

OZWORDS!

A newsletter from the Australian National Dictionary Centre
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EDITORIAL

The response to *Ozwords* No. 1 was overwhelming. We thank in particular all those who offered publishable responses to the issues raised.

Tony Lang's introductory article on Plain English in the Law stimulated several readers to say that their own professions were equally diseased. One reader made a grandiose claim: 'The language of health administration beats that of the social sciences for pleonasm and obfuscation'. We asked him to substantiate the claim, but have not heard back.

Gary Simes' article on Taboo Words elicited a lot of predictable responses (plus some very funny stories). One drew a comparison between Dr Bowdler's efforts to clean up Shakespeare and a recent edition of Grimms' fairy tales cleansed of ageism, racism and sexism. It was very bland. We are looking for an article which will draw it all together into a General Theory of Taboo.

Any takers?

Meanwhile, enough people wrote asking for our editorial guidelines to persuade us to publish them. They will be found on the back page.

Ozwords competition No. 1

Langford-Reed wrote:

*There was an old man of Boulogne
Who sang a most topical song
It wasn't the words
Which frightened the birds
But the horrible double entendre.*

Readers are invited to supply the words of the topical song in question. Prize: an OUP book to the value of \$50.00.

What can we do about Unplain English?

by Nick Renton

COMPARED with many foreign tongues, English is not an especially difficult language. Yet many people find it remarkably hard to say what they mean in a straight-forward way.

Even governments sometimes fail to communicate. The application for the Seniors Card in one Australian State – a useful official initiative for residents aged 60 years or over – contained this classic ambiguity:

I am not in the full-time workforce
Yes ☐ No ☐

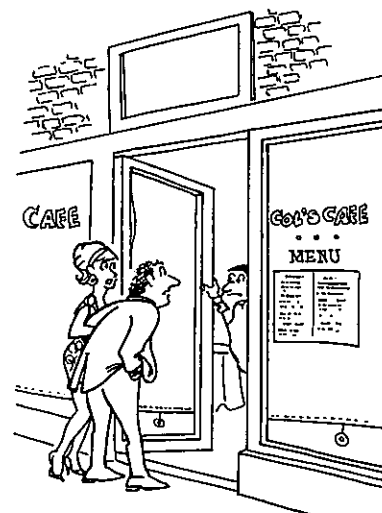
Should the correct answer for a retired person have been *Yes, I am not in the full-time workforce* or *No, I am not in the full-time workforce*?

The American State of Pennsylvania has a 'plain English' law for its own statutes. This requires an average word length of less than 1.55 syllables and an average paragraph length of less than 75 words. No sentence may exceed 50 words and no paragraph may be longer than 150 words.

This attempt to force style by legislation, while no doubt well-intentioned, seems naive in the extreme. Style is not a matter of mathematics – there is no such thing as an 'ideal' size for a word, a sentence or a paragraph.

More often, the problem lies in the use of stilted or pretentious words, slang, jargon, worn clichés, archaic terms, mixed metaphors, tautological expressions and acronyms which are meaningless to their readers.

Many people believe that the answer lies in teaching people to write plainly. Certainly the Seniors Card



'Are you in customer-oriented mode or focused on personal recreation?'

application form breaks a basic postulate of plain writing – that questions containing negatives are almost invariably ambiguous. But would re-education help with any of the following?

(1) *Through focusing on the company's objectives, Critical Success Factors (CSFs) and risk profile we can determine an optimal audit/review approach and resource requirements and skills to ensure maximum value is realised from the function.*

Letter from a leading firm of accountants to a client

(2) *... the cost savings achieved through close cluttering due to the nature of the products; for example, whether they are specialised products with a high infor-*

mation content, the nature of agglomeration economies and whether existing or potential externalities exist through common use of indivisible factor outputs...

i Report of a Task Force on Employment and Unemployment

(3) *One motive or complicating factor in relation to these failures in prudential standards may, of course, be of the kind of personal, social, domestic links that we've described flowing over and having an impact in relation to dealing with the persons in the capacity as a borrower, when there is a personal, domestic basis to the relationship that may have a causative effect in relation to how that borrower is assessed from the terms of prudential banking standards, or how the borrower's investment banking transaction is assessed from its prudential viewpoint.*

QC, addressing the
Tricontinental Royal Commission

(4) *The integration of Microsoft Mail with HP DeskManager allows customers of HP DeskManager to migrate their desktops to Microsoft Windows while leveraging their existing investments in an enterprise-wide messaging backbone.*

Press release from
a computer company

This is no laughing matter. All the above are quiet genuine extracts from local material created with a serious intent.

Now, all these pieces were written by people who can be assumed to be intelligent, and probably capable of making a clear statement in any situation where a clear statement was required. Why, then, did they produce all this nonsense?

In example (1), the probability is that the writers translated a simple sentence into language they believed would conceal its triviality. They could have written

By thinking about why the company is failing to reach its objectives, we can produce some strategies for success.

But this might have seemed unworthy of their fees. So they buried its triviality in verbiage.

In such cases, it is no use teaching them to write clearly, because the obscurity is deliberate. The only cure is

for the clients to refuse to pay the bill until any report is rewritten in readable style. Readable style then becