



OZWORDS

A Joint Australian National University

and Oxford University Press Project

EDITORIAL

NO OZWORDS for a year. Happily, this does not mean that we have fallen victim to economic rationalism—though *Ozwords* is less economically rational than a lot of institutions which have succumbed. Put it down to the vanity of human wishes. With luck, it won't be a year before the next issue.

Otherwise, it has been a good year for pedants. We have argued the meaning of the seemingly innocuous phrase 'Australian issues' in the rules for the Miles Franklin award, and attempted to define the frontier between *post-modernist borrowing* (hooray) and *plagiarism* (boo). We have vainly tried to distinguish between what is now called *healthy competition* and what used to be called *wasteful duplication*. Currently, we are busy redefining an assault rifle as an *essential agricultural implement*. There are new tasks to be done every day.

Your job for this month, reader, is therefore to send us the most absurd examples of nice new labels on nasty old cans, or nice old labels on nasty new cans, all designed to make us cheer when we should boo (or vice versa).

HILARY KENT *Law and Disorder*

IN HIS 1966 BOOK *Australian English*, Bill Ramson comments that James Hardy Vaux, who in 1812 compiled a *Vocabulary of Flash Language*, was the 'most unlikely of Australian lexicographers'. Vaux was transported to Australia three times (in 1801 and 1810 for theft, and in 1831 for passing forged banknotes). His dictionary of criminal slang was presented to Thomas Skottowe, the commandant at

Newcastle, in the hope that he would 'occasionally find it useful in his magisterial capacity', reflecting the persistent notion that the police and the judiciary needed to understand the language of crime and criminals.

The vocabulary described in *Flash Language* was not specifically Australian, being the language of the London underworld; but the implication was that it was used in convict circles in New South Wales. Despite Ramson's misgivings, it is clear that Vaux had struck a rich vein, which would be productively mined in later studies of language in Australia.

In 1869 Marcus Clarke, in his 'Sketches of Melbourne Low Life', published in the *Australasian* on 3 July, took up the theme. Writing about 'Bohemians', Clarke described how a member of a particular group might use language devised to 'convey a more full and humorous notion of all his thoughts' but which con-

cealed 'the idea he wishes to convey from all save his own particular friends', and regarded 'language as absolutely given to him to conceal his thoughts'. Clarke was convinced that 'in no other city is this terrible language

spoken with such facility as in Melbourne', and that the reason was obvious: 'During the last twenty years has been pouring into the city a crowd of released convicts, redeemed scoundrels, adventurous vagabonds, all of

whom speak this hideous tongue with facility'. He went on to demystify a long list of underworld terms, including:

jemmy and **jilt**, a crowbar
little snake, a boy who is put in at the window to open the door
betty, a skeleton key
jug or **doss**, a prison
put in chokée or **be quodded**, to be imprisoned
do seven stretch, to be sentenced to seven years
mounter, a perjurer.

Interest in the language of crime continued through the nineteenth century with the publication in about 1882 of *The Detectives' Handbook: The Sydney Slang Dictionary*. And in 1895 Cornelius Crowe, a Melbourne policeman, added to the list with his *Australian Slang Dictionary*.

In 1950 Detective Constable B.K. Doyle compiled 'a list of local criminal and gaol expressions which may

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be of some assistance to police in doing their jobs'. Doyle thought his list, published in *The Australian Police Journal*, would give police an understanding of 'the true meaning of what might be said in underworld parlance'.

More recently, Gary Simes had edited *A Dictionary of Australian Underworld Slang*, which was published by Oxford in 1993. Simes combined glossaries of slang compiled by two prisoners in New South Wales: the first by Ted Hartley, imprisoned as a conscientious objector in 1943 and 1944; the second by a long-term prisoner known only as Thirty-five (from the custom of referring to a prisoner by the last two digits of his official number). Some of this material is international:

hoist, to steal

chiseller, a swindler

dip, a pickpocket

and some of it is distinctively Australian, including:

fruit for the sideboard, easy pickings

tank, a safe

track, a prison warder who carries contraband messages or goods for a prisoner

There is much previously unrecorded material:

button up, to cease betting, or lower one's stakes considerably when one is winning

chicken thief, a petty thief

leafing, a method of fraudulently shortchanging a customer.

