

Pop group names

I've just enjoyed *ET29* (Jan 92), especially Katie Wales's article on pop group titles, and in it the paragraph of continuous narrative woven from some of the titles.

It reminded me of my elder nephew who, when he was a student, was a member of a pop group for several years. They used to perform at clubs, etc and achieved some success in their Midlands area. At one stage they wanted to sharpen up their image and thought up a few titles, such as 'Spasm' or 'Ragbag'. To test audience reaction they tried them out on individuals in the audience. One less than enthusiastic fan muttered: 'Please y'self', so that was what they called themselves from then on! It would have fitted into Katie Wales's narrative, but it was quite a long time ago: my nephew is shortly to become a 'grumpy'!

Anna Dunlop,
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I enjoyed the *Lexicon* article by Katie Wales in *ET29*. She might be interested to know that the 'Soup Dragons' in the last paragraph are from the children's TV puppet series 'The Clangers', which I think was shown in the 70s. She also might like to add to her collection 'Everything But The Girl'. This title has an interesting origin. The group consists of two young people who used to be students at Hull University, which my husband and I also attended (but many years before they did!). In our time, and I presume in theirs also, a furniture shop in the city centre had 'everything but the girl' emblazoned above the shop window, to the disgust of some proto-feminists! The last time we paid a nostalgic visit to Hull, the sign seemed to have disappeared. However, it lives on in the title of the pop group. (Being products

of Hull University, the group is of course very talented and successful.)

Valerie High,
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A risky business

As a general comment on Debbie Logan's piece 'Thon' in the January 1992 *ET*, I recall reading years ago a better solution to the 'generic *he*' – *he/she*, *s/he*, etc.– problem. The proposal was to use *E* (pronounced *he* but without the *h*), *Eself*, *Es*, and so on for a common gender third person pronoun. I liked, as is most obvious, the immediate parallel to *I* as the first person common gender pronoun. The major problem with *thon* is that I am not sure how to pronounce it (is the *th* voiced or voiceless, and is the vowel a schwa as Logan states it is 'a combination of *the* and *one*'?). Of course, since neither *E* nor *thon* has ever caught on, it is not likely that native speakers of English feel this to somehow be enough of a problem as to do something radical about it like change their speech habits. Yet who knows what the future holds as predicting language change is a risky business.

Alan S. Kaye,
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Corpses thick on the ground

I would like to comment on Debbie Logan's 'Thon' in *ET29*. C.C. Converse actually derived *thon* from *that* + *one*, not from *the* + *one*. He voices the initial *th*, though I suspect more recent users (there have been a few) might prefer the voiceless form. As I noted in *Grammar and Gender* (Yale Univ. Press, 1986),

over the past century and a half more than eighty neologists have coined common gender or epicene pronouns to fill what many people feel is a black hole in our pronoun system. *Thon* and the *heer* (or *heesh*), *himer*, *hiser* paradigm are simply the most well-known. Forms include *le*, *se*, *co*, *per*, *tey*, *na*, *e*, *em*, *ae*, and my own favorite, *ip*. And coining continues. I wouldn't be surprised if Logan's note prompted a couple of additional forms in *ET*'s mail, which I will be only too happy to add to my collection.

Many English speakers feel the need for such new pronouns, and both *thon* and the 1912 incarnation of *heer* have appeared in some dictionaries, but the neologisms have not been very successful. Logan says 'it will only take an elite few to implement *thon* as the standard . . . [and] the efforts of all educators to implement such language change in the classroom.' In view of the past history of such pronouns, whose corpses lie thick on the ground, and in view of the general iffiness of English language reform, I doubt very much if any one person or any group could agree to declare a new pronoun as the standard or secure its adoption.

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Capital pronouns

Re Alex Bristow's interesting observation on the use of the capital 'I' (*ET29* Jan 92). Is it possible that this is less the expression of arrogance than a belief that the lower-case single letter in certain contexts is visually odd – as in e.e. Cummings?

