

## The Story of Men's English?

The television series 'The Story of English' has just completed its screening on Singapore television. The aims of this series were admirable, and it has undoubtedly brought before a wide public some current issues in sociolinguistics and the history of English.

We would like to express our disappointment, however, at the overwhelming preponderance of male speakers in every programme in this series. In some programmes there were no female speakers at all: and few programmes showed more than two or three women. In the treatment of British and American varieties there was a particular concentration on old men, although in the discussion of the newer varieties more young men appeared and, occasionally, a few women. The focus in the British and American programmes was often on broad speech, and to some extent the use of old men results from this emphasis. However, there are as many female speakers of Scots Gaelic, Welsh, and Irish as there are male: there was no reason to focus on fishermen, onion sellers, pub scenes or teams of boys playing shinty with a priest. Similarly there are plenty of women speakers of Canadian English, Scots, and Cockney. The immigrant communities of New York presumably include Jewish, Italian, and German women as well as men.

We feel that this programme made no attempt to show more or less equal numbers of women and men, but was happy to present the story of English as a story, largely, of men's English.

○ Anthea Fraser Gupta, Julie Bradshaw, Susan Hunston, Department of English Language and Literature, National University of Singapore

*Robert McCrum, scriptwriter for the series, replies:* This letter voices a criticism with which I profoundly agree, and which all of us on the *Story of English* series were constantly aware of. In a sense the preponderance of males in the films reflects something about our society. Take our on-camera academic advisers for instance: we felt we should film the acknowledged experts in each particular area. They happen, thanks to university recruitment and promotion patterns, to be men. There was not much we could do about this, though we tried where possible to take positive counterbalancing action. In the earlier episodes, where (to narrate the earlier part of the story) we filmed 'language fossils' in South Carolina, Ireland, the Highlands of Scotland etc., we had to find visual sequences that would work well for the camera. These tended to be

crafts. These, in turn, tended to be the preserve (especially in very traditional societies) of men.

I hope this shows that, while it's impossible to deny the criticism, the authors of the letter are wrong to suggest that we 'made no attempt to show more or less equal numbers of women and men'. In fact, we used women wherever we could, including our production team!

## A Yorkshire 'double is'

'Double is', as described by Professor Bolinger in *ET9*, is not only American. As a fairly senior Army clerk in Hong Kong in 1969, I was sent on a fortnight's course to brush up on the purely military skills – how to kill people and so on. Our weapon training instructor was a young corporal in one of the Yorkshire regiments, and the 'double is' was a notable feature of his speech.

At the completion of each stage of instruction, his formula to move us on to the next was: 'Right, now we're going to do [e.g. immediate action on weapon jamming]. It's really quite simple. What it is, is you grab this knob here . . .'

I have absolutely no recollection of any of the things he was trying to teach us, but the memory of his 'double is' has remained vividly with me ever since.

○ Paul Beale, Loughborough, Leicestershire, England

## We should take care with trademarks

May I comment on two points in the January 1987 edition of *English Today*.

You quote a sentence from my *Dictionary of Confusing Words and Meanings* in which you find my use of the plural pronoun 'we' with a singular noun unusual. (I wrote, 'If we are not a scientist, we may thus have problems . . .'.) I could have used 'I' or 'you' or 'one' here to conform with the singular verb. But 'I' I find too intrusive, 'you' too casual (or too personal) and 'one' too formal. My use of 'we' here is thus close to the journalistic one, and is nothing new. John Healey, in his translation of the life of St Augustine (1610), wrote: 'Should we particularize, wee should become a direct Historiographer'. My usage is identical.

In his interesting article on trademarks, Thomas W Adams is treading on perilous ground, as I myself discovered when researching the origins of trade names for my own *Dictionary of Trade Name Origins*. He says that

Thermos and Cellophane have lost their exclusive rights to these names. That may be so in the United States, but it is certainly not so in Britain, where both companies vigorously protect their trademarks. Thermos is thus the registered trademark in Britain of Thermos Ltd, and Cellophane that of BCL Ltd (formerly British Cellophane).

Mr Adams could also have made the reassuring valid point that whether a trademark is registered or not, the companies have no legal right whatsoever to prevent us from using the names in our everyday speech exactly as we please. If my wife says, 'Oh dear, I'd better give it another Hoovering', and does so with the Electrolux, she will not be hauled off to court or served with a summons. It is simply that the companies concerned are in danger of losing their rights to the trademark if it is used loosely or generically.

