



# OZWORDS

A Joint Australian National University  
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## EDITORIAL

TALKING on the ABC the other night, the Coodabeen Champions raised a very important question: when did the horses involved in harness racing cease to have *owners* and start having *connections*?

OZWORDS would be delighted to get the answer, if possible embedded in an article about *Interdominionspeak*, the extraordinary language of harness racing commentators.

But this raises an even more profound question. Why do some human activities generate a more opaque jargon than others? Often the answer is pretentiousness—postmodern discourse is the obvious example; but harness racing is not pretentious. Is it because not many things can happen to a few horses and carts trotting round an oval track, making it necessary to devise numerous variations on a very small number of themes? Chariot racing at the Circus Maximus would have been easier for the commentator. At least the horses were allowed to gallop.

OZWORDS seeks a General Theory of Opaque Circumlocution.

# WHY ARE POMS CALLED POMS?

by James MacLean

ONE FINE and windy afternoon near Paris in 1984, a circle of aero club members stood – five French chatting, one Aussie listening – close to a low security fence at Guyancourt airfield, as a man and his family hesitantly came to the fence and waited. Each flier glanced at the newcomers, who were obviously looking for help and beyond hearing distance. Soon the club leader excused himself to deal with these ‘*paumés*’, pronounced very like ‘pommy’ in Australia, complete with the gentle irony. ‘*Coulditbe...?*’, I thought.

Bill Ramson, in *Australian English* (1966), p. 62, describes *pommy* as a ‘widely used word of hotly disputed etymology’. He goes on: ‘Partridge suggests several possibilities: that it is a corruption of *Tommy* or *pom pom* ... an abbreviation of *Pomeranian* ... influenced by *pomegranate*... derived from *Pompey* [Portsmouth] or from *pommé*, a Breton colloquialism imported by Cornish miners.’ Ramson concludes: ‘Until the early history of the word in Australia is more fully documented, one can do little more than guess at the probable origin.’

In *The Australian National Dictionary*: (1988), Ramson gives the starting points for such a history: ‘*pommie*’ was first used in print by *Truth* (Sydney), 8 June 1913, p. 8

(the ‘*Satirical Splashes*’ column), as title to a poem, ‘*The Complaint of the “Pommie”*’ – who is out of work in a horrible country with nothing but sunshine, flowers and sport.

### The Pomegranate hypothesis

‘*Pomegranate*’ was clearly associated with early use of pommy, but it is not clear which came first.

Rumsey, in the preface to *The Pommies, or New Chums in Australia* (1920), apparently dates ‘*pomegranate*’ to the early 1870s, and says ‘*pommy*’ is an abbreviation, both positions

unsupported by firm evidence but often reiterated.

‘*Pomegranates*’ first appeared in *Truth* on 22 December 1912, p. 3, as ‘a new name for jimmygrants’. This puts it six weeks after ‘*poms*’ and six months before ‘*pommie*’.

In the early 1900s the main printed slang terms for an immigrant were ‘*jimmygrant*’, and ‘*new chum*’ – both then old and now obsolete. Earlier names for newcomers included: ‘*Billy Barlow*’, ‘*black hat*’, ‘*canary*’ (convict), ‘*jackaroo*’ (colonial experimenter), ‘*remittance man*’, ‘*sterling*’, ‘*townie*’, etc.

‘*Jimmygrant*’ was arguably more derogatory, typically ‘*useless trash*’, whereas ‘*new chum*’ might merely imply ‘*virginal innocence*’. →

‘...a widely  
used word of  
hotly disputed  
etymology’



→ Xavier Herbert, in *Disturbing Element* (1963), p. 90, tells us that as a boy, before 1914, he explored Fremantle harbour, and yelled the rhyme 'Jimmygrants, Pommygrants, Pom-mies!' at people like his Pommy teacher Grassopple. The final exclamation mark indicates a conclusion – that the rhyme validates and explains pommy.

From mid-1913 to mid-1914 *Truth* used 'pommy' far more often than 'pomegranate', which was quietly dropped. One of the few documented uses of 'pomegranate' in speech is given by W. C. Watson in *Memoirs of a Ship's Fireman* (1916), p. 61, who says it was a hostile term.