Fowler's sections (in my copy)

on the first personal pronoun and the use of capitals make no pronouncement on this point, and it is noticeable that the pronouns of the other languages referred to contain two or more letters. Would not perhaps a fairer comparison be with the royal or editorial 'we' or the impersonal 'one' where (so far as I am aware) the lower-case 'w' and 'o' are invariably employed?

Harry Morgan,
Morden, Surrey, England

The paratactic president

Some of President George Bush's idiosyncrasies of prose have already been noted (*ET* 24, Oct 90).

It should be noted, too, that he – or one of his speech writers – has excelled in the mastery of the annual Thanksgiving Day Proclamation, issued in the U.S. for the fourth Thursday in each November. (Of course few read it and only the clergy may cite it.)

His usual Bushspeak, as it is affectionately called, whether in prepared or impromptu addresses, consists of a string of loose sentences, generally introduced by coordinating conjunctions such as 'and' and 'but.' In one opening statement at a press conference in Kennebunkport in August 1990 as many as 63 per cent of his sentences so began.

This year, though, his Thanksgiving Day Proclamation, the third of his administration, reached new heights. Gone were the juvenile loose sentences, replaced now by the more literary periodic sentences, where the main thought is made to wait briefly in the wings, so to speak, for effect. Instead of the bread-and-butter coordinating conjunctions, his favorites of the past, now as many as 33 per cent of his sentences were introduced by the more sophisticated subordinating conjunctions such as 'when,' 'as,' and 'since.'

George Bush may be no match

I beseecha!

I'll sail the deepest ocean,
Write limericks to treatcha.
I'll sit through any film you
wish
But NOT a Double-
Featcha!

Alma Denny,
New York

for New York State Governor Mario Cuomo on the platform, where the Governor likes to call on Plato, Socrates, and Thomas Aquinas. But when it comes to invoke the Deity in a Thanksgiving Day Proclamation, the President is rhetorically unsurpassed. Nobody gives thanks like George Bush.

E. Leo McMannus,
Venice, Florida, U.S.A.

Subtitles and apostrophes

Having watched a number of television programmes with subtitles recently, I have been roused by a tendency which does little service to the cause of encouraging proper pronunciation of English, and for my part, slows down my comprehension of what the subtitles are saying.

What I am concerned about is the excessive use of the apostrophe. Typical examples are *I've*, *he's*, and *they're*. They fall into two categories:-

(1) The simple reduction of text that is still implicitly understandable, e.g. *I've* (I have); *he'd* (he had).

(2) The elimination of vital information that tells the reader the tense, or even the verb, used, and requires the reader to deduce the lost information from the context, e.g. *they're* (could be *they are*, or *they were*); *he's* (could be *he is*, or *he has*); etc.

Now such apostrophization is

used throughout literature, but historically only in direct speech, and usually to indicate how heavy an accent the speaker has.

I have seen those subtitles on foreign films and news items. It can be said that some films with subtitles include characters with heavily accented (French, German, etc.) voices, but not all the characters of all of the films!

The biggest offence is caused in news items when the news-reader has either been chosen for their elocution, or is a politician, diplomat etc. Hence there will be very few cases where it is justifiable to make the understanding of the speech more difficult. It is even more galling when the speaker says *I have*, but the subtitle wrongly says *I've*!

I write to you because I wonder if there are some guidelines somewhere to control this shackling of the language?

P.M. Swadling,
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Pronunciation and reading aloud

I read Peter Duppenhaler's piece in *ET* 27 (Jul 91) with interest and found his bibliography very helpful. I found his reference to pronunciation evaluation via reading aloud less convincing.

I am unhappy with the whole notion of reading aloud as a pedagogic strategy. That it is a specialised skill is widely recognised. The same is true of translation, but translation is returning to the EFL classroom (cf *Headway* as one example) and there seem to be sound reasons for this. The same can't be said of reading aloud.

That we are not often training learners to be newreaders or clerks of court is clear. There is another argument to level against reading aloud, the cognitive. To simplify: to process a written word during silent reading (that is, to recover its meaning), we need to access our semantic sys-

tem via the visual word recognition system; for an unfamiliar word, the process changes: we might recover meaning through context, or by disassembling the word item into constituent morphological and phonological components (the phonological being redundant in the context of silent reading). Or we may simply pass it by as not essential to the underlying gist of the text.

When we set our learners the additional task of translating the written word into spoken sounds, the cognitive burden is hugely increased, both in the case of familiar and unfamiliar items. For familiar items, as we access the semantic system we have at the same time to refer to our phonemic word production system, breaking the phonemic code of the item to generate pronunciation. For unfamiliar items, the grapheme-phoneme correspondences must be disassembled (into not always discrete components) and then reconstructed via the phonemic code (a *second language* phonemic code in the case of our learners) into pronunciation.

It is clear that the cognitive processes involved are extensive and it is not surprising therefore that semantic processing receives a lower priority during this phase: there is only so much that the brain can manage at one time. Hence the recognised phenomenon that those who read aloud an unseen text (or simultaneously interpret a spoken text) are left with little or no grasp of its content.

I have an open mind on the subject, but I have yet to hear a convincing argument in favour of reading aloud: the closest my colleagues here have come is the claim that their learners enjoy the activity – which is a motive that demands respect; alas, it appears that the majority of learners ‘enjoy’ the activity because they

believe it helps them improve their pronunciation. My contention is that pronunciation can best be diagnosed and improved through close attention by the teacher to their learners’ spontaneous and meaningful classroom and extra-classroom discourse: a much more complex job for the teacher, of course, than hearing a learner read a dialogue or a list of words, but ultimately, I think, of more practical advantage.

If any of your readers has a stronger claim to make in favour of reading aloud I would be interested to hear it. (My reference for the above is *Reading, Writing and Dyslexia*, by Andrew Ellis, (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Ltd, 1984; 0-86377-002-9). Any unwonted distortion of his thesis is entirely my responsibility.)

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World Plain English

The World needs an international language which comes from natural languages. World Common Language (W.C.L.) will be based on English which is the most widely used in the world. At its initial stage, W.C.L. will take its place in the world as Plain English.

World Plain English (W.P.E.) is a simplified form of English with a selected vocabulary of 2,450 essential words. International Words and the words from Oriental Languages will be adopted step by step. We’ll make the first step to combine the languages of the West with the East. A few Compound Words from East and West will be formed, e.g. HANDPA ← HANDKERCHIEF. The word ‘kerchief’ comes from Latin words ‘ker’

meaning to ‘cover’ and ‘chief’ meaning ‘head’. So KERCHIEF means ‘a piece of cloth or lace used as a head covering’. Many people today do not know what ‘kerchief’ means. HANDPA will be easy to read and write than HANDKERCHIEF. (‘Pa’ comes from Chinese ‘shoupa’, ‘shou’ meaning hand and ‘pa’ meaning ‘kerchief’.)

Foreign learners often find it difficult to master the rules of English grammar. For instance, there are two forms (regular and irregular) of the past of some verbs:

<i>infinitive</i>	<i>p.t.</i>	<i>p.p.</i>
burn	burnt, burned	burnt, burned
learn	learnt, learned	learnt, learned
shine	shone, shined	shone, shined
show	showed	shown, showed

We’ll only retain the regular form (burned, learned, shined, showed).

According to the pronunciation, ch pronounced /k/ will be replaced by ‘k’, e.g. character → karacter. In the same manner: ph /f/ → f: e.g. telephone → telefone; qu / kw/ → kw: quality → kwality.

Some soundless letter will be removed, e.g. campaign → campain.

Pronunciation will tend to become more uniform. Spelling will become simpler in W.P.E.

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Readers’ letters are welcomed.
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