Mr Adams should perhaps also have specified that although shredded wheat is now legally a generic name, Welgar Shredded Wheat is not, and is still legally protected. To his selection of generic names he could similarly have added (in Britain) *aspirin, derv, dynamite, gramophone, hovercraft, kerosene, melamine, polythene* and *Portland cement*.

○ Adrian Room, Petersfield, Hampshire, England

## Animalism?

Am I alone in wanting the creation of a new figure of speech, a kind of inverted personification in which man is given the attributes of an animal? Here are some examples:

For God's sake let us be men  
not monkeys minding machines  
or sitting with our tails curled  
(*D. H. Lawrence*)

Judge Taylor was on the bench, looking like a sleepy old shark, his pilot fish writing rapidly below in front of him . . . In answer to the clerk's booming voice, a little bantam cock of a man rose and strutted to the stand.  
(*Harper Lee*)

While I realize that the above are metaphors, surely a more descriptive term could be found – animalisation, depersonification?

○ Jill Bray, Malvern Link, Worcestershire, England

## Better English: how?

Thanks, Bill Broughton and Paul Harvey (*ET9*). *ET's* need for succinctness has sharpened the debate

deceptively; cries of 'bigot' and 'elitist' won't help. I never supposed there were simple answers. Babel's doom is not upon us, but linguistic entropy does seem to have suddenly increased. Our spelling fosters confusion, and an Ozzie presenter broadcast 'lesions' as 'lezzy-uns'; but radical reform would stunt local accents and spread barbarism. We don't want a purist, Canutish Académie, but some sane body to counter 'blind guides' in the media etc.; individuals 'blowing their tops' risk discounting as prejudiced. Glad there's a Language Awareness working party: how much influence will it have? We should all digest from the Introduction (1852) by Roget to his *Thesaurus*, paragraph 8, beginning 'It is of the utmost consequence that strict accuracy . . .'. Amidst accelerating change, his principles still hold.

○ David I Masson, Leeds, West Yorkshire, England

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### Rubbishing the language

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One indication of growing old is that I become greatly annoyed at examples of slovenly speech, and I'm even angry at present about the use of 'rubbish' as a verb. Even the better writers are using it, talking of 'rubbishing' this or that.

○ Vernon Noble, Brockholes near Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, England

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### Saddling the written language

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With reference to the editorial comment in *ET* 8 (Oct 86) quoting George Racz in regards to a plea for some kind of uniformity in the English language: He, of all people, should remember that in many countries there exists a 'mother tongue' in addition to the official language. It is only in English, from my own experiences, that dialects are saddled onto the written language and it doesn't seem to bother too many individuals except the die-hard purists. The biggest problem is that there are too many individuals these days that can neither spell nor write although there appears to be a movement to get some of this illiteracy and bad writing corrected in some way. Keep up the good work and we may get some of the problems licked!

○ George F Smith Jr, Manorville, New York, USA

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### Esperanto adrift?

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This letter is in response to the article on 'The Planned and the Ethnic' in *ET* 8. In this article, Arnold Pitt gave reasons why Esperanto would make a good world language. I wish to take

issue with one of his statements.

He states that '[Esperanto] has lasted long enough to prove its durability without breaking into dialects . . .' I don't know that much about Esperanto to comment on the statement itself, but I would like to comment on one possible reason why it could be true. People who learn Esperanto are motivated for some reason to do so. Therefore, the corpus of speakers of Esperanto are probably a tightly-knit group who feel at least some interest in preserving the language. If 400 million speakers from all walks of life spoke Esperanto, I would venture to say that it would be subject to the same rules of language change and linguistic 'drift' as other languages are.

○ Michael K Buckley, Omaha, Nebraska, USA

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### Plesing the I

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Maurice West's invitation to stir up an orthographical hornet's nest (*ET* 9) requires a cool reply. After caricaturing what reformed English spelling might look like ('*yaw korrespondence sea phit ta wright ta yoo in sucha pikyooloeya manor*'), he suggests some criteria for a reformed system (*phonetic consistency, the need to please the eye, words as abstract symbols*), and concludes that no system proposed so far satisfies them.

