

The Fat Owl of The Remove

From: Leila Ward
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Surely Laurie Bauer is mistaken, in *English Today* 58, in giving 1929 as the year in which Billy Bunter first appeared in Frank Richard's comics? My parents born in 1903 and 1905, read the Greyfriars stories as children before World War I. My dictionary of biography gives 1906 and 1908 as the dates when Richards brought out the *Gem* and the *Magnet*: the reprehensible Bunter must have appeared in the comics before 1929. A misprint, maybe, if not the author's error.

So what, incidentally, if the stories were sexist, racist, whatever, though I can't say I've ever noticed: but I do know that my parents told me they (my parents) were steeped in expressions from Shakespeare, as well as from Gilbert and Sullivan, long before they ever encountered the originals, only to find them 'full of quotations'! Billy Bunter by no means featured exclusively in all the stories and my recollection of such tales as I've read is that there was a lot about schoolboy honour, being decent to the village lads, polite to people's sisters (sexist?) and so forth. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was a favourite, especially his delicious English, and neither he nor any of the rest of the nobility/aristocracy at Greyfriars or St Jim's ever showed signs of snobbery, which would not have been tolerated.

Reprint the lot, I say!

A footnote to Bulley's /hat/

From: Keith Davidson
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A footnote to Michael Bulley's piece in *ET*58 (Apr 99):

The use of æ in IPA inscriptions goes back to the time when phonetic texts in English were intended almost entirely for teaching pronunciation to French and German learners of the language, and because of this it was thought necessary to draw special attention to the difference in quality between the vowel in English *pat* and the vowel in French *patee* by using a distinctive letter for the former. The force of tradition has been strong enough to perpetuate this use of æ even in transcribed texts where there is no particular reason to emphasize the difference ... In any case this vowel in RP seems to be becoming both less front and also more open (a tendency which may also be observed in some types of Cockney accent) – in other words the vowel is losing the characteristics which originally singled it out for special attention.'

David Abercrombie on the 'Edinburgh' transcription. 1964 *English Phonetic Texts*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd.

It certainly is /hat/ and not /hæt/!

From: Michael Ferguson
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I was delighted to read (*ET*57, Apr 99) the article by Michael Bulley on the vowel sound in 'hat'. Although he only mentions German speakers of English in a half-sentence, I can confirm from many years of living in Germany that this particular point of pronunciation causes more misunderstanding and ambiguity than almost any other feature of German spoken English. In fact I have taken this very point up in a short piece I wrote for an English teacher's magazine *What's New?* published by my firm, Cornelsen Verlag in

Berlin. I enclose a copy of this piece (see panel opposite).

Simply incorrect?

From: Robert Phillipson
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David Crystal begins his article "The future of Englishes" (*ET*58 1999, 10–20) with a plea for clarity in theoretical thinking and in observing the facts of language change. He sees intelligibility and identity/attitude as two key parameters for the existence of one or more languages, but his examples from Scandinavia and Yugoslavia are simply incorrect.

To claim that on grounds of intelligibility "people from Norway, Sweden and Denmark speak a single language" is false. There is substantial variation within and between each language. Literary works in each language are translated into the others rather than being read in the original. Students in higher education in each country are very reluctant to use books and articles in other Scandinavian languages.

In Norway there is continuous debate in educational circles about the extra burden that the promotion of two standard languages imposes on learners. Intelligibility in inter-Scandinavian speech presupposes a substantial effort to accommodate, and there are manuals advising speakers of each language on how to make their tongue more readily accessible. Examples of distance and difference could be multiplied.

All of which does not contradict the evidence that Scandinavians from many walks of life develop an active receptive competence in other Scandinavian languages. But it would never occur to them to conclude that this means that Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are one language.

Neither intelligibility nor

Kennington or Canning Town?

Last time I focused on puzzling semantic changes that English words sometimes undergo on their transition from English to German. This time I'd like to look at differences in pronunciation and stress.