Newspaper reports of the proceedings of the Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service show that the vein is still productive and that, despite Marcus Clarke's belief, Sydneysiders are every bit as inventive as their Melbourne cousins. **Trevorcam**, **Trevortape**, **crotchcam**, and **duelling wire taps** are all technical devices used by the Commission's investigators in concert with a disgraced former detective, variously referred to as a **useless little prick of a thing**, the **supergrass** and the **Kuringai mountie**. Although the Commission does not **deal**, it has given individual police officers a **tap on the shoulder**, persuaded them to **roll/turn over** and to **tip a bucket** on their corrupt associ-

ates. Police who have **rolled** may be taken into a witness protection program and enter the Commissioner's hearing room through the **rollover door**.

Police officers in denial defend themselves with counter charges of **black lies** (allegations made against them), claims that they are being **butch-**

'the vocabulary of coppers... seems at times to be barely distinguishable from that of... criminals and informers'

ered (having their reputations ruined), or **squared back** (subjected to revenge for past disagreements), or they simply affect an **attack of the Carmens** (respond to questions with 'I don't recall'). Justice Wood remains determined to **flush out** the force, and after harrowing, sometimes tearful, days in the witness box, those called before him are stood down with a **clean soul** (what you get after baring it) but **shot for all time** (with a career in ruins). One less philosophical officer thought, however, it was all a **woftam** (waste of f...g time and money).

As Clarke had implied more than a century earlier, this humour itself reveals the fears and insecurities of those previously confident that past indiscretions would remain concealed, and the overwhelming embarrassment and humiliation of **straight shooters** (honest cops), unable to deny any longer that they belong to a corrupt and rotten organisation.

Clarke's second point – about a desire to hide the true nature of activities from all but the closest of associates – seems confirmed by the evidence. Indeed one could extend the analysis, pointing to the construction of a language of brotherhood which justifies what to outsiders is truly shocking behaviour by the guardians of law and order. This language describes such behaviour in normal, everyday, even playful, terms, and implicates and draws succour from colleagues, corrupt and non-corrupt alike, by drawing

them into the abyss at the cultural heart of the job.

Thus a **wallaby** (police officer) determined on **graft** might **do a notebook** (manufacture notes of non-existent conversations) or **verbal** a suspect (claim that s/he made self-incriminating verbal admissions outside the formal recorded interview).

Such an officer might **put the bite on** or **make business arrangements** (seek a bribe). Should these attempts fail, he might **load up** suspects or **salt** premises (plant evidence), and possibly arrange a **scrum down** (a meeting to coordinate police statements) in an attempt to **fit up** (frame) or **brick** (ensure an unsafe conviction against) someone.

Failure to comply could mean the **high jump** (referral to a higher court, where a stiffer sentence would apply) or a **binge** (a police crackdown on a particular activity). Individual **scams** are known as the **laugh**, the **giggle**, a **drink** or the **Christmas club**. A **sling** might be offered through a **conduit** or paid to a **bagman** who would **divvy up** (and perhaps **wash/laundry** the proceeds, then **fix a person up** or distribute the **cut** down the **chain** (a loose linkage of obligation), always assuming that an associate had not been **lashed** (had his share **ripped off** by his colleagues). Rewards for **payouts** by criminals might be **writing a person out** (deleting his/her name from the deposition) or **no-billing** of a charge (failure to offer any evidence), although without care they could be **snipped** (asked to pay a bribe even when a case against them has no chance of success).

Vaux thought the interests of law and order would be served by understanding the language of crime and criminals. Had he seen the evidence of the Royal Commission he might have found as compelling a case for demystifying the vocabulary of **coppers**, which seems at times to be barely distinguishable from that of the **enforcers**, **standover men**, **recruiters** and **phizgigs**, criminals and informers.

Hilary Kent is the editor of the *Australian Little Oxford Dictionary*

MAILBAG

We welcome readers' comments on their recent observations of Australian usage, both positive and negative, and their queries, particularly those not easily answerable from the standard reference books.

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

Connections

'When did the horses involved in harness racing cease to have owners and start having connections?' (Editorial, last issue)

Twenty years ago I backed a pacer at 12:1. It led all the way but as it entered the straight the driver started having quick glances over his shoulder to see where the opposition were, at the same time attempting to strangle the horse – all to no avail.

As I collected my money the bookie said, 'You were lucky to get this collect – that horse wasn't supposed to win.'

I said, 'I noticed.'

'You don't get my drift. I own that horse and Number 3 was supposed to win the race, not Number 5.'

I said, 'But the official Course Booklet lists four people as the "connections", and your name is not one of them.'

'No. I own it outright. The "connections" are just for the benefit of the Trotting Control Board.'

'Really?'

'Yes. Ninety-five percent of the runners at Harold Park have dummy connections. The owners are mostly the bookies. How are we going to win otherwise?'

I hope this enlightens you. I prefer to be anonymous as I still punt every weekend.

'Terry'

The Indian experience

Because of the Oz limitation on your interests, I should not mention that the local paper recently reported on the number of people bitten by stray dogs

in a village named Ouch, and an advertisement for a lady secretary with strong word processing skills, good appearance and a pheasant personality.

James B. Farrell
Peshawar, Pakistan

My favourite story about South Asian English involves an advertisement for a wife, demanding that she be an interplucked virgin. This turned out to be from a failed BA who required a wife who was educated, but just slightly less educated than he was, i.e. one who had 'plucked' her Intermediate examination. Put the two stories together and you could propose some new verses for the pheasant plucker song.

Portal Rights violated?

I have come across a number of glass doors lately bearing the label 'These doors are alarmed'. Yet the doors seem calm to the point of catatonia. Have they been tranquillised to stop them being alarmed?

L.G. Norman,
Naremburn, NSW

Jambled, perhaps?

'Available from good bookshops'

The advertisement on page 5 of *Ozwords* concerns me. What are the factors which make a bookshop 'good'? Because they sell that book? If they sell one book from that publisher but not another, are they good or bad? Is a technical or ethnic bookshop 'bad' for not selling that book? Isn't every bookshop selling books within libel, racial and pornographic laws 'good'?

Yours, only partly in jest,

John Ellis
Scarborough WA

The simple answer is 'Yes', but there is also a more complex answer.

Publishers use the phrase in question to indicate that the book is offered through normal trade channels (as opposed to a special direct mail offer, for example). However, 'available from any bookshop' would not be true – most discount bookshops and remainder houses, and many chain outlets, would neither stock it nor order it for you. The bookshops identified as 'good' are those which offer a special order service for books they do not have in stock, and for my money this is a reasonable definition.

Truffles

Your observation that book editors live 'down among the roots, like truffles' reminded me of a verse from Thomas Love Peacock's immortal pome, 'Sir Hornbrook: or, Childe Launcelot's Expedition – a Grammatico-allegorical Ballad' (1818):

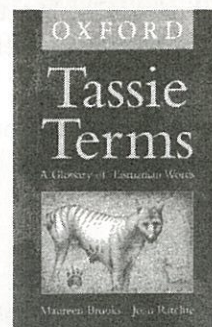
*There Etymology they found
Who scorned surrounding fruits
And ever dug in deepest ground
For old and mouldy roots.*

John Bangsund,
Thornbury, Vic.

(More letters on page 7)



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TASSIE TERMS

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REGIONAL AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH

WHAT DO THE FOLLOWING quotations have in common? Where are the words in bold spoken? One of the quotations is from a book published in 1986. The rest are from newspapers published in the past five years.

- And as for the dignity of Parliament, may I ask just one question? What dignity? Any dignity or sanctity that might have existed dissipated the day that MPs started calling one another slob, imbeciles, louts, **yafflers**, whackers, harlots and maggots.
- 'Triantelope' appears in Australian dictionaries but **triantula** doesn't, although it's well known here.
- **Nointer** ... applied to young children and ... roughly synonymous with *brat*.
- The girl slipped through a **merry mix** seat while the ride was in progress and was flung into a large side-show alley crowd.
- The ... School Parents and Friends Association have decided to arrange a series of functions in aid of school funds. The first, an **American tea**, will be held at the school on Friday.
- Professional snake catchers have for years come to [the island] for snakes to stock farms where venom is extracted for antivenene laboratories. They have taken away oil-silk bags weighty with ... snakes that lie unblinking on the rocks or thread in the barilla on [the island]. They cough, some men say, others declare it is more like a bark. And the bush they bark in is known in island parlance as **barking brilla**.
- An **inchman** is what [most Australians] would call a bullant.

- Most types are marketed commercially through tackle shops and other bait outlets as whitebait, bluebait, sprat, or under regional names such as 'glassies' ... and '**pretty fish**'.