'Pommy' looks more like the primitive term: in *Digger Dialects* (1919), W. H. Downing gives only 'pommy' and 'pom', and W. Hatfield, in *Sheepmates* (1931) p. 271, reports 'pommy' as being current c.1912.

#### The P.O.M.E. hypothesis

Popular opinion that 'Prisoner of Mother England', a supposed expression from the convict period, was abbreviated to form 'P.O.M.E.' does not fit the known facts. Sidney J. Baker, in *The Australian Language* (1945) p. 263, notes that it was not recorded by 'keen observers' of slang, Stephens and O'Brien (1910), making earlier origins unlikely.

Two alleged sources cited by Baker can now be dismissed:

- the Education Officer at Port Arthur replied 'definitely not' when phoned in January 1995 and asked if P.O.M.E. is carved on cell walls;
- alphabetical lists of convicts arrivals in NSW 1788-1825 (in the Public Records Office in London) contain nothing resembling P.O.M.E.

#### The Paumé/Pommé hypothesis

In French, *paumé* is a former term for 'slapped', derived from Latin *palma*, palm of the hand. Other words for a slap include the medieval *soufflet*, or today's *claque* and *gifle*. All can refer to somebody who has been slapped, or in a metaphoric sense who looks stricken (by horror, panic, poverty,

etc.), lost or bewildered.

For *paumé* this latter meaning came late, first recorded in 1899 when it was uttered by Nourguier, a criminal awaiting execution. In argot (slang) its meaning is given in G. Esnault's *Dictionnaire des Argots* (1965) as '*désemparé*' (overwhelmed, bewildered, lost). Recently Celland and Rey *Dictionnaire*

*'...borrowing of the same word, with the same feeling, from French slang... is at least as plausible as other explanations.'*

*defrançais NON conventionnelle* (1980) give *paumé* as slang for a person lacking in energy and resources, desperate, aimless.

A. Rey, in the *Petit Robert* (1978) gives the pronunciation of *paumé* as *P-O-M-E*: *pére, soupe, mot, blé*. This is near to the pronunciation of *pommé*, in use since the 13th century, given by dictionaries as a vulgar familiar term, with the sparse explanation of 'complete', as in 'completely stupid'. Duneton, in *La Puce à l'Oreille* (1978) pp. 353 and 363, notes a similarity in pronunciation between *pomme* (apple) and *paume* which leads people to think that *paumé* comes from *pomme*.

It seems clear that the 'stricken' senses derived from *paumé* were pronounced and recorded as *pommé* from the 13th to the 20th centuries. Since then a say-as-you-write change has overtaken *paumé*, but the *pomme*-like pronunciation was still current when *pommy* was first printed in Australia. Hence borrowing is at least possible.

French ships regularly came to Australia at the time pommy came into Australian English – the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 13 March 1912, p.19, reported plans for new French service, the building of four 13 000-ton cargo steamers for Messageries Maritimes, to replace their existing passenger vessels in service to Australia.

Comparison between derogatory terms for immigrants in newspapers 1911 to mid-1914, and current dictionary definition of *paumé* shows a close correlation with the first sense given by Celland and Ray (1980) 'lacking in resources and energy', and some correlation to: 'desperate' or 'aimless'. The *Larousse* senses 'lacking in adaptability' and 'living outside reality' match fewer cases.

#### Conclusion

According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, slang arises from social forces, with new use of language to express conflicts in values, hostility, ridicule, or contempt – often with sharp wit and shock value. If the speaker projects the group emotional reaction the expression will gain currency. Highly charged words may take a long time to be used lightly. New slang is often current in a subculture before the standard language, making it difficult to determine origin.

The origin of pommy is a long-standing enigma, but I believe that borrowing of the same word, with the same feeling, from French slang, to express the difference between Australian and English national character, is at least as plausible as other explanations.

