

OZWORDS!

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DICTIONARY CENTRE

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EDITORIAL

THERE was movement at the Cottage... Yes, Bill Ramson, our founding director, has retired.

This newsletter is not an in-house journal, but the departure of Bill, editor of our flagship publication, the *Australian National Dictionary*, is a public event, and we make no apology for devoting our centrefold to saying goodbye, while hoping that his retirement will not spell the end of his contributions to Australian lexicography.

His place has been taken by Bruce Moore, who comes to us from the English Department at the Australian Defence Force Academy. As most readers will be aware, this does not mean that he is a military gentleman. Indeed, he is better known for being the editor of the latest edition of the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary*.

His stay at ADFA is immortalised, however, in his *Lexicon of Cadet Language: Royal Military College, Duntroon in the period 1982-1985* (ANDC, 1993), which contains such items of military intelligence as the following:

acca germ an insidious virus which attacks the acca-immune system of a hitherto normal and healthily unacademic cadet and frenzies him with the sudden urge to do some academic work.

rack attack a sudden and overwhelming desire for sleeping (invariably yielded to), the onset of which disease most commonly occurs during academic lectures.

Meanwhile *Ozwords* will continue to be the *Pravda* of linguistic *Izvestia*, or vice versa...

Vain Repetitions

In this second article on legal English, TONY LANG discusses the origins of another disease of legal English: the use of tautologous pairs of words where a single word would be sufficient. Indeed, not only sufficient but also preferred, as this would serve to highlight those instances in which there must be two or more words because two or more separate concepts are being invoked.

ONE of the most common complaints about legalese is that it is too wordy. Cynics might suggest that this is because traditionally lawyers have been paid for their drafting by the 'folio' (currently in Victoria \$9.20-\$15.10 for every 100 words in non-litigious matters).

Whatever the reason, a characteristic feature of legalese is the extensive use of doublets and triplets: *terms and conditions; goods and chattels; aid and abet; lands, tenements and hereditaments*. Garner in his excellent *Dictionary of Modern Legal Usage* (OUP, New York, 1987) lists over 100 examples.

Doublets are, of course, found in ordinary language. We have *each and every; over and above; part and parcel; cut and thrust; neither rhyme nor reason; boil and bubble, toil and trouble*. The doubling, often alliterative, provides emphasis. This method of forming phrases is ancient, but still active. A classic example is Lewis Carroll's *gyre and gimble*.

In legalese, however, many doublets and triplets have become so entrenched that it is almost unthinkable for a legal drafter to use one element of the formula without the other or others. To the lay reader these ritualistic incantations rarely add to the meaning of the document, and more usually have the opposite effect of reducing comprehension.

One traditional explanation for the use of doublets and triplets is etymological: the Law French word was glossed with its English equivalent (or vice versa). For example, *goods* is Old English, whereas *chattels* is Old French. However, many doublets and especially triplets cannot be explained on this basis.

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One man's goods are another man's chattels.

Of Gelati, Gelato and Other Australian Oddities

IT ALL STARTED because we wanted to get some information about the terms *gelato* and *gelati*. Neither of these words appears in the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, suggesting that this Italian ice cream does not exist in Britain. The large *Collins English Dictionary* does not include the term either. When it appears in Australian dictionaries *gelato* is given as the headword, often without comment on the plural, implying that the plural is 'regular' and therefore *gelatos*.

When I edited the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* I gave the Italian plural *gelati*, and added the usage note: 'The Italian plural *gelati* is often treated as a singular in Australian usage'. A few months ago we had a query from the lexicographers at Oxford University Press in England seeking clarification about what the plural of *gelato* is. As part of the Centre's research into the issue, we surveyed a group of 81 students.

63% of respondents said they would 'buy a *gelati*' and 37% would 'buy a *gelato*'. There were some significant regional variations here. 80% of Victorians gave the singular as *gelati* while only 42% of respondents from New South Wales used this form. In New South Wales the preferred form is *gelato*, but, apart from the ACT, this is the only State or Territory where *gelato* is the preferred form.

For the plural we found four possibilities: 'buy two *gelatis*' (40%), 'buy two *gelatos*' (29%), 'buy two *gelato*' (4%), 'buy two *gelati*' (20%). The New South Wales respondents (the *gelato* mob) stuck largely to *gelatos*, while the seemingly correct Italian plural form *gelati* came mainly from respondents who also had the singular as *gelati*.