The trouble is, these criteria are mutually incompatible. The spellings that 'please the eye' (whose eye?) are the familiar ones, yet they are phonetically (or phonemically) inconsistent. The spellings are 'abstract symbols' (or *gestalts*, as the psychologists say), yet they are made up of letters representing sounds and are learnt as such. The letters represent sounds, yet they please the accustomed eye by doing so inconsistently. How do we untie this knot of contradictions?

The question to be asked is not how we should write English phonetically, but how we can best improve our present writing system. It turns out that some 10–15% of the letters that now make up our spellings are misleading because they are superfluous. Therefore, by removing them, we not only make the system more consistent, but we relieve it of unnecessary clutter; at the same time, if we don't actually change letters, we preserve what most 'pleases the eye', the essential 'abstract symbol'.

This technique is known as Cut Spelling. We have no difficulty reading it, yet if children were taught it in school, they would still be able to decode traditional writing. In other words, it has the indispensable characteristic of a practical reform scheme: it ensures compatibility of old and new. By cutting out irrelevant letters, it saves time and reduces inconsistency, yet the shock of the unfamiliar is far less than would

be occasioned by any attempt at full consistency. Does it please you? Well, there are 13.2% fewer letters to be read in this paragraph, so at least it saves you that much trouble.

This system is now under active discussion in the Simplified Spelling Society. Readers interested in such developments should contact the membership secretary, who signs this letter.

○ Chris Upward, 61 Valentine Road, Birmingham B14 7AJ, England

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### Kuite dilijitid

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Ij wyz kuite dilijitid tu riid Maurice West's letter in *Qanjuerij's ET*. Wot hiz letter indikaitid tu mi iz dat hi at liist iz wyrrid inyf bij spellin riform tu riplij. If hi iz wyrrid bij di ijdia ov spellin riform, den, wi kan bet dat menij ydherz ar tuu. Dis iz y gud sijn. Wyrrij like dat iz di prikyrsor ov canqe. Ij du not klaim dat di waij dat Ij spel iz konsistent, onlij dat it iz *mor* konsistent dan di tradixional orthografij.

On hiz spesifik grymblz. If Ij am rong wen Ij rikord 'z' radher dan 's' at di end ov 'seksez', den so ar di maqoritiv ov profexxional linguistz.

Az rigardz 'karakteristikz', iz konvenient tu juz onlij wyn letter az di plural marker. S or Z ar availabl tu ys, and praktis xouz Z tu bi di *mor* apropiat. If 'malez' apiiz tu reprizent y twu sillabl wyrd, di same kan bi sed for 'males'. Houever, 'malez' iz an impruvment on 'males', bikoz di fijnal sound iz dat ov Z, and not dat ov S.

○ Robert Craig, Weston-super-Mare, Avon, England

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### Quebec English

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The pressure that English exerts on other languages is immense and troubling. As it impinges, however, English is also impinged upon. An excellent example of the process can be seen here in Quebec, Canada's largely French-speaking province. Until recently, most English-speakers in Quebec were unilinguals who shunned contact with the majority; but political changes since 1970 have forced them to abandon their lofty isolation. As a result, a local idiom has developed containing a strong infusion of French. Even in Montreal, a metropolis that more than half a million Anglophones call home, certain French expressions

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Readers' letters are welcomed. *ET* policy is to publish as representative and informative a selection as possible in each issue. Such correspondence, however, may be subject to editorial adaptation in order to make the most effective use of both the letters and the space available.

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have entered daily English use.

In this city, a corner store is a *dépanneur* (a Quebec term that means 'breakdown service'). To reach a *dépanneur*, fortunately, one rarely has to cross an *autoroute* (used instead of 'highway' or 'freeway'), though one might well pass a *brasserie* or a *pâtisserie*.

French terms are particularly common in the domain of high culture. The opening of an art exhibition is a *vernissage* and the exhibition itself would, increasingly, be known as an *exposition*. French-language singers are described in both languages as *chansonniers*; and the New Year festivities, comparable in tone and insobriety to a Scottish hogmanay, are a *réveillon*. Revellers are less likely than visitors to avail themselves of a horse-drawn *calèche*.