*James MacLean is, inter alia, the author of a French/English dictionary of building terms.*



*Voilà... les paumés!*



## 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.

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Letters should be addressed to:  
The Editor, OZWORDS  
GPO Box 2784Y  
Melbourne 3001

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### Set a cliché to catch a cliché

Would it be safe to release the malevolent 'winds of change' from their bottle in order to let them blow over 'at the end of the day' and 'the new kids on the block'?

I realise that 'address' with its new meaning, 'I'll look at it and do nothing', has got away from us, but with the 'winds of change' on the rampage, you never know. There's always a chance.

Geoffrey Reading  
Castle Hill, NSW

It's a solemn thought that the late Harold Macmillan is remembered for two phrases, 'the winds of change' and 'You've never had it so good.' At least we don't hear too much of the latter these days.

### Ambiguity Observed

From a recent Qantas ad: 'We'll be introducing new interiors, seats and more delicious meals.'

This seems to indicate that the airline is finally putting seats into their planes. Just as well. I was sick of strap-hanging all the way to LA.

Hans Colla  
East Geelong, Vic.

Mr Colla might also have noticed a poignant example of what I call the light brown loaf syndrome. Are Qantas serving

*more delicious meals,*

or *more delicious meals.*

Either way, no wonder that new interiors are needed.

### Goods and Chattels distinguished

I wish to take Tony Lang to task over his article *Vain Repetitions*.

There is a vast difference between "Goods" and Chattels" in the Austral-

ian idiom. A young man might say to his mates, when he sees an attractive girl, "Gee, she's the goods". He would never say "Gee, she's the chattels".

After he has courted the girl and they marry, it is then that he treats her like one of his chattels.

H.K. 'Blue' Garland  
Dora Creek, NSW

### Computerese

As one who spends a deal of time reading computer literature, I am intrigued by the growth of what can be seen as another language, characterised by acronyms and verbalised nouns.

Acronyms without explanation, much more the rule than the exception, are one thing, and not to be excused. A favourite of mine is MIPS: millions of instructions per second. On the other hand, verbalising nouns is, I imagine, an old practice and something I have little trouble living with. But it does seem to be growing at an exponential rate.

Ian Flannery  
Erindale, SA

The other night I was working away on a piece about the disastrous state of the world when suddenly up popped a message box saying

**Cannot undo creation.**

I have a strong suspicion that it was God telling me I was on the right track.

I run Macintoshes, which generally speak a more literate language than I remember from the old DOS days. But the messages are sometimes puzzling. My favourite one reads 'Sorry, stack collided with heap', which sounds like one of those road accidents involving stationary vehicles that magistrates get so shirty about.

Incidentally, Marlene Morris sent me a copy of her article on turning nouns into verbs, which appeared in the 27 April 1990 issue of *Business to Business*, in which she produces a string of beautiful examples of the disease—all drawn from Shakespeare.

### Pronunciation questions

I find as I get older I am irritated more by bad pronunciation. One of my pet hates is *anaesthetist*, which is often pronounced *anaethetist* by people whose profession it is. I would like the

pronunciation of lingerie to be clarified, too.

Pamela Crosthwaite  
Beechworth, Vic.

I'd never noticed the anae(s)thetist problem, so I tried my assistant, and she mispronounced it just as you describe. Bingo. But I have two even larger worries about anaesthetists. Firstly, some of them call themselves *anesthiologists*. Secondly, some of them get the gases mixed up. Both of these seem to me to be more serious problems than a missing *s*.

As for *lingerie*, the authorities differ, as you will see if you compare the pronunciation guides in our various dictionaries. The basic problem is that it is a French word containing French sounds which do not exist in English. The problem is then compounded by the fact that most of our dictionaries give their pronunciation guides in IPA, the International Phonetic Alphabet, which despite its optimistic name only works reliably for English sounds. In French:

- The L- is a normal L.
- The -G- is like the S in measure.
- The -ERIE is rather like *air-ee* with the stress on the EE and a gutturalised R.
- The -IN- is like the -IN- in *cinq*, which makes a noise somewhere between *sank* and *sunk*, but lengthened and nasalised.

So much for the French. But we speak English, and have to decide whether *lingerie* is naturalised (like *guillotine*) or a resident alien (like *bouillabaisse*).