There is clearly some variation (or, indeed, confusion) about the terms *gelati* and *gelato*. One especially interesting aspect of the results is the possible regional variation - with New South Wales and the ACT showing a strong preference for singular *gelato*, while all other States and Territories prefer *gelati*.

Harassment - a question of stress

We took the opportunity to test some other issues of pronunciation and usage.

Of the 81 students, only one claimed to stress the first syllable in the words *harass* and *harassment*. The remaining 80 put the stress on the second syllable. Australian dictionaries allow both pronunciations, although the *ha*-rass and *ha*-rass-ment forms are usually given first, suggesting that these are more common or more socially prestigious. On the evidence of this survey it seems likely that these pronunciations are rapidly disappearing from Australian English. It is always possible, of course, that some of these respondents will adopt what is seen as a more socially prestigious pronunciation at a later age. It seems more

BRUCE MOORE

Director of the Australian National Dictionary Centre

An ANDC survey of a group of Canberra tertiary students (81 in total) aged 18 to 21, from all States and Territories, revealed some interesting trends in Australian English among young (educated) Australians.

likely that to one generation, at least, the pronunciation of *harass* is no longer an issue - there is only one pronunciation.

Of trays and trates

Much the same is true of the pronunciation of the word *trait*. A recent survey published in the *Australian Style Newsletter* (June 1994) indicated that 53% of all respondents (a total of 422) pronounced this word to rhyme with 'tray', and 47% pronounced it to rhyme with 'rate'. In that survey there were only 17 respondents in the 10-24 age group, and their responses were 24% for 'tray' and 76% for 'rate'. In our survey, only 5% of respondents pronounced *trait* to rhyme with 'tray'; an overwhelming 95% pronounced it to rhyme with 'rate'. Again, this indicates that in the long term the pronunciation rhyming with 'tray' is under threat in Australian English.

Of moons and moans

The pronunciation of the word *maroon* continues to be of interest. Respondents were asked whether they pronounced the second syllable to rhyme with 'moon' or 'moan' in the sentence: 'He is wearing a maroon jumper'. 91% gave the 'moan'

pronunciation. It is well known that this is a distinctively Australian pronunciation that is not heard in British or American English. Yet when asked how they pronounced the word in association with rugby league ('The Blues are playing the Maroons') this dropped back to 73%. Those who shifted their phonetic allegiance were from New South Wales (4), Victoria (4), and South Australia (3). In the wider community allegiances appear to be more evenly divided. The *Australian Style* survey had 48% preferring 'moon' and 52% preferring 'moan' (but with a strong preference for 'moan', 73% to 27%, in the youngest age bracket). The evidence indicates that the 'moan' pronunciation is gaining ground among the young.

Dived or dove?

One of the surprising results was a question concerning the past tense of the verb to *dive*. This is generally assumed to be *dived* in Australian English, as it is in British English. The *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (2nd ed., 1987) gives both *dived* and *dove*, and comments on their use in American English:

Both *dived* and *dove* are standard as the past tense of *dive*. *Dived*, historically the older form, is somewhat more common in edited writing, but *dove* occurs there so frequently that it must also be considered standard: *The rescuer dove into 20 feet of icy water*. *Dove* is an Americanism that probably developed by analogy with alternations like *drive*, *drove*, and *ride*, *rode*. It is the more common form of speech in the northern United States and in Canada, and its use seems to be spreading.

In our survey 65% of respondents gave *dived*, but a surprising 35% claimed to say 'he *dove* into the water'. This suggests that the American-Canadian past tense is making inroads into Australian English.

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.

Letters should be addressed to:
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God the Father

In response to John Cowburn's article on Inclusive Language in the Church I have to say firstly that, since the Bible states that God is our *Father*, the masculine pronoun should be used when referring to Him. If someone wishes to refer to (and presumably think of) God as being either a female or an it, it should be understood that such a god is not the God of Whom the Bible speaks, but a god of their own imagining.

Secondly, when the Bible speaks of *man* it is referring to mankind – to the human race, or species, as against the animal species. By all means, let us in this day and age speak of humanity instead of mankind. Let our poets write songs in the language of today, but let us, in order that they may develop satisfying rhythms to their lyrics, grant them some poetic licence; and let us not blatantly bowdlerise the works of former writers on the pretext of eradicating sexist language from the Church.

Kay Christensen
Kalbar, Qld

Taboo words

I once heard some parvenu academics on the ABC discussing popular taboo words. They sounded very like people who were thoroughly enjoying uttering these words under the pretence of an academic discussion.

Taboo words are ugly words which debase the things they allegedly refer to; I will not allow them to be used in my presence because they are a debasement of the language itself. Even the thin things they refer to have perfectly legitimate terms for their expression.

I distinguish popular vulgarisms which have some expletive legitimacy but I believe their use should be subject to the rules of courtesy.

I hope Gary Simes did not get too much of a kick out of writing his essay.

Niall Brennan
Gladysdale, Vic.

Nouns from verbs

It annoys me very much to hear verbs frequently used as nouns in expressions such as 'have a listen', 'have a read' or 'it is a big ask'.

Lorraine Emden-Snook
Margaret River, WA

We wince when we first hear these, but they seem to grow on us. We put up with examples which must have been far more wince-inducing when first used as nouns, like *interest*, *affidavit* and *exit* (and I use Latin derivatives because we can be in no doubt that the verb came before the noun). Indeed, I can hear 'John's new book is a good read' without wincing these days. I can even say it. Try it for yourself. It is like the first jump into a swimming pool: a momentary shock, and then all is well.

Verbs from nouns

I hope *Ozwords* will examine the new trend to use nouns as verbs e.g. to 'access' computer information.

Dr Keith Suter
Sydney, NSW

Response as above, e.g. *to index* a book. You can object to this way of changing usage if you like, but please don't call it a 'new trend'. Shakespeare was the Grand Master of it, with verbs like *to king*, i.e. to make someone into a king. This one flopped, but *to knight* survives.

In an article based on his forthcoming book *The Language Instinct (Australian, 4 May 1994)*, Stephen Pinker says 'I have estimated that about a fifth of all English verbs were originally nouns.'

Lexmiths and others

I do not know of any satisfactory word for a person with my own passion, the *invention of new words*. A *neologist* would appear to be the answer, but its possible misinterpretation as a *knee-surgeon* is perhaps discouraging. Besides, its deeply Greek roots seem to run counter to the whole purpose of this exercise.

My own term for this armchair hobby is *lexmith*. So, *lexmith* or *neologists* of the world, make your preferences known...

Peter Spolc
Blaxland, NSW

Honcho

Will 'head honcho' be in the next edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*? And where does *honcho* come from?

Lesley Singh
Maleny, Qld

Honcho will not be in *AND* unless it appears that the Australian use is significantly different from the use elsewhere. It is already in *ACOD*, where it is described as 'US colloquial', and is said to be derived from the Japanese *han cho*, a group leader.

Australian Language in Aust. Lit.

Why is it that Australian journalists by and large write in Australian and so-called serious writers do not?

I can taste, hear, whatever, America in every American writer's work, Britain in most British writers' work, South Africa in some South Africans, and can tell Latin Americans from peninsular Spanish. Most national literatures are, after all, a discovery of that country. But not Australia. I can hear Oztralian in my daily life, in the pub and at the post office, can read it in the newspaper but I cannot read it in the literature. Homage paid through language to our neo-colonial masters on the editorial boards of London, New York or Hollywood does strike me as the worst cultural cringe of all. More so, in fact, than my daughter using a Webster's dictionary at school.

I am not speaking of accent, mind you. When I first migrated Australia was culture British and accent Australian and now I'm not so sure, save that I suspect I'm now living in a colony of the country I migrated from in the first place.

E. D. Webber
Dee Why, NSW

Ozwords would welcome comment on this letter. My first response is that the basic proposition is false, which makes it hard to discuss why it is true.

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Vale, Bill Ramson

Bill Ramson, editor of the *Australian National Dictionary* and founding Director of the Australian National Dictionary Centre, retired this year. We print below a tribute to him from John A. Simpson, Editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

BILL RAMSON was one of my first long-distance email pen-pals. It's difficult to quantify the importance of electronic mail to historical lexicography, but the next edition of the *OED* will benefit from it immeasurably and I hope that Bill and his colleagues at the ANDC found some advantage in the continuous passage of lexicographical information between Oxford and the ANU.