There are a number of French terms which are generally understood even by unilingual Anglophones in Montreal, and which seem to be on the verge of entering its English parlance. Two examples are *garderie* (day-care centre) and *régie* (a government department or



"Pay attention, Dobbs, or you won't know how to fill in unemployment forms."

bureau). It is probably a proof of the success of measures designed to maintain French as the working language of Quebec that the very term *Québécois* is nowadays accepted in English discourse.

The influence of French can be felt not only in the gradual establishment of new words, but also in the increased use of many terms in political and financial affairs that are common to both languages. In Toronto, a businessman at a 'meeting' might 'co-operate' with a colleague on a 'file' before going off to a 'movie theatre'. But in Montreal, he or she would *collaborate* on the *dossier*, then leave the *conférence* for the *cinéma*.

Quebec French, of course, contains many hundreds of words that were originally English. One of them – a heart-slowng confection of cheese, gravy and *frites* ('French fries' or 'chips') – goes in both languages by the name *poutine*: an offshoot of 'pudding'. Such are the incidental joys of life in a bilingual city. I would be interested to hear if the English spoken in other such cities – Hong Kong? Miami? Capetown? – is undergoing a comparable sea-change.

○ Mark Abley, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

## LITERACY: Did the system fail them?

I was surprised to find in David Crystal's article *Literacy 2000* the assertion that '... there seems to be little doubt that individual tuition is essential' in helping adults to acquire reading skills and that '... the more successful campaigns rely on a one-to-one situation'. This is simply not true.

The most successful campaigns around the world have been those which have fulfilled John Vaizey's dictum, quoted in the article, about the need for '... a direct correspondence between the achievement of literacy and its subsequent use in daily life'. Daily life is about meeting, talking and listening. It is about hearing, forming and expressing views on issues of personal relevance. Matching these experiences of daily life is the aim and the achievement of group learning in all parts of the globe.

In the UK the historical accident whereby one-to-one tuition became, by default, the accepted way of working within adult literacy has long been superseded by a recognition of the greater value – notably in terms of confidence, usage and the collective teaching abilities of the student group – of people sitting down in an atmosphere of shared study and co-operative support. In 1984/5, 80% of adult literacy students in England and Wales were receiving tuition as part of a small group or class.

It all comes down, of course, to this question of 'illiteracy' being 'a sensitive area in which the person's dignity needs to be safeguarded' and where 'a modicum of privacy' is required.

Nobody's dignity is enhanced by suggestions that they are the educational equivalent of The Elephant Man – to be kept hidden from public view at all costs.

Students who come together under the umbrella of the NFVLS, the National Students' Association or their local scheme do so without embarrassment or crisis of dignity. They come secure in the knowledge that they are normal, competent adults engaged in useful learning and, moreover, that they have insights into the failings of our education system which are worth far more than the litany of causes, focussing on individual culpability, which David Crystal and others are so ready to recite. The stigma attached to reading difficulties stems solely from the attitudes of those who consider themselves 'literate' towards those over whom they feel compelled to assert some sort of moral and/or intellectual superiority.

In the UK one in ten adults find that they have been failed by the education system to the extent that they have insufficient literacy skills (National Child Development Study, 1981). In comprehensive education system, ten per cent is too high a figure to blame on the individuals. So whose dignity are we really trying to safeguard?

○ Eric Appleby, Organiser, National Federation of Voluntary Literacy Schemes, London, England

*David Crystal replies:* I welcome the corrective Mr Appleby introduces in the first part of his letter and am happy

to draw readers' attention to the booklet recently produced by NFVLS in association with the Broadcasting Support Service illustrating this view. However, I deplore the emotive tone that he chooses to introduce into the second part of the letter, which does his cause no service. My article, as he should know, was not written in routine support of any of the various philosophies or political positions advocated in this field. I do not write regularly on literacy, in fact, but anyone who bothered to read what I have written in my books on normal and abnormal child language development will know that his interpretation of my beliefs is, quite simply, absurd. My criticisms of the inadequacies of the educational system, in respect of its focus on the development of language skills, are a matter of record. What a pity that this potentially useful contribution to the topic should have been marred in this way.

What we need, in research terms, is detailed information about the complementary roles of group and individual tuition in literacy development. Even in group activities there is the need for individual discussion, as the NFVLS booklet makes clear. What would be interesting is to establish just how much tutor-student interaction takes place, as opposed to student-student. I hope the stance taken by NFVLS, as reflected in Mr Appleby's letter, will not preclude their promoting the development of objective studies of such matters.

## A language for Europe

Language is a barrier to European unity because the twelve EEC countries speak twelve different languages. Although these countries are learning to live together economically and politically, agreements are often difficult to reach when members do not properly understand each other without the aid of interpreters. Consequently, a common language is needed for all the countries of the Common Market in order to improve decision-making and reduce costs.

The real decision for reducing costs is the choice of one language for the whole community – half of its work force comprises interpreters and translators who would be redundant if there was a common language. One official language has many other advantages and they could all contribute to eliminating national differences. Unfortunately, choosing one language from the twelve alternatives is a very difficult decision to make. Or is it? Surely, English has chosen itself and deservedly so?

English is the easiest language for the different European nationalities to understand, because its grammar has virtually no declensions or conjugations – unlike German or French, which can give headaches to anyone trying to learn them. The grammatical case of a noun in German changes according to its relationship with another word – nominative, genitive, dative, or accusative; its subjunctive mood; its gender – masculine, feminine or neuter; in all probability, you still find it difficult to remember which is which! English rarely uses them at all and that makes it an easier language to learn or, when in doubt, the message is usually clear anyway. Plus the fact that its vocabulary contains a great stock of descriptive words. For two thousand years, English has been a sponge language absorbing words from other languages and people from all the Western Countries can recognise word similarities with their own languages before they even start to learn English.

Historically, the British Isles were first invaded by peoples from Northern Europe who brought their languages with them to influence the native way of speaking. All their languages were Germanic whilst the native British language was Celtic, but they were combined to produce the Anglo-Saxon language which was related to the other northern languages. Other invaders were from Southern Europe; firstly, the Romans and then, the Normans. Consequently, the English language assimilated many Latin and French words and they are recognised by speakers of the other southern languages.

So it can be seen that ancient history

## Doggone waste

She often rides with the Duke of Beaufort's hounds. – News report.

I'm a bit of a clod about diking,  
And ask, with a Zounds and  
Gadzook,  
Why does a pretty girl ride with his  
hounds?  
Why doesn't she ride with the  
Duke?

○ Alma Denny, New York

is responsible for linking English with the various languages of both northern and southern Europe; however, modern history has played its part too. English explorers and colonisers spread out to the four corners of the Earth during the last two hundred years, with the result that their language became international in character. One of the English colonies has grown into the World's greatest industrialised country, the USA, and it now dominates World commerce and industry making English an even more important medium for everyday communications. Modern English is widely used in technology, trade, advertising, journalism, gastronomy and medicine, as well as, in the young world of 'pop' music, sport and entertainment. Some special English words have become household names, or they describe things that do not have any other name. For example: ballpoint, lipstick, drugs, air-conditioner, beauty-case, jeans, jumper and computer are all English words although they have an American connotation.

The considerable American presence in Europe is another good reason for choosing English as the common language for Europe. At the level of governments, many international exchanges involve military strategies and political exchanges and what better language to use than the one used by the Americans themselves – English. Whoever is against it, must become one of the losers. Like the fast-food chain in Paris that was forbidden to use the word 'milkshake' despite most of its customers never asking for anything

## A capital project

Wanted, information on the history and development of capitalization of proper nouns and of criteria for dividing nouns into proper and common subcategories. Please write to:

○ Professor Robert S Wachal,  
Linguistics Department, University  
of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52240,  
USA

else! On the other hand, wine is always 'Produce of France' and not 'Produit de France'. The choice of a common language for Europe is not really a problem at all, because English is already doing very well!

○ Dr P R Attwood, Eindhoven, The Netherlands

## Constitutional sexism

Sexist language is found in both the American and the Irish Declarations of Independence. However, the Irish declaration (1916) contains far less sexist language than does the American declaration (1776). Could the reason be educational, chronological, or cultural?

The Irish document's first line addresses the declaration to 'Irishmen and Irishwomen'. The first line of the American Declaration of Independence appeals to the 'Opinions of Mankind'. While the American document declares 'all Men are created equal', its Irish counterpart gives 'equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens . . . cherishing all the children of the nation equally'. The Irish declaration goes on to give suffrage to all 'men and women', while the American version states, 'That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men.'

The educational patterns of the authors were quite similar. The authors were all British subjects, educated in England, or English-based schools. Both groups would have studied traditional Latin-based grammar.

Chronologically, the status of all women has not progressed equally. Today, certain cultures in the world forbid women from showing their faces in public, or from eating in the same room as male guests. The mere passage of time cannot account for the different positions of women in various cultures, nor can it account for the varying amounts of sexist language found in the two Declarations of Independence.

The reason may be cultural. Women have always played an important role in Irish society. While women of other societies may have played roles of equal importance, they were not given the recognition that the Irishwoman was given in Ireland. One of the heroes of the 1916 Uprising, which ultimately led to Ireland's independence, was Countess Constance de Markievicz. She was an officer in the Irish Citizen Army, and second in command of a division. Countess Markievicz and the other women in the ICA wore the standard military uniform and carried arms. They were equal to, and fought alongside, the male comrades. Even today's outlawed Irish Republican Army is comprised of Irish men and women. The equality of the Irishwomen is evident in the language

used in the Irish Declaration of Independence.

Irishwomen were given the right to vote the day the Irish Declaration of Independence was signed. American women had to wait one hundred and forty-four years. Sexist language is still in use today. Some believe that language is a manifestation of the thought process, and hence reflects a speaker's self image. Others believe the Sapir-Whorf theory, which holds that language actually molds thought, rather than merely reflecting it. To children in their enculturation process, linguistic connotations function as a source of images and can influence behavior. Regardless of which theory one adheres to, the inherent dangers of sexist language warrants its disuse.

○ J T Brown, Houston, Texas, USA

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### Fairman answers Bowman

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Mr Bowman in *ET9* states that my use of Kenya to illustrate my argument (*Prestige, Purity and Power, ET7*) is invalid because I make two, perhaps three, errors in my references to Kenya. Though I admit to making one error, this doesn't make Kenya an invalid illustration of my argument because rightness or wrongness in that particular point doesn't affect my argument. To show that Kenya is an invalid example one needs to show that the Kenya 'establishment' didn't use English for political and social power. Mr Bowman doesn't do this.

First, Mr Bowman is correct; Swahili was designated the national language in Kenya, not English. This decision was taken by the ruling KANU party. Up till at least 1974 the decision had no legal power and should be regarded as an advisory declaration of intent. English at that time had a wider range of national uses than Swahili had.

Secondly, the mid-70s debate in Kenya was about many aspects of English, including literature. Only one of my five quotations from that debate relates to literature. It's understandable that Mr Bowman in the Ministry of Education should think the debate was exclusively about literature because his Ministry organized nationwide seminars about literature.

Thirdly, it isn't clear whether Mr Bowman thinks I misunderstand Brian Hocking, but I think he does. Nowhere in his book does Brian Hocking distinguish explicitly or implicitly between form and content words. He states that his purpose is to deal with 'the really common errors' and 'almost exclusively with mistakes of syntax and grammar' which he distinguishes, not from content words, but from 'pronunciation errors.'

Nowhere does he say his book's about power, political or linguistic; he says his book's about 'correct' English, that is, 'THE SPEECH (OR WRITING) OF WELL EDUCATED NATIVE SPEAKERS.' Spread indiscriminately throughout the book are a number of 'errors' with what Mr Bowman calls content words, one of which is 'cheat', which he now allows but which he didn't allow as chairman of the selection committee for the book. 'Errors' with 'refuse' ('John's bad leg refused him to play'), another content word, also feature in the book, and in the 1975 primary leaving exam and in the 1974 secondary exam. Because of the book and such questions in the exams no teacher could state confidently that there was any aspect of native English which would never be the focus of the examiners' attention. One consequence of the book and Mr Bowman's writings, then and now, is that we learn how to 'correctly' classify, not language, but the people who use 'incorrect' language. This is what I mean by social power.

Finally, I do Kenya no disservice by elucidating Kenyan English, of which my Kenyan friends were proud and in which they and I shared a common interest. Mr Bowman maintains that 'to go with it (book) home' is ineffective and sloppy communication. It's hard for anybody, even those who've never heard African English, to misunderstand that expression, and it isn't sloppy. In many parts of Africa 'go with' means 'take' and is used as a phrasal verb, like 'The dog went for him at home.' Regarded as a phrasal verb 'go with' follows the rules of 'correct' English.

○ Tony Fairman, Maidstone, Kent, England

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### Phonetics centenary

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Your readers may be interested to know of recent changes that have taken place in the Journal of the International Phonetic Association. The position of Editor has passed to Anthony Bladon at the address below, and his appointment coincides with what, according to the best evidence, is the centenary year of the International Phonetic Association. It has been decided, therefore, to publish this year a special centenary edition of the Journal, with invited papers from distinguished members of the Association, as well as the two regular numbers of the Journal.

It is planned that the Journal will include an annual section on the use of phonetics in education and other applied fields such as speech therapy and speech pathology, and that this section will appear in the second regular issue of the year. Anyone who

is interested in contributing to the section should contact the Educational Phonetics Editor, Dr Bryan Jenner, at Christ Church College, Canterbury, Kent CT1 1QU.

The International Phonetic Association is in the early stages of planning revisions to the International Phonetic Alphabet, and would like to encourage discussion of this topic in the pages of the Journal over the next two years. Comments from both members and non-members of the Association will be welcomed.

○ Frances Morphy, Assistant Editor, Journal of the International Phonetic Association, Phonetics Laboratory, University of Oxford, England

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### The oldest literary tradition in Europe

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I note the erudite protests in *ET10* at the absurdity of a term like Anglo-Irish when applied to Literature, which is, in any language, an expression not of an amalgam but of a living cultural tradition. Irish Culture still exists, and not only between the mountains and the Atlantic in a dying never-never land. Two poets representative of the many spring to mind; Michael Davitt, who learnt the Irish language at school, liked it, explored it, and has come as near to mastering it as anyone can master such a magnificently self-willed medium, and Cathal Ó Searcaigh, who grew up within the language and couldn't, and still can't, understand why people turn their backs on one of the oldest and finest honed languages in Europe for one which simply doesn't suit their temperament.

I have no objection to books of Irish poetry being published in translation so long as that is clearly indicated, but to call poetry conceived in a language foreign to Irish perceptions 'Irish' is more than mere carelessness. The vast wealth of real Irish literature, spanning a couple of thousand years and still rolling off the presses, indicates our native culture is alive and well, and because of its longevity is a better bet for survival than English; after all, English has to survive for at least another fifteen hundred years to equal us, presuming that we were willing to give up now, which we are not.

Incidentally, the letter from Eoghan Mac Cormaic tells us something more than his opinion on literature, it tells us that one man – and there are no doubt many more – has been dubbed by the judiciary, the press, etc., a 'mindless' terrorist, when quite clearly Mr. Mac Cormaic is a good deal brighter than many a literary critic. I cannot help wondering what percentage evidence and what percentage prejudice has led to men like him being incarcerated.

Literature is far more than attractively packaged propaganda; the deliberate misnaming of a product can only be conceived as propaganda. To publish original Irish poems with English translation would be no bad thing, it might encourage a few English to study our language and so begin to

understand what true freedom of spirit is.

By ignoring real Irish literature and aspirations, the English are ignoring the oldest literary tradition in Europe, and are unwittingly smothering a key to European consciousness, and therefore a key to understanding their own

origins and mentality. I don't particularly mind who commits suicide, but I do object when they try to take me with them. is mise, le hard mheas,

○ Séamas Ó Coileáin, London, England

## DARE replies to Claiborne

Mr Claiborne's article 'The politics of dialect' (ET9, Jan 87) calls for an answer, not because he does not make some valid points about the 19th-century romanticization of folk speech, but because (ignoring his errors of fact) his entire posture is skewed. What he objects to in the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (DARE) is that it does something differently from the way he would have it done. His chief objection is that DARE has paid insufficient attention to urban language, concentrating on rural language, and has left aside slang, prison lingo, and similar forms. Since these kinds of language have been well covered in other works (I could furnish Mr Claiborne a substantial bibliography of such books, of which he is evidently unaware) and since quite elaborate studies are now in preparation of American and Canadian prison language, and a historical dictionary of American slang, to mention only two, the need is, rather, to gather the everyday speech of Americans who say the same thing in different ways according to what part of the country they live in. This is what DARE is doing. When the remaining four volumes have been completed, some of the things Mr Claiborne does not find under the letters A, B, and C will turn up under D to Z. May he be patient.