#### Conclusion:

If you want to say *lingerie* like the French, ask a French person. If you want to say it like the manager of the lingerie department in Myers, ask the manager of the lingerie department in Myers, who may well say *lonja-ray*.

### If dove, why not shore?

I would like to pass comment on what seems to be a sad imbalance.

If 'dove' as past tense of 'dive' is gaining currency in Australian student circles (*Ozwords* November 1994), what of 'shore' as past tense of 'shear', with its long history of common usage in the pastoral industry? Yet it took the full weight of the *SOED* back in the 1970s to convince a publisher that I

(continued on page 8)



# When a He is not a He

Tony Lang

THE MOST useful text on plain legal language in Australia is the Drafting Manual that forms Appendix 1 to the Law Reform Committee of Victoria's report *Plain English and the Law*. The LRCV was at the forefront of the plain language movement in Australia, and its 1987 report presents a compelling case for making legislation more accessible to the community. In just over 70 pages the Drafting Manual sets out concisely but comprehensively a series of practical guidelines designed "to help people involved in legislative drafting to prepare Acts which communicate their message efficiently and effectively". It is a tragedy for those of us interested in demystifying the law that the LRCV has been abolished and that the Drafting Manual has been out of print for a considerable time.

Most of the guidelines contained in the Drafting Manual are just as applicable to preparing legal documents generally as to drafting legislation. Indeed, many are relevant to any form of effective written or oral communication. For example, "if legislation is to be readily comprehensible, its central message should be introduced early in the document" could well be said of any speech or essay.

A more controversial recommendation in the Drafting Manual is that legislation be written in gender neutral language. At one level it is hard to see what gender neutral language has got to do with plain legal language. After all, an Act or agreement riddled with *hes*, *hims* and *hises* could be just as simply expressed as one which avoids gender specific vocabulary.

This analysis, however, misses the point. Plain language is much more than a choice of words. Its fundamental aim is effective communication. Drafters who use gender specific language are excluding a significant proportion of their target

audience, perhaps a majority.

I suggest that there has been a significant change in attitude to the use of gender specific language over the last 10-15 years. Take *chairman*, for example. In 1979 Nick Renton dedicated the third edition of his well-known

*Plain language is much more than a choice of words. Its fundamental aim is effective communication.*

*Guide for Meetings and Organisations* "To all the Chairmen who have upheld my Points of Order". The penultimate paragraph of the preface justifies the usage thus:

This book unashamedly uses the term "Chairman" — a title which, despite appearances, is equally appropriate regardless of whether a man or a woman occupies the Chair. The terms "Chairwoman" for a lady in the Chair or "Chairperson" for either sex are neolo-

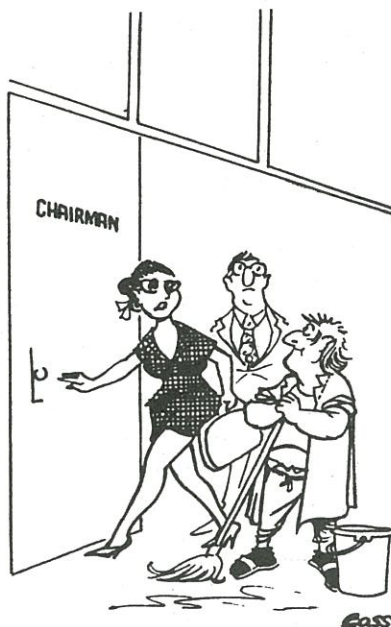
gisms of no philological merit whatsoever. (The use of "Chairman" for a male and "Chairperson" for a female is even sillier.) Similar remarks apply to other similarly-formed words, e.g., "spokesperson" for "spokesman". (Those who think "Chairman" sounds unduly sexist will presumably need to replace the word "Chairperson" by the word "Chairperchild" to be perfectly logical!)

With the fourth edition of the same work in 1985 the dedication has become "To all the Chairs who have upheld my Points of Order". The preface to the third edition is, however, reproduced in full. The fifth edition in 1990 has the same dedication as the fourth, but the preface to the third edition is omitted. Instead Renton, after paraphrasing his earlier comments, suggests a number of ways in which gender specific language can be avoided, including the use of *Chair* instead of *Chairman*.

Finally, in 1993 our own editor, Nick Hudson, in his excellent *Modern Australian Usage*, is able to cite the replacement of *chairman* with *the chair* as one of the success stories of what he describes as the "attack on sexist language in English".

It is usually relatively easy to find an appropriate gender neutral equivalent for a particular gender specific word, e.g. *president* for *chairman*, *firefighter* for *fireman*, *crewed* or *staffed* for *manned*, *press secretary* for *spokesman*. However, the use of pronouns can present some difficulty. Fortunately, there are some simple ways of avoiding the problem:

1. Use the plural: "A ~~director~~ *Directors* shall not vote in respect of any contract or proposed contract with the company in which ~~he is~~ *they are* in any way, whether directly or indirectly, interested . . ." "The company may by resolution re-



*It is important to distinguish a chairperson from a charperson*



move any directors before the expiration of his *their* period of office, and may by resolution appoint another persons in his *their* stead."

2. Use the first or second person: "The trustee *I* declares that he *I* holds the shares on trust for his *my* son . . ." "The Insured shall *You must* notify the Insurer *us* in writing of any event which may lead to a claim by him *you* within 28 days of the event."

3. Use the definite or indefinite article instead of the pronoun: "(T)he office of a director becomes vacant if the director . . . is directly or indirectly interested in any contract or proposed contract with the company and fails to declare the nature of his *the* interest as required by the Act." "In the case of an equality of votes, the chair of the meeting, in addition to his *a* deliberative vote (if any), has a casting vote."

4. Substitute another noun for the pronoun: "The directors shall elect one of their number as chairman of *to chair* their meetings and may determine the period for which he *that per-*

*son* is to hold office." "The person so appointed is subject to retirement at the same time as if he *the appointee* had become a director on the day on which the director in whose place he is appointed who has been removed was last elected a director."

5. Repeat the original noun instead of using the pronoun: "A member is not entitled to vote at a general meeting unless all calls and other sums presently payable by him *the member* in respect of shares in the company have been paid." "Any director may whenever he *that director* thinks fit convene a general meeting."

6. Omit the pronoun entirely: "A person so appointed is not required to hold any shares to qualify him for appointment . . ." "(T)he office of a director becomes vacant if the director . . . resigns his office by notice in writing to the company." "An alternate director is entitled to notice of meetings of the directors and, if the appointor is not present at such a meeting, is entitled to attend and vote in his stead."

7. Change the syntax: "If *he* *A person becoming entitled who* elects to have another person registered, he shall execute a transfer of the share to that other person."

"A notice may be given by the company to any member either by serving it on him personally or by sending it by post to him at his address as shown in the register of members or the address supplied by him to the company for the giving of notices to him."

The company may give notice to members:

(a) by serving the notice on the member personally; or

(b) by sending the notice by post to the member:

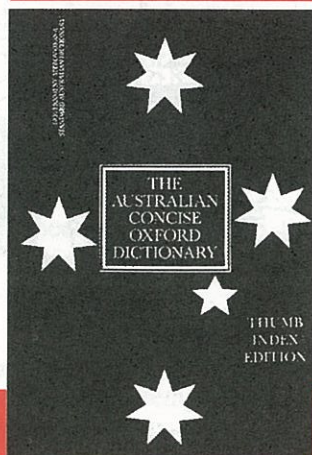
(i) at the address for that member shown in the register of members, or

(ii) at the address for notices which that member has supplied to the company."

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

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# Of implications and inferences

I have received a disturbing communication from Ms Bea Faust. She writes:

*Ten days ago, I sent a column to the Australian that said, inter alia,*

*'Observing a correlation between X and Y, he inferred ...'*

*It was published last Saturday as*

*'Observing a correlation between X and Y, he implied ...'*

*My columns are so frequently interfered with that I do not care to invest energy arguing fine points of usage, but I had an insight about this one: editors should be gatekeepers of language – like teachers, and publishers and writers themselves.*

*It follows from this that editors should be scrutinised carefully and perhaps should be better educated than they are at present. At the very least, they should have access to a wide variety of authorities on usage, be trained to consult them, and be imbued with sufficient humility to recognise that holding an editor's job gives them the power to correct others but not necessarily the expertise.*

*I suppose this means higher professional standards for editors? Perhaps even higher pay?*

I was at the same time disturbed and totally delighted by this letter. It was about a real issue, proposed splendidly impractical remedies and came complete with its own tiny semantic lapse.