I don't remember speaking to Bill face-to-face about the medium, but I suspect it puzzled him a lot. His were the messages that came without newline characters, with the text often sprawled and broken casually in the editing window. It was peppered with reminders from Bill that Australia had beaten England at cricket, or that the All Blacks from Bill's homeland had cut another swathe through the English three-quarter line. Or that Bill and Joan were planning another holiday in France. In between was the lexicography: the painstaking amassing of apparently trivial information that when pieced together end to end goes to make a great dictionary. Should this word be included in the *AND*, or was it current more widely in British or American English? Did we realise that the *OED* had misdated or misquoted an Australian text? Did we have any evidence in our files for some term?

The *AND* put Australia on the lexicographical map: it was a dictionary covering the entire period of English Australia, from the earliest colonisation to the present day. Bill and his team presided over a monumental achievement, monitoring language change over a period of immense linguistic and cultural development. There are few enough of us working in the field, and Bill was one of the best. His retirement marks an end of an era, but may the story continue!



The following speech was given by John Ritchie, General Editor of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, at a farewell dinner for Bill Ramson and Joan Hughes.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,
Greater love hath no man than he should attend a function as this one on the same night as the third and deciding game in the State of Origin series. Parenthetically but emphatically, I should add that I asked the staff of University House to set up a big screen in this room, but they thought that the State of Origin was either a Darwinian dictum or a Platonic proposition, so I gave up the argument.

We come together tonight to honour Bill Ramson. And not only Bill. It is right and proper that we also honour Joan Hughes, the associate-editor of the *Australian National Dictionary*, and Bill's wife and academic partner. We acclaim her achievements, wish her a long and happy retirement, and ask her to accept these flowers.

In the past thirty years Bill Ramson has written two books, edited nine others and been a consultant for four more. He's been directly and indirectly responsible for producing fifteen books, in addition to which he has published fifty scholarly articles. The breadth of his accomplishments should be emphasized. He has taught English at the University of Sydney from 1955 to 1960 and in the Faculties at the Australian

National University from 1961 to 1981. He has been vice-master at Wesley College, University of Sydney, and acting-warden at Bruce Hall, ANU. Sub-dean in 1964-65 he was Dean of the Faculty of Arts at ANU for two terms, 1975-81.

In his days of strident Bolshevism, he was vice-president of the ANU Staff Association in 1982-83. He chaired the governing body of the Staff Centre at our university in 1968-70, and contributed greatly to the management and efficient running of the Humanities Research Centre. In addition, he has been a fellow of the Nuffield Foundation, of the University of Edinburgh, and of the Australian Academy of the Humanities (since 1989). And, what's more, he's been variously president, vice-president, chairman, convenor, secretary and a member of learned societies, committees, associations, councils, centres, panels, boards and schools too numerous to itemize here this evening. In short, he has served academia loyally and the wider community as well.

In 1981-87 Ramson was editor of the *AND* and from 1988 head of the *AND* Centre. In 1988, the bicentennial year, the *AND* was published, to universal acclaim. In producing it, Bill demonstrated tremen-

dous hard work, dedication and scholarship, and insight that was penetrating and acute, a span that was catholic in its range and a vision that encompassed a sense of Australia's national characteristic and our place in the wider world over two hundred years of time. It is revealing, too, that it took a lad from New Zealand and a lass from Pommyland to tell Australians so much about themselves.

In producing the *AND*, Ramson did something more: he gathered around him a splendid group of lexicographers, inspired them by his example, moulded them into a team, and kept them happy – despite a shoestring budget. All this he did, at some cost to his professional advancement, and, to a marked degree, at the expense of his health, though he's not one to admit to that. Our university is greatly indebted to him, perhaps more than it realizes. The *AND* is one of the greatest contributions to the humanities and social sciences that this nation has ever received. It is a masterpiece. It will live forever.

Who is this W. S. Ramson? What manner of man is he? What makes him tick? Why is he as he is? In an attempt to find the answers, I opened the *AND* and dipped randomly, in serendipity fashion, much in the manner of a bibliomancer. I looked at the six letters R, A, M, S, O and N. By chance, or by divine guidance, my eyes landed on six words, all of them, thankfully, quite 'politically correct': 'Read', 'Artist', 'Moomba', 'Shyster', 'Ocker' and 'Ning-nong' — R, A, M, S, O and N. What does the *AND* say about them?

