

Editorial

Our editorial in *English Today* issue 29.3 raised the subject of English as a ‘killer language’. Demonstrating that English too might be thought to be threatened at times, here is an entertaining but nevertheless serious linguistic matter that has recently arisen in the Welsh part of the UK, as reported in *The Times*:

Residents in the Welsh village of Varteg are not happy with plans to rename it Y Farteg, saying that it will make them the butt of jokes. Welsh language campaigners are calling for the name change, claiming that the current title for the village is incorrect. In the Welsh language, there is no letter V – although the same sound is pronounced [i.e. written] with the letter F. However locals say that the proposed name sounds like a schoolboy’s playground insult. Sioned Jones, 42, a resident of the village, said: ‘Just imagine how embarrassing it will be to have the word fart in your village’s name...’

The interaction between the Welsh and English languages has not been a happy one in Wales. Historically, English was frequently imposed upon Welsh speakers: in the extreme southwest of the country replacement of Welsh by English occurred through settlement as long ago as the late eleventh century, and in much of the south, where Varteg is situated, it occurred progressively throughout the period of the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Replacement of Welsh by English was not sympathetically done, and created hurt and resentment. As social and political attitudes have changed, especially since the mid-twentieth century, strenuous efforts have been made to give Welsh proper official status.

But as we know, language is tied closely to identity, to the way in which speakers connect with their communities as they are now and as they have been passed on to them by their forebears. Just as the Welsh speakers bridled at having English forced upon them in the past, so many of their English-speaking compatriots now resent having Welsh forced upon *them* from outside their community. To the very large majority of

people in the area in which the village is located, Varteg is not an ‘incorrect’ spelling but a time-honoured one, used for generations. And it seems likely that the anger at its being questioned goes deeper than the merely linguistic, so that what local Varteg residents *really* object to is not so much the association of the word ‘fart’ with their village, but more that the V- spelling inherited by them from their English-speaking ancestors is being eroded, and that the Welsh language is being boosted at their expense. There is no easy solution to such conflicts of language wherever they occur, but they should be handled intelligently and sympathetically on all sides.

Five of the articles in this issue of *English Today* concern aspects of the interface between English and other languages. One, by Botha, treats the use of Chinese and English by Chinese university students. Another, by Hu, uses comparisons of written English and Chinese to shed light on ESL writing. Two more, by Chang and Takahashi, deal with learners encountering non-native English varieties in Taiwan and Japan respectively. Prčić’s article shifts the geographical perspective to investigate the impact of English on Serbian. Beyond focus on language interactions, Wyatt puts the usage of EFL teachers under the spotlight. The University of Leiden team researching prescriptivism (major article in *ET* 29.4) invites readers to provide information on one of their issues of concern. Wikstrom provides an in-depth exploration of native-speakers’ perceived authenticity of supposed Received Pronunciation articulation of two variables, and Hinton offers a personal reflection on a wide range of words for ‘mother’, to coincide as closely as possible with Mother’s Day (or Mothering Sunday). Todd’s book review picks up the theme of the non-standard dealt with especially in the articles by Chang and Takahashi, while Beal’s treats the subject of diachronic variation. Sheldon reviews an open-access online pedagogic site offering an educational ‘bargain’.

The Editors