Bruce Moore reports on current work in the Australian National Dictionary Centre

- [Advt] With well constructed, myrtle lined shed with septic tank. Suitable to live in whilst building. Large dam. Permanent creek. Phone and **hydro**.

By the time you get to **hydro** most readers will realise that we are in Tasmania. Australian dictionaries give **hydro** as an abbreviation of 'hydro-electric', but Tasmanians use the term as the equivalent of 'electricity' – you have the hydro put on, you pay the **hydro bill**. The term **inchman** for a kind of ant is known to all Tasmanians, but its existence has yet to be recog-

nised by the dictionaries. It's interesting to note that two British dialect words – **nointer** ('a spoiled or troublesome child') and **yaffler** ('a garrulous person') – have survived in Tasmania, but are unknown on the mainland.

The quotations are from the Centre's latest publication, *Tassie Terms: A Glossary of Tasmanian Words*, edited by Maureen Brooks and Joan Ritchie. It is published by Oxford University Press, and is available now in the bookshops.

This glossary of Tasmanian terms contains words drawn from a variety of written sources including Tasmanian newspapers, books of flora and fauna, historical works, fiction, and a range of periodicals, journals, and pamphlets.

The 700 words featured include:

badger, blind velvet worm, buzzy, conjoined house, convict brick, cordial, guitar plant, horizontal scrub, jollytail, kitchen-larder party, manfern, muttonbird koori, Palawa, pluck house, Regatta Day, sassy beer, snottie, stone picker, tanglefoot, tissue, Wally's wattle, and wonkie.

Terms from Tasmania's history are also included:

black line, Derwent duck, Hobart every mail, Irishman's ride, Isle of the Dead, Lieutenant-Governor of the Woods, the Model, nut cracking, Sanitarium of the South, Tasman's stingo, and tiger catcher.

Tassie Terms follows *Words from the West: A Glossary of Western Australian Terms* (1994) as part of the Centre's continuing research into regionalisms in Australian English. Western Australia and Tasmania form discrete geographical areas, separated as they are from the mainland eastern states, by distance in the case of Western Australia and by Bass Strait in the case of Tasmania. Yet while Tasmanians have many



words which are used only in that state, it also has many words which are shared with Victorians and/or South Australians.

Both South Australia and Tasmania have the terms **area school** ('a school formed by the amalgamation of several small rural schools, offering both primary and secondary education') and **tier** ('a forested range of hills or mountains, especially one of a series'). Tasmanians, Victorians, and South Australians use **kindergarten** for what everywhere else is called **pre-school**, and in the cattle and dairy industries they use **chopper** for 'a cow which is being disposed of for slaughter as opposed to being used as a breeder'.

Tasmanians and Victorians have **bathers** for a swimming costume, known elsewhere in Australia as a **cossie** or **swimmers** (or, including Victoria, **togs**), bungalow for a 'small and usually self-contained dwelling, separate from and situated to the rear of the main house', **cantaloupe** for what is known elsewhere as a **rock-**

melon, icy pole for what is known elsewhere as an **iceblock**, **nature strip** for what is known elsewhere as a **street lawn, verge**, or even footpath, **spouting** for what other areas call **guttering**, and **state school** for a government primary school (known elsewhere as a **public school**).

As was illustrated by *Words from the West*, *Tassie Terms* demonstrates that at the lexical level regionalism is more significant in Australian English than has hitherto been suspected. In 1995 the Centre conducted research into Queensland terms, and in 1996 South Australia is our target.

What about Victoria? They have **mudlark** for the bird known as South Australia the **Murray magpie**; **snib** in the sense 'to engage the lock on a door so that the handle cannot be turned'; **Boston bun** for what in New South Wales is called a **tea cake**; **spider** for a drink of lemonade with a scoop of ice cream added (although this is also used in South Australia); **dixie** for a small tub of ice cream for one person (how

widely is this term used?); **German sausage** for the bland sausage which is **fritz** in South Australian, **polony** in Western Australia, **Belgium sausage** in Tasmania, and **Windsor sausage** in central Queensland; **yonnie** for a stone; **divvy van** for a police divisional van; and **lucky shop** for a TAB shop. Many Aussie Rules terms were created in Victoria, but with the 'nationalising' of the game they are now known Australia-wide. During the 1995 finals series a commentator used the term **mosquito fleet**. This term was first applied to a groups of small, fast, and skilful players in the 1922-26 Essendon team, and was then used for any similar group of players. Do non-Victorians know the term? And do any schoolchildren outside Victoria call rubber bands **lacker bands** (presumably a corruption of 'elastic band')?