R is for **read**, verb, as in the phrase, 'you wouldn't read about it'. One example cited is from Barry Humphries, *Bazza Comes into his Own* (1979). Referring to English people who emigrate to Australia, become disillusioned with what they find here and return to the land of their birth, Bazza McKenzie says: 'When they crawl back to Pommyland and see what a shithouse it is, they come back to us for another cheap trip. Poor old Poms — you wouldn't read about it in *Pix*. My oath, you wouldn't neither'.

A is for **artist**, defined as 'a person practised or habitually engaged in an activity which requires little skill or is reprehensible'. The example is drawn from G. A. Taylor, *Those Were the Days* (1918): 'The Writers and Artists Club was so called from the fact that most of its members could easily write their names at the end of a cheque, but it was the work of an artist to get it cashed.'

M is for **Moomba**, a carnival held annually in Melbourne from 1955. The citation comes from B. J. Blake's *Australian Aboriginal Languages* (1984): 'Undoubtedly the most unfortunate choice of a proper name from Aboriginal sources was made in Melbourne when the City fathers chose to name the city's annual festival "Moomba". The name is supposed to mean "Let's get together and have fun", though one wonders how anyone could be naive enough to believe that all this can be expressed in two syllables. In fact "moon" means "buttocks" or "anus" in various Victorian Aboriginal languages; and "ba" is a

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suffix that can mean "at", "in" or "on". Presumably, someone has tried to render the phrase "up your bum" in the vernacular.'

S is for **shyster**, defined as 'a worthless person'. The example is taken from Louis Esson's *Woman Tamer* (1910), a work curiously overlooked by the Virago publishing house. 'We're all thieves. One bloke, he says, does the trick with a silk hat on the Stock Exchange and a shyster mine. We do it with a jemmy.'

O is for **ocker**, defined as a masculine nickname. The *AND* quotes a passage from the *Bulletin* (April 1977): 'And you have the poofster problem. There seem so many poofs in Sydney as might cause serious concern about overcrowding to the housing authorities of Sodom. It is a statistical and biological impossibility for all these poofsters to be homosexuals. They are refugees from the other Australian tyrannical myth, the ocker. Any young Australian man with a normal fondness of dressiness, an interest in the arts, a liking for a varied diet, a penchant for European travel, a preference for comfort, even a weakness for

after-shave, measures himself against the ocker and instantly assumes himself queer. Once he thinks himself queer, he acts queer'.

Now, that quotation *must* have been selected by Joan Hughes who, I'm told, picks all the bold ones, and whose favourite source is Clem Gorman's play, *A Night in the Arms of Raelene* (1983). Raelene? Kayleen? Where else, on the English-speaking earth but in Canberra, could you find two adjacent suburbs named 'Kaleen' and 'Bruce'?

N is for **ning nong**, defined as a foolish person. Two examples this time. The first from E. Mackie, *Oh to be Aussie* (1977): 'The trainee Aussie must not go to King's Cross — it's only for the tourists, ningnongs and geezers all the way from Woop Woop.' The second from Dorothy Hewett, *This Old Man* (1976):

'Ere comes the bride,
Fair, fat and wide,
Who's that poor ningnong
She's got by her side'

R, A, M, S, O and N. Six of the words starting with these letters tell you a lot about the *AND*. Laconic, earthy and sardonic, what fun it is, what a joy to read. And, perhaps indirectly, the work reveals a little about Bill Ramson and a lot about Joan Hughes. Tonight we honour Joan and Bill, and wish them well in their retirement. Collectively and individually, we have many reasons for being grateful to them.

Allow me to intrude one personal note. On 12 August 1986 circumstances thrust me into the post of acting-dean of the Faculty of Arts at ANU. I knew nothing about the job and turned to W. S. Ramson who agreed to help me. When asked why he took that on, he simply replied, 'Ritchie's my mate.' Tonight I say to Dr Bill Ramson, you have many mates, men and women who are indebted to you and who regard you with abiding affection. They thank you for your generosity, your kindness, your gentle nature; for your wisdom, warmth and wit; for your company and your constancy. You have done more than bring fame to this university. You have graced the place for a third of a century. Come and see your friends now and then, if you ever tire of Sydney and the South of France. I'm sure that your friends will come and visit you, though that may sound more like a threat than a promise, especially in the year 2000, when Sydney hosts the Olympics. Thank you, Bill Ramson, for so very much, and best wishes for the future from all of us.

DANGEROUS BUSINESS

Jay Arthur

'THAT OLD FELLA, he's a clever fella; he can go to that dangerous place for business.'
What does this mean?