Stress shift is especially puzzling as it takes place in BOTH directions. There are words stressed on the first syllable in English ('feedback, 'know-how, 'layout, 'make-up) which get stressed on their second syllable when used in German, and words stressed on the second (or third) syllable in English (dis'play, ho'tel, enter'tainer) which tend to get stressed on their first syllable when spoken by Germans. It's really crazy!

Less puzzling (because the examples at least obey German rules of pronunciation) but nevertheless irritating and, sometimes, ambiguous to native ears are these random oddities:

- 'Hifi', which is ['haɪfaɪ] in English, often becomes ['haɪfɪ] in German.
- The adverb 'live' [laɪv] is almost always realised as [laɪf]. And this is of course reflected in the written language: The Rolling Stones – LIFE! Sex show, life girls! A TV programme on B1 called 'Berlin Life', a radio station called MDR Life, etc.
- The 'r' in 'iron' or 'Ironman' nearly always gets pronounced by Germans.
- Whereas the 'g' in words like 'single' or 'jungle (music)' is dropped!

All very confusing for British ears, but at least – usually – not the cause of serious ambiguity.

Last but, to my ears, far from least is the widespread practice by Germans of pronouncing the English short 'a' sound as the equivalent of a German 'ä' sound. The phonetic transcription might look like that but, believe me, IT JUST AIN'T SO! Indeed I would go so far as to say that, to British ears at least, this one point causes more genuine misunderstandings than any other single aspect of German pronunciation of English.

It may have been the case some 50 or more years ago, perhaps it still is in the speech of RP-speakers aged 60+ (the Queen, for example, or her mother), but today in British varieties of English almost no-one pronounces a short 'a' sound to rhyme with a short 'e'. If you do, beware! You may end up in Kennington (south of the Thames) instead of Canning Town (north of the river), as some unfortunate German tourists once did whose taxi driver wasn't accustomed to German English pronunciation. This is what British ears will understand:

- The female name 'Alice' sounds like the male name 'Ellis'.
- The Princess Royal's name sounds like the letter 'N'.
- 'Bands' sound like curves in the road ('bends') rather than groups of musicians.
- A 'crash' sounds like a place where small children are looked after ('crèche').
- A 'flashcard' suggests something to do with raw meat ('flesh').
- Camden (Town, Market) comes over as Kempton (Park) – not the same thing at all.
- Even the harmless little sign of our e-mail times '@' tends to come over as 'et', which I, at least, would understand as the Latin word for 'and'.

Never forget that the following pairs of words are pronounced *with a very clear difference in the vowel sound in English*. They do *not* sound identical:

*jam – gem; man – men;
sat – set; pat – pet;
am – 'M'; fan – fen;
sacks – sex; Annie – any, etc.*

It is a complete mystery to me why this myth continues to live on.

attitude/identity would justify such a conclusion.

Crystal goes on to claim that in the early 1990s "the populations

of Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia would all be described as speaking varieties of Serbo-Croatian". This statement ignores social realities

and history. The monarchy that existed between the two world wars was "the kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes". Throughout Titoism, Yugoslavs identified themselves as speakers of Serbian or Croat in addition to Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian. The old self-ascriptive labels were never dropped. Political forces have for 20 years been actively dismembering Serbo-Croat and instilling exclusive linguistic identities, but it is false to create the impression that the Croat and Serb languages have come into existence since the disintegration of Yugoslavia. It is a sociolinguistic fact that they have been there for as long as these forms of language have had labels.

Let me cite one more example from Crystal's article where more rigour would be needed. "Britain leads the world in ELT... no-one was predicting such world language scenarios for English in the 1960s" (p. 18). The expansion of ELT was in fact deliberate policy by the British government from the mid-1950s, the main contours of which I have summarized in chapter 6 of "Linguistic imperialism" (Oxford UP, 1992).

A blueprint for English as a "world language" was written by an adviser to the British Council in 1941, H.V. Routh, "The diffusion of English culture outside England" (Cambridge UP). He envisaged an "army of linguistic missionaries" (12); the new service must "lay the foundations of a world-language and culture based on our own"; the model teacher "must think as a citizen of the world, and behave as a representative of England should behave" (86); Britain has a responsibility which implies that "we not only have a spiritual heritage of our own – a national soul – but that somehow this possession is incomplete unless shared with other nations" (134). This world language scenario and key official documents of the 1950s and 60s are part of the history of ELT that no amount of contemporary rationalising can explain away.