Any comments and further suggestions will be appreciated. We will feature your suggestions in the next number of *Ozwords*. Then it will be on to South Australian and Queensland.



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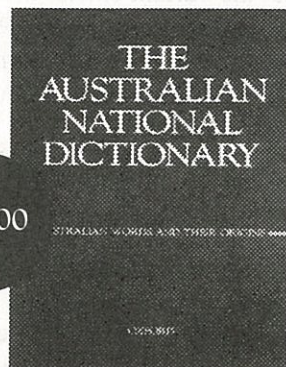
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Les Murray, *Weekend Australian*

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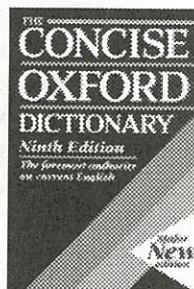
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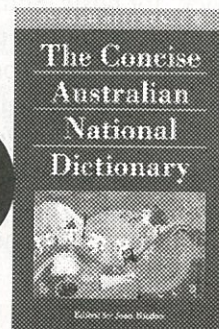
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People get very upset about mispronunciation. Often, our reactions are quite violent, as if the issue were not one of error but of gross moral turpitude. Mispronunciation is not just seen as a mistake, like putting salt in the sugar bowl. Nor is it just a social gaffe, like taking a mouthful of soup a moment before somebody else starts saying grace. It is much more deep-rooted than either of these, as if other people's mispronunciations were a threat to our personal ethical standards.

I had a very good example of this the other day in a letter from Kenneth Good. He wrote:

There must be a reason for the astounding prevalence of commentators – some of them academics – pronouncing *zoology* as 'zoo-ology'

Perhaps they are ignorant of a seldom used word, or they feel that the average listener would not comprehend 'zoe-ology' as being that branch of biology concerning animals.

Probably they utter 'zoo', ad infinitum, so that most unlettered dunces such as myself will catch on, which makes many suspect that all animals they refer to are in the bloody zoo.

Perhaps Macquarie will ocker it – sooner or later – with the spelling changed, as intoned by these voices, as *zoology*. Ooh! That'd fix it, cobber, woodnit.

Now, I think we all know just how he feels. Perhaps we would not all share his worry about 'zoo-ology', but almost all of us have some pet hate: 'preformance' for *performance*. 'bassick' for *basic*. Some get very upset by what they perceive as un-Australian pronunciations, like 'Mom' for *Mum*, while others insist on them, like 'Kee-hoety' for *Quixote* (though happily not 'kee-hoetic' for *quixotic*).

Our reaction when we hear unacceptable noises is immediate and uncontrollable. We shout back at the radio, as if we believed that a sufficiently loud shout would travel back over the airwaves and emerge in the studio, to the mortification of the offender.

Now, most of us can, if asked, produce good reasons for our concerns. For example, my pet concern is about the word *defuse*, which is often pronounced so that it sounds just like *diffuse*. I argue my case very powerfully, quoting the risk of ambiguity, the need to distinguish neologisms from classical forms, etc., and am constantly

*The prospects for
'killer-metre' once seemed
to be very bright ...but
... Gough and the vulgar
mob are winning.*

surprised that nobody seems in the slightest impressed.

The argument which is supposed to reassure me runs like this: 'The fact that you notice it indicates that there is no real ambiguity, and the arguments about etymology are irrelevant, because once a word is in the language it ceases to matter how it got there.'

Now, these arguments are patently spurious when used in the context of my own concerns, but useful and compelling when used by me to reassure others. Does it really matter whether we say 'zoe-ology' or 'zoo-ology'? We have learned to live with twin pronunciations for many words, e.g. *either* and *neither*. If we add in regional variations – the *a* in *Newcastle*, etc. – the list is enormous, yet they rarely cause a comprehension problem.

Similarly, the etymological argument is very dangerous. Certainly the Ancient Greek omega normally makes an 'oh' sound, but we are talking English, not Ancient Greek.

Why, then, do we reckon that 'zoe-ology' is correct? Answer: (a) because that's the way we say it ourselves; (b) because that's the way our educated friends say it; (c) because that's the way the dictionaries tell us to say it.

Three good reasons. But let us look at them more closely.

Why do the dictionaries tell us to say it this way? Answer: because that was the way the editors and their educated friends said it when the dictionary was being written. And this is as it should be. The dictionary which does not reflect current educated usage and pronunciation rapidly becomes a fossil. For lexicographers, the question is not whether to change but when. Each change starts as an uneducated variant, then becomes a disputed variant, then an acceptable variant and finally the preferred, educated form.

Whether we like it or not, changes are going to continue. This means that we pedants are always going to have plenty to complain about, but it also means that we are rarely, if ever, going to win.

Take the case of the pronunciation of kilometre. The prospects for 'killer-metre' once seemed to be very bright: it was in line with the pronunciation of *millimetre* and *centimetre*, it was in line with the way the word was stressed in every European language; and it was officially prescribed by the metrication board, the ABC and every respectable authority. Against this we had the 'kill-ommmitter' lobby, consisting of the vulgar mob and, for some unaccountable reason, Gough Whitlam.

Gough and the vulgar mob are winning. The ABC have surrendered; the major dictionaries are now admitting that the variant exists (though *ACOD* still labels it '*disp.*'). Sooner or later, it will probably be the 'correct' usage, and our preferred version will be branded 'archaic'.

At the moment, 'zoe-ology' is the only form recognised in the dictionaries, so we are still three stages away from disaster. But beware: 'zoo-ology' is not just Ocker. I heard it the other night on the BBC World Service, from the lips of a leading Cambridge academic with an otherwise impeccable SRP accent.

Pommies and pomegranates

I am 61, and a fourth-generation Australian. The family migrated to Australia in 1870. My great-grandfather, Alfred Joass, had been a head gardener on one of the royal estates in England, and arrived in Australia clutching a few grape cuttings, with which he later started a vineyard at Pokolbin, NSW.

My grandfather was born in England in 1864, and had the nickname 'Pommie Albert'. I recall on my 8th birthday asking how he got the name. He replied by telling me his father's theory about it.

His theory was that most English people, himself included, had very fair skins and were unused to a lot of sunlight. When exposed to our harsh sunlight for more than a few hours, their cheeks would acquire a reddish glow similar to a ripe pomegranate.

Over the years I have heard this theory expounded by other older people.

Albert Joass,
Swansea NSW

Yes, the theory is widely known, but the dates you attach to it are new evidence.

It sounds as if your grandfather acquired the nickname as a child. If so, it means that 'pommie' was already around by (say) 1870, long before its first uses in print, which was c. 1910. It also means that the usage cannot have arisen from the 'immigrant, jimmygrant, pomegranate, pom' jingle.

It is unlikely that he got the nickname after 1910, when he would have been 46. Very few people get new nicknames at this age, and he would not depend on his father for an explanation of it.

However, another possibility is that he got the nickname (as a baby, perhaps, or at his first school), not because pommie meant 'English' but because *he* did indeed look like a pomegranate. In that case it is just a coincidence that the term later acquired its 'English' sense.

Either way, the information is fascinating, and sounds like powerful evidence that the word was used well before its first appearance in the printed record.

Mixed metaphors

Australian English is known for the richness of its images and use, or abuse, of the metaphor.

Many of this tradition's notables seem to hail from the country – and perhaps the Country Party in its various guises. A quote from their national (and National) leader, Tim Fisscher, brought 1994 to a nice close. Complaining about the Federal Government's response to increased movement of people from Beihai, in southern China, he said:

'We have a situation where a signal rippling through the bamboo grapevine is that Australia is a green light'

This was duly celebrated (at the writer's prompting) in Frank Devine's 'That's Language' column in the *Weekend Australia* (21-22 January 1995) colour magazine as a triple-transverse mixed metaphor.

I suggest that Tim deserves a prize, perhaps even the naming rights in an annual award for original Australian contributions to the corpus of mixed metaphors, like the prize created by Alex Buzo for tautologies.

Australia's usage is rich enough to supply plenty of candidates for the Tim Fischer Award. An early competitor emerged from an ABC report of the recent High Court decision against the powers of the Human Rights Commission. Mr Alan Rose, president of the Australian Law Reform Commission, was quoted as saying that

'[this decision] has removed the bottom-line teeth from the [Human Rights] Commission.'

A nice fiscodontic juxtaposition, worthy of an honourable mention, if perhaps not quite a fully fledged TFA.