He's a smart old man who can go to dangerous places (unstable foreign countries?) in order to transact business.

Possibly. But if you were aware of Aboriginal English, the variety of Australian English spoken by many Aboriginal people, you might read it differently:

That elder, he's a spiritually powerful person. He can safely go to that sacred place (which can make those unqualified to go there ill or have some other misfortune befall them) to conduct ceremonies.

Old, clever, dangerous and *business* have all their meanings extended or altered in Aboriginal English to give them specifically Aboriginal meanings. *Old* means someone with a great deal of traditional knowledge, so someone might be called *old man* as a term of respect even if they were younger than the speaker. *Clever* means clever in spiritual matters; the *cleverman* is what used to be called a 'witch doctor' or a 'sorcerer'. *Dangerous* means spiritually dangerous and *business* is what Aboriginal people see as their business, ritual and ceremony.

Defining the topic

What is 'Aboriginal English'? It's the English spoken by Aboriginal people where it differs from that of 'standard' Australian English. But it is not quite as simple as that. The past history and experience with English of an Aboriginal person from Mt Druitt in the western suburbs of Sydney are going to be quite different from those of someone from Ringers Soak in the Western Desert of Central Australia.

Aboriginal English in south-eastern Australia may differ from standard English in only a few words with different meanings. In the south, people tend to speak Aboriginal English at home and standard English at work (as do the speakers of many minority dialects all over the world).

In the north and centre of Australia, people may speak Aboriginal English as their second language and they may speak Aboriginal English that is so different from 'standard English' in accent, vocabulary and grammar that many people would find it hard to understand. In some areas of the north, it has become another language, called Kriol.

So Aboriginal English is best understood as a continuum that is only a little

different from standard Australian English at one end, and has this new language, Kriol, at the other. There is also a historical continuum, because the speech of Aboriginal people in SE Australia last century was much closer to the language of people in the north and centre today.

'Many people still haven't heard the phrase Aboriginal English or understand how widely it is used, but there does seem to be a growing recognition of Australian English's first and most widely-spoken spoken dialect.'

In my research at the Australian National Dictionary Centre I have been looking at the vocabulary of Aboriginal English, concentrating primarily on contemporary language.

Most people who know about the different English spoken by Aboriginal people still think of it as 'pidgin' English. Strictly speaking it is not 'pidgin' because a pidgin is a language spoken between two groups of people who don't have a common language; it is the language they devise to use between two communities as a form of communication. (The pidgin used in early Australia is one of the sources of Aboriginal English.)

Many people who are aware of this different English think only of a limited range of words, such as *plenty*, *allabout*, *number one*. But Aboriginal English has many other words which are just as distinctive but not as obviously different (such as the ones in the beginning of this article).

For instance, Aboriginal society, in the

south as well as in the north, puts much more emphasis on the extended family than do most Australians, and their language reflects this. People claim and address as *cousin* or *cuz* people who would have long dropped out of reckoning in most non-Aboriginal families; they use kinship terms such as *aunty*, *uncle*, *granny* and *grandpa* to address the older members of the community; and they call *brother*, *sister*, *mother* and *father* those people who in standard Australian English would be called 'cousin', 'aunty' or 'uncle'.

Aboriginal people have a strong allegiance to their land; what they call their *country* non-Aboriginal Australian would call a 'district' or 'region'.

Sometimes there are words which could be misunderstood: in the Aboriginal English of Northern and Central Australia you could say to someone *That bloke killed me with a stick; I had to go to hospital*. *Kill* means to affect someone, usually by hitting. If you want to say this action resulted in death, you say *kill'em dead*. (It's a bit like the English verb 'to shoot'. If you said to someone *She was shot*, they might reply *Was she shot dead?* because 'shot' can sometimes mean *shot dead* and sometimes just *hit with a bullet*.)

Growing recognition

A few years ago it was often difficult to find any recognition at all of Aboriginal English; in printed form, it rarely appeared except for the odd sentence spoken by an Aboriginal character in a novel. Aboriginal children at school received remedial attention for their 'poor English'. Most people assumed that the language Aboriginal people spoke was just a 'deficient' form of English which would eventually die out when people had more non-Aboriginal education.

Nowadays, when Cathy Freeman comes

back to Australia and talks about going home she is quoted as saying she is going back to her 'mob' (*mob* is a common Aboriginal English word for extended family). In most major newspaper, in articles about Aboriginal matters, you'll often find a word or two in Aboriginal English. Television documentaries showing interviews with Aboriginal people speaking the 'heavy' Aboriginal English of Northern Australia will often use subtitles so that you can hear the sound of the language instead of using voiceovers or just talking about the people in the documentary.

Many people still haven't heard the phrase Aboriginal English or don't understand how widely it is used, but there does seem to be a growing recognition of Australian English's first and most widely-spoken dialect.

Jay Arthur is a researcher at the ANDC. She is writing a book on Aboriginal English which will be published by OUP in 1995. She has co-edited *Long Time, Olden Time* (an Aboriginal oral history of the Northern Territory) and W. H. Downing's *Digger Dialects*.

Mailbag

(continued from page 3)

Obviously serious writers are writing for a more disparate readership than most journalists, and hence may be rather more careful about using local idioms and allusions. On page 4 of this issue, John Ritchie mentions that the phrase 'State of Origin', does not travel well. This is relevant because an internationally successful Australian writer is writing for exactly the same market as the successful American or British writer: 70% American/Canadian, 20% British, 5% Australian and 5% other. It would therefore not be surprising if our writers took some note of the needs of American and British readers.

But does this actually happen? Do Peter Carey and Tom Keneally modify their language in order to be internationally read? Or do they get heavily edited? We would like to hear from them or their editors.

As for the school using a Webster dictionary, it must be a very odd school. Since Mr Webber arrived here, school dictionaries have turned from being 100% imported (there were effectively no local ones) to being 99% locally-produced (and I would say 100% but for Mr Webber's evidence to the contrary).

PEDANTS' CORNER

Your Pedant-in-Residence got some correspondence of his own this time.

I am increasingly worried by the use, even by the apparently 'educated', of the verb 'to lay' in place of 'to lie', e.g. 'I was just laying there.' In vain to point out 'lay' is a transitive verb and requires an object.

Nancy Cato
Noosa Heads, Qld.

This is such a common usage that it is unwise to get worried about it, unless one feels very short of things to worry about. I hope that the letter indicates that Nancy Cato, who has given us so many wonderful books, is leading a tranquil life.

For what it is worth, *ACOD* reports the intransitive use, describing it as 'Brit. dial. and erroneous', which seems to me odd considering its currency in US and Australian. Odder still, *The Macquarie Dictionary* does not mention it, presumably hoping it will go away. But Pam Peters, a member of the Macquarie team, says in her book, *The Cambridge Australian-English Style Guide*, that *lay* and *laid* are used intransitively 'in common talk in all English countries... [F]or the moment they remain markers of informal speech. In the longer term they spell the doom of *lie*.' Whether we like it or not, the gentle lady is probably right.

Your pedant would add the more general point that the statement '*lay* is a transitive verb and requires an object' is a tautology, not a proof, and the proposition that it requires an object comes first: a verb is *termed* transitive *because* it requires an object, not vice versa.

I was once editing a play by a New Guinea writer, who had one of his characters say 'Last night I slept a dream'. Now, all the dictionaries say that *sleep* is normally an intransitive verb except in a few very special phrase like *to sleep the sleep of the damned*, *to sleep it off* and *The hotel sleeps forty*. None of these supported the phrase *to sleep a dream*, which was a fully transitive usage. I thought it an attractive one, and left it in—as I feel sure Nancy Cato would have done.

The admirable Robert Dessaix was the first (but not the last) to give your pedant-in-residence an instance of a modern language with a fully-developed set of case

inflections: Russian. Thank you, Dr Dessaix. I dips me lid.

The even more admirable Beatrice Faust has sent me an article from *Good Weekend* containing some usages which cause me great grief:

From *Good Weekend*, July 23): 'Nasreen is in hiding (at last report) because Muslim fundamentalists have demanded that she be killed for her alleged critique of the Koran.'

I don't want *critique* to go the same way as *criticism*, i.e. move from meaning *an analytical judgement* into meaning *an adverse comment* (and it is quite clear that this was the intended meaning). I associate this usage with pseuds, but if *Good Weekend* accepts it, perhaps we have lost this battle, too.

In another cutting from the same issue, Ms Faust finds 'Rankin's work has been honoured as equally as Brett's'. Let us hope that the editors had better things to do that week than read their magazine. In any case, we can object to this as woolly thinking, even if we have to accept changes in usage.