Meanwhile, he needs to recognize that the language is so complex, especially over so huge an area as the United States, that the field requires – and, indeed, benefits by – division. Dictionaries have been published of slang, jargon, the terminology of various occupations, underworld argot, and many more. Each deserves separate treatment. Studies of urban language have not been neglected – they go back at least to 1891: O F Emerson's 'The Ithaca Dialect' *Dialect Notes* I.85–99.

In producing the *Linguistic Atlas of New England*, Hans Kurath made a point of providing for urban variants as well as rural. The DARE questionnaire deliberately includes even more questions on urban features. Since Mr Claiborne brings up the subject of terms for police cars, let him look up *cherry top* in DARE Volume I. To question W4, 'A police vehicle with a red, blue, or yellow flashing light on top,' we received the response *cherry top* (with one instance of *cherry*) from Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Texas, and Washington state.

Five of these responses were urban, one village, one rural. (Incidentally, three were from young people, three middle-aged, one old.) Though *cherry top* is not clearly regional it was included just because it was chiefly urban, and certainly of popular origin. On the other hand, *squadrol*, a blend of *squad car* and *patrol wagon*, a big-city word from the 1950s, was an official coinage, not a folk word, and will not make it into the S volume of DARE.

The rural emphasis has been traditional with dialectologists for the very good reason that rural language conserves more past forms than does urban, furnishing data of great value to etymology and linguistic history. The whole discipline of dialect geography, in France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain and other old countries gets its best data from rural sources. Two recent works that might deserve Mr Claiborne's attention, Orton and Wright's *A Word Geography of England* (1974) and Orton et al *The Linguistic Atlas of England* (1978) both concentrate on rural language and a majority of elderly informants.

Since Mr Claiborne seems a bit vague about the meaning of 'folk' (32/1,2), let me quote from the definition used when the American Folklife Center was established at the Library of Congress in 1976 (Public Law 94–201):

The term 'American Folklife' means the traditional expressive culture shared within the various groups within the United States: familial, ethnic, occupational, religious, regional; expressive culture includes a wide range of creative and symbolic forms such as custom, belief, technical skill, language, literature, art, architecture, music, play, dance, drama, ritual, pageantry, handicraft: these expressions are mainly learned orally, by imitation, or in performance, and are generally maintained without benefit of formal instruction or institutional direction.

Though independently arrived at, DARE's definition corresponds rather well with this.

Mr Claiborne has misread the figures on DARE's communities and informants, with confused results. He should note that the two do not correspond: a questionnaire was not often answered all the way through (1847 questions) by a single informant; two or more informants usually answered different sections to complete a single

questionnaire. Mr Claiborne's figures (32/2) are therefore wrong. The fact is that Atlanta had one questionnaire, done by three informants (two middle-aged, one young; two white, one black) while Marshallville had one questionnaire, done by ten informants (five middle-aged, three old, two young; nine white, one black). Detroit had three questionnaires, done by five informants (two old, two middle-aged, one young; four white, one black); Ishpeming and Gladstone had one questionnaire each, each done by five informants. 'The entire city population of Washington state is represented by a single Seattle informant' (32/2) is false. There were also seven informants from small cities. Mr Claiborne's reading was hasty, to say the least.

Mr Claiborne charges (31/1) that:

'Dialectology is probably the most politicized area of linguistics; scholars' views on which dialects are worth studying, even on what is and what isn't a dialect, almost invariably embody some sort of hidden ideological agenda. For example, nearly all American dialectologists have preferred to study regional rather than class dialects – in part, surely, out of a reluctance to concede that social classes exist in the US.'

If it is so, it is a grievous fault – but I fear the statement only testifies to Mr Claiborne's own 'hidden ideological agenda' – a jargonish phrase for 'prejudice'. Dialectologists constantly take note of the social status of speakers (see *Dialect Notes* passim). In 1896 E H Babbitt was writing on 'The English of the Lower Classes in New York City and Vicinity', recognizing both urban and social differences in language use. DARE made it a basic point to record, with the informants' responses, the five social correlates of age, sex, race, educational level, and community type. It is because of this attention to social factors that DARE can assign more objective and accurate labels than dictionaries usually do.

Mr Claiborne needs to read Volume I more carefully. His final paragraph is a classic dramatic irony as, with Orwell, he condemns 'sloppy thinking and sloppy writing'. We couldn't agree with him more.

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