As a true pedant, I will deal with the semantic lapse first. Ms Faust refers to the people who bugger up her texts as *editors*. This would be appropriate if she was talking about book publishing. However, the context is that of newspaper publishing, where the people employed to bugger up texts are called *sub-editors*. A newspaper editor lives at the top of the tree. A book editor lives down among the roots, rather like a truffle.

So to the issue. The oddity of the case quoted by Ms Faust is that it is the reverse of the usual confusion. If the

dictionary citations are true, it is reasonably common to replace *imply* by *infer*, but unknown to replace *infer* by *imply*.

This is probably because *infer* is a relatively rare word, a technical term of logic, whereas *imply* is a common-language word.

This is the normal pattern. Wishing to make an impression of great wisdom, we replace a common word whose meaning we know well with a less common one which we believe to have the same meaning and to have a more impressive ring about it.

For example, many speakers say *simplistic* when they mean *simple*. But they would not say *simple* when the sense required *simplistic*, because they would notice that *simple* did not carry the intended meaning.

Thus the odd thing in the present case is that Ms Faust's editor did not know the meaning of either word. As a result, he took a sentence which would have puzzled only those readers who didn't know what *inferred* meant, and produced one which made no sense at all.

There are three levels of editorial crime:

*Level 1:* to use the odd wrong word from time to time.

*Level 2:* to fail to correct a wrong word used by someone else.

*Level 3:* to change somebody else's right word into a wrong word.

The only way to deal with those who commit a Level 3 offence is to execute them. This may seem extreme, but it is really a kindness. In the present case, the crime involved (a) ignorance, (b) failure to recognise one's own ignorance and hence failure to check up, and (c) failure to recognise that Ms Faust was likely to have chosen her words with great care and skill.

There is no way that these crimes are going to be discour-

aged by more education or higher pay, as proposed by Ms Faust. Execution, by contrast, would really teach them a lesson.

In the meantime, there is another strategy which just might work. At the moment, we try to teach the difference between *imply* and *infer*. As only one of these exists in common language, we are effectively saying 'Use *imply* unless it doesn't fit.' As one recent publication puts it, 'Writers may be reassured by the [fact] that the word they need most of the time is *imply*'.

We can do better than this. We have two virtual synonyms for *infer*, namely, *conclude* and *deduce*. *Conclude* is a well-known common-language word, and *deduce* is widely used in mathematics, logic and detective fiction. Rather than test *imply* vs. *infer*, we test *imply* vs. *conclude* or *deduce*:

The correlation of X and Y deduces... This is obviously wrong, so use *implies*.

Observing a correlation between X and Y, he deduced ...

Obviously right, therefore use *inferred*.

Better still, use *concluded* or *deduced* and forget all about *inferred*. Then we will not need to execute as many editors.



Cass

*The wages of inference*



*Are questions about language the same the world over? We asked our colleagues in the Oxford English Dictionary Department in Britain for their experience, and got back a spirited reply. Then we set this against a sample of the questions which come to us. Here is the total outcome.*

THE DEPARTMENT has always received numerous enquiries, learned or otherwise, from the users of Oxford Dictionaries. On the Ides of March 1983, the department launched the Oxford Word and Language Service (OWLS) specifically to answer such casual queries. Eleven years on, two intrepid lexicographers have ventured within the now dangerously bulging filing cabinet packed with OWLS correspondence to compile a small florilegium of favourite questions and answers.

Some of the enquiries are frustratingly brief, even consisting of a single word written on a postcard, with no indication of whether it was discovered in an article on post-structuralism or overheard in a skateboard park. The British enquirer who asked about the meaning of 'Claytons principle', for example, did not mention any context at all, and it took a little while for our (British) lexicographer to work out that this was not some obscure formula of thermodynamics, but a success story of Antipodean advertising.