Meanwhile (just in case we thought she had it in for *Good Weekend*), Ms Faust also sent a cutting from the *The Australian Magazine*, with (in big bold type)

In private discussions with colleagues, Downer was as scathing in his criticism of Hewson as he was publicly praise-worthy of him.

I must remember to chide the normally impeccable Jim Hall for letting that one through.

Incidentally, going back to the 'alleged critique of the Koran', Ms Faust might have noted that this also illustrates a curious use of the word 'alleged'. The usage appears to have arisen from the need to avoid defamation and contempt of court: thus a death is an *alleged murder* and a suspect is an *alleged murderer* until the jury says that it was indeed a murder and who dunnit. By a bizarre infection, however, the usage has been extended, so that we get an *alleged corpse*. That Ms Nasreen had commented on passages in the *Koran* was never in dispute. The only possible doubt was whether this constituted an act of blasphemy, which depends on the law and the judges.

Vain repetitions

(continued from page 1)

The more likely reason was identified as long ago as 1860:

This multiplication of useless expressions probably owed its origin to the want of knowledge of the true meaning and due application of each word, and a consequent apprehension that, if one word alone were used, a wrong one might be adopted and the right one omitted; and to this something must be added for carelessness and the general disposition of the profession to seek safety in verbosity rather than in discrimination of language.

(Davidson, *Precedents and Forms in Conveyancing*, quoted in Garner)

That is the rub. There are two types of doublets and triplets. Some are truly tautological, some are not. With the first category, nothing is lost if the formula is reduced to merely one of its elements. With the second category, the lawyer who makes a mistake faces a professional negligence claim. Faced with an urgent drafting assignment from an important and impatient client, there is no time to ponder the niceties of legal meaning, and the familiar formulas of the precedent to hand will invariably be followed.

Fortunately, some assistance is available. Over the past few years the Law Foundation Centre for Plain Legal Language at the University of Sydney has in a series of articles in the *New South Wales Law Society Journal* analysed a number of the more common doublets and triplets. The articles are, without exception, well

researched, with sufficient reference both to leading cases and authoritative texts to satisfy even the legal traditionalists. Nine of the items dealt with and their recommended plain language equivalents are:

right, title and interest: interest

will and testament: will

estate and interest: interest

joint and several: together and separate

signed, sealed and delivered: signed as a deed

give, devise and bequeath: give

null and void: of no legal effect

rest, residue and remainder: all other property

Of the nine examples given, seven are essentially tautological, while two are not.

It is this uncertainty about which is precisely the right word to use which so often leads to the lengthy strings of near synonyms found in legal drafting. Rather than exercise professional judgement, the drafter plays it safe by including all the alternatives, then adding for good measure a catch all such as *and all like things*. In most cases, one of the alternatives alone would suffice, or a generic expression could be substituted instead.

The real message of doublets and triplets for the non-lawyer is that, far from being a sign of great learning, they are usually a symptom of a lack of legal skill. Nearly always all but one element of the formula will be surplusage. The true place for doublets and triplets is as a rhetorical device. All else is stuff and nonsense.

Tony Lang is a partner of Slater & Gordon, solicitors.

Ozwords Competition No. 1

Competitors were asked for the lyrics of the popular song which frightened the birds with its horrible double entendre.

The most unexpected double entendre was that of Ian Mabbett, who predicted that the chunnel would become infested with microbes, leading to a new meaning to the phrase 'Wogs begin at Calais'. The best ones in Flora Fisk's were in her title: '*Ars bilonga Asia brevis*: A really horrible double entendre on Keating's bottom line'.

They get the consolations; first prize goes however to Brian Riddell's briefer and more obvious, but also more singable, lyric:

Sausage would erupt

If not for its skin

Aids like this

Keep the sausage in.

Ozwords competition No. 2

We all know of the letter which came directed in a writing unexpected: 'Clancy's gone to Queensland droving, and we don't know where he are'.

It is less well known that after the Dismissal the same writer was employed by Malcolm Fraser to deal with correspondence addressed to Gough Whitlam. Prizes for the best equally brief form letter to cover the situation.

A Word from the West

caterpillar a participant in the 'Caterpillar Cup', or 'Mad Mile', a team foot-race held at Northam.

There will also be prizes for the first caterpillar to finish. The Caterpillar Cup will be won by the first team of four runners, joined together like a caterpillar, to cross the finish line. 1986 *Northam Advertiser* 23 July

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