggest a name by which the customers can be known. As we see it, one of the biggest problems with a phrase like "mentally handicapped" is that it lumps together a vast spectrum of intellectual impairment, from people who can for most purposes operate normally to those who can scarcely operate at all. This can have tragic results for people at both ends of the spectrum, involving stigma at one end and unrealistic expectations at the other. If the new name results in the use of a range of labels which distinguish the needs and capacities of the customers more clearly, it could be an advance. Or are we being too sanguine?

(Professor McLeod will be remembered by many readers as a former Director of the Remedial Education Centre in Brisbane, and retains a keen interest in Australian language and education.)

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