Your readers might nominate some more, preferably in Australian public life, and comment.

G.D. Bolton
Sydney, NSW

The Fischer Trophy might take the form of a feral politician up a gum tree without a paddle – Ed)

Chinese Puzzles

IT SEEMS that the UN Women's conference in Beijing ran into a spot of bother with semantics. Some proposals got universal support until it was realised that the words meant different things to different people.

Here are just four of the words which caused trouble, gleaned from an AAP story which never made the papers, drawn to our attention by Radio Australia's Rob Hoskin.

family Does it mean married couples with children, or should it include married couples without children, unmarried couples with children, single parents with children, same-sex couples?

consider If you undertake to 'consider' an issue, have you promised to mull it over and come to some sort of conclusion, or have you done an adequate job if you have just mulled it over?

sexual rights If you vote in favour of sexual rights, what *precisely* are you voting for?

sexual health A reference to sexual health caused a ripple of anxiety in the Arabic-speaking section, only resolved when it was found that the term had been translated as 'pornography'.

AM for former Director of ANDC

Admirers of Dr Bill Ramson, foundation director of the Australian National Dictionary Centre and editor-in-chief of the monumental *Australian National Dictionary*, will be pleased to know that he became a Member of the Order of Australia in last year's Honours List.

WRECKLESS RITING

Contributions to the search for the ultimate Freudian misprint poured in. 'Many were fun but strictly ineligible:

Adelaide's resilient defence will face the spectre of Sydney's powerhouse forward Tony Lockett' (*Advertiser*, 25 April).

The contributor, David Mercer, commented: 'Lockett may haunt the Crows but they'll just walk through him.' However, it

was an unfortunate choice of cliché rather than a Freudian misprint.

Others were good homophonic misprints but not (to me) Freudian, e.g.:

'The Porsche was a right-off'
(*Telegraph-Mirror*, 24 April)

contributed by Peter J. McCormack.

On the way to glory was this one, contributed by Mary Masters:

With little or no exercise our waste lines increase'



and there was a very disturbing hyphen, from Bronwen Hickman, describing the joys awaiting visitors to Portofino:

Helpful signs tell [the delay] before the motorist can get into the one-car park there. (*Age*, 19 April)

But the contribution below, from Michael J. Ryan, came closest of all to the specifications:

(*Australian*, 18 April 1995)

Law revue lets digital data into courtroom

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Ozwords Competition No. 4

Competitors were asked for a promo paragraph on an Australian literary work, as it might appear in a TV guide.

Which of these two shows would you watch?

German ecotourist dies mysteriously in Australian bush. Questions are asked about Sydney socialite. Does she know more than she admits? (Edgar Castle)

or

Old Sydney pariah with speech impediment lusts for salvation in the wilderness, is kicked by mule, starves, hallucinates, dies at knifepoint, but lives on in bronze and whispers of paternity (Brian Ridden).

Both cover the same work, Patrick White's *Voss*. I think I'd watch the first. The second sounds too much like SBS, and anyway it blows the whole plot.

Patrick White's work tended to encourage overwriting. I wonder why. Take this euphuistic paragraph on *The Twyborn Affair*:

Sensual, enchanting Byzantine emperor wannabe and consort of Greek geriatric turns outback jackaroo before transformation to flamboyant madame of elegant London brothel (William La Ganza).

David Mercer avoided euphuism, but his show sounded to me like less-than-compelling viewing:

Retreating rapidly in the face of a powerful canine charge, three agile bushies survive man's best friendship (Henry Lawson, *The Loaded Dog*).

Anne-Marie Cook contributed a precisely misleading summary of Bryce Courtenay, *The Power of One*:

South African boy, inspired by German cactus enthusiast, overcomes fear and hardship to become a champion boxer.

Third prize to Anne-Marie Cook; second to Edgar Castle. But the first prize goes to L. H. Norman for a paragraph clearly aimed at the politically correct viewer:

A number of naked and semi-naked children are rescued from a child molestation ring (May Gibbs, *The Complete Adventures of Snugglepoot and Cuddlepie*)

Ozwords competition No. 5

Many people claim to have sold the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and if current trends continue it is only a matter of time before its present owners put it on the market.

Competitors are invited to write a small ad. offering this (or some other desirable piece of the National Estate) to first home buyers or small investors.