I happen to agree with much of what Crystal writes otherwise, but

his argument would benefit by the kind of attention to detail that one expects from someone of his eminence.

Speaking a language

From: V.C.R.A.C. Crabbe,
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I just want to take Patrick Honeybone up on one point in his article *Life, language and the things linguists look at* (ET57) Vol. 15 No.

1). In dealing with Bulley's definition of language he states that if A speaks Dutch to B knowing that B does not speak Dutch then what A said would not be part of language. That is a *non sequitur* because:

- A knows that A is speaking a language, Dutch in this case, the purpose of which is to communicate. A is clearly intending to communicate with B to prove a point as A understands the issue;
- the fact that A acted in the way A did, did not make what A said

cease to be part of the Dutch language;

- the fact that B does not speak Dutch does not mean that B does not understand Dutch;
- even though B does not speak Dutch B would know, in the example given by PH, that A is speaking a language which B does not understand;
- PH's example, needless to say, is language because PH intended to communicate some information to us, the readers of ET, whatever our reactions to the example. □

Polyglossic, polycentric reality

Comment on "International English in the global village" by Marko Modiano (ET58, Apr 99)
Robert Phillipson

There are problems with most labels. *Lingua franca* has been used in several different senses over time, and still is. A few decades ago the term *international* language was more likely to refer to Esperanto than a "natural", national or ethnic language. Calling a language "international" may obscure the fact that it also serves a multitude of purposes at national and sub-national levels. It may also serve to downgrade other languages, that are stigmatized explicitly or implicitly as being less "international". Labels often contribute to processes of hierarchizing languages.

The term the *global village* is a metaphor for certain trends in late modernity, but in villages, towns and cities globally many languages in fact assure that "nation shall speak unto nation". For the global village to be monolingual would represent a sacrifice of our rich linguistic heritage.

The label *standard* language implies prestige and control, and self-appointed or official guardians of the standard. If World Standard Spoken

English were to come into existence, you can bet your bottom dollar/pound/crown that its existence will necessarily entail non-standard or sub-standard speakers. Similarly, mid-Atlantic English speakers are likely to be adrift unless the term relates positively to traits on both sides of the Atlantic.

All such concepts represent an abstraction from the polyglossic, polycentric reality of how English is used. For those concerned with pedagogical needs and strategies, it is vital to distinguish between speech production and speech reception. To develop the *productive competence* of learners of English as a second or foreign language, it may be appropriate to aim at a single form of English.

Receptive competence on the other hand needs to be multiple. Everyone exposed to spoken English experiences the language used in a wide variety of ways. It is indeed arguable that quite contrary to the myth that English is an easy language, English can be considered one of the most difficult languages in the world precisely because it is used in so many ways.

Modiano rightly points out that proficiency in English as a national language is no guarantee of efficient performance in English as an international language. It is a fact that users of English as a second language

are often more comprehensible than many native speakers: they are simply more audience-sensitive, and appreciate the problems, linguistic and cultural, that unthinking use of a mother tongue may cause.

Diversity in English-using local villages is a reality. As was noted in the introduction to the Papers from the First Scandinavian-German Symposium on the Language of Immigrant Workers and their Children (ed. Dittmar, Haberland, Skutnabb-Kangas and Teleman, 1978, University of Roskilde, ROLIG 12), echoing the words of a participant, "a language in international use deserves all it gets" (Stolting, p. 108), "the language of the report is the responsibility of the contributors. Any similarity with the English language spoken and written in the UK or the US is purely accidental". This is of course "a truth with modifications", as the Danes put it, but makes the point that norms are negotiable, and that linguistic diversity is triggered by many variables, and needs to be cherished. The label *The English languages* (the title of an admirable new book by one T. McArthur) makes a very telling point.

Ed. We regret that this contribution did not appear, as it should have done, in ET58, through an editorial oversight.