It is hard to identify the most pressing questions among speakers and writers of English, but recurrent ones include 'what is the longest word?' (simple answer: *pneumoultramicroscopicilicovolcanoconiosis*), 'how many words are there in the English language?' (brief answer: over a quarter of a million, but it depends what you mean by 'word' and 'English'), 'isn't the -ize spelling of verbs an Americanism?' (summary answer: historically not, but increasingly so), 'why is the word *perjorative* not in my Oxford dictionary?' (concise answer: *try perjorative*), 'why is the word \*\*\*\* in my Oxford dictionary?' (polite answer: because it's part of the language, like it or not), and 'would you please put this word I have invented in your dictionary?' (short answer: no!).

There are also numerous enquiries along the line of 'what is the word for a person who collects little metal bottle-tops?': we restrain the impulse to reply 'idiot' and compose a polite explanation of the limits of the vocabulary. Among our favourites must be the letter asking for the correct word for someone who drinks their own bathwater (as opposed to someone who drinks someone else's bath-water!) The lexicographer's reply: 'As the concept is not central to European civilization I am not surprised that it has failed to find a place in dictionaries. If words for this are needed in the future, then *autoloutrophilist* and *alloloutrophilist* are waiting in the wings ready for their brief flash of celebrity'.

*Questions of English*, compiled and edited by Fred McDonald and Jeremy Marshall, was published by OUP in November 1994.

IT ALL SEEMED very familiar. What's the term for a collector of knives? the collective noun for maiden aunts? the word for the unconscious act of removing belly-button fluff? Most of these are, of course, not requests for information about established words, but invitations to us to try our hand at a bit of neologising. (Our British colleagues could not be expected to know the Australian phrase *alleloloutropinic pair*, denoting two people simultaneously drinking one another's bathwater).

We have also had our equivalents of the objection to including words like \*\*\*\*. (The spelling here, incidentally, is that of the enquirers). An interesting extension of the problem was illustrated by a writer who objected to the *APOD*<sub>2</sub> definition of 'wog'. He did not object to

wog<sup>1</sup> (sl. contempt.) foreigner ...

but to the next item

wog<sup>2</sup> (Aust. sl.) small insect, grub, virus, gastric complaint  
(“Get the wog” = become ill) ...

He objected on the grounds that it was racist, i.e. (presumably) that because of wog<sup>1</sup>, wog<sup>2</sup> was tainted. In this he has a point, but what more can a dictionary do to than remind people using wog<sup>2</sup> that they may be imagined to be using the offensive word wog<sup>1</sup> and hence cause accidental offence; and what better way to point this out than to print both words? (Incidentally, the latest *APOD* has wog<sup>1</sup> flagged 'offensive'.)

Perhaps one day somebody will write *The Oxford Book of Confusions*, collecting all the ambiguities, homophones,

homonyms, embarrassing slips of the tongue and so on, like the one about the French lady searching for the English for *entremets* 'It is what you have between the courses ... the intercourse?' 'Not before the dessert, dear,' said her husband gravely.

We got a magnificent list of words we had overlooked from a reader who had been perusing Mueller's English Russian Dictionary, published in Moscow. The words included *axunge*, *coxcombical*, *goat-sucker*, *gombeen-man* and *pilliwinks*. Ozwords offers a modest prize to the first reader to get one of them into a respectable publication – other than *OED*<sub>2</sub> and *SOED*<sub>2</sub>, that is, since they have the lot.

Then we get the perennial demands for settling arguments, bets, scrabble disputes, etc. Is there a verb *to rejog*, meaning to jog again? Answering this kind of question can be a high-risk occupation – who knows what fame or fortune may rest on the decision? So we are cowards: of *rejog*, we replied that it was not in the *OED*, but that its formation conforms to standard English practice.

O X F O R D

CANBERRA



was not doing violence to the language by writing 'shore' instead of 'sheared'. In 1981 *Macquarie* described 'shore' as 'archaic', and there seems little evidence of any increased acceptance.

Which goes to show, I guess, the overwhelming urban influence now overshadowing the old authentic Australia bush tradition.

Bobbie Hardy  
Double Bay, NSW

Good news, Bobbie. *Macquarie*<sub>2</sub> (1992) reports 'shore' as an alternative to 'sheared' without any hint of its being an archaism. Maybe your complaints reached them. And *ACOD*<sub>2</sub> places *shorn* before *sheared* as the past participle form—correctly, I think: no one would talk of a *sheared lamb*. There is still justice in the world.

## BRIEF ANSWERS:

To Bryan Reid, Albert Park, Vic.

**sloid:** You had the pronunciation, sense and origins right, but the spelling is *sloyd*. It was a Swedish-inspired course in manual arts, basically carpentry, taught in Victorian primary schools in the 1920s and 30s. The Swedes spell it *slöjd*. There is a good account of it on pp. 84/5 of *Marching as to War*, Don Charlwood's splendid story of his school days.

To E. Zeidan, Finley, SA:

**ekphrastic:** The noun form of this word (normally spelt *ecphrasis*, incidentally) is defined in *SOED*<sub>2</sub> as 'a lucid, self-contained explanation or description'. The adjectival form was last noted (prior to your sighting in the work of John Tranter, that is) in Greek c. AD 250, when it was used by Diogenes Laertius, a collector of academic abstracts. Make of that what you will.

To Jack Horner, Dickson ACT

**tad:** You didn't find this in the dictionaries of offbeat words because it is in the standard dictionaries. *ACOD*<sub>2</sub> gives 'a tad too salty' as a usage example, and says it is 19th century, of uncertain origin. *Macquarie*<sub>2</sub> says it is c. 1930 US and relates it to the *tad* in *tadpole* or to the British dialect word *taddick*, meaning a small amount.

*OED*<sub>2</sub> reports a single citation of *tad* as 'a person who won't pay' (1845) and then offers numerous citations of *tad* = child before coming to the first citation using the word in its current sense, in 1940. It mentions the *tadpole* connection but not *taddick*. However, the *Oxford Dialect Dictionary* gives *tadas* 'a quantity, a burden, a load' and *taddick* as a diminutive of it, i.e. 'a small quantity of anything'.

Brighton, SA:

They've gone, Gough and his in-tray,

And we don't know where they is. Most replete with allusions to issues of the day was second prize winner Russel Henry, of Burwood East, Victoria

Whitlam shot on Armistice Day – repatriated, seeking loopholes.

But first prize goes to the magnificent set of relevant mixed clichés generated by Brian Ridden of Sapphire, NSW:

It's time –

Gough's in deflation spiral and he's puffed his last hurrah.

## Ozwords competition No. 4

'Ambitious Scottish husband and wife team have initial success in bid for power but are ultimately overcome by moving forest.' Thus the plot of *Macbeth*, as summarised in a TV magazine. Competitors are asked to compile a similar summary of their favourite Australian literary work, fiction or non-fiction. Limit 30 words. Entries close 30 May.

## Ozwords Competition No. 3

Competitors were asked for the wording of the standard letter sent to people who wrote to Gough Whitlam after the dismissal, and composed by the same genius who wrote 'Clancy's gone to Queensland droving, and we don't know where he are'.

Several popular themes emerged: the slogans and scandals of the time, the exile in Paris, and so on. So V. Lightfoot contributed French doggerel:

Gough s'amuse sur la plage

Maintenant son rage

and in very similar mode Flora Fisk wrote:

UNO Gough, he saw his chance

Maintains his rage in Paris, France.

We liked the succinctness of Christopher Fyfe's

Dear Sir

Gough's Off

Yours faithfully,

Mal's Pal

Closest to the spirit of the original was the third prize winner, David Mercer of

## WRECKLESS RITING

From the Age, 16 March 1995:

Each faces charges of ~~reckless~~ wreckless conduct endangering life ~~and limb~~

This is the inaugural entry in a spot to be devoted to singularly unfortunate misprints, Freudian slips and malapropisms. Submissions must be in the form of cuttings, and carry the name and date of the publication in which they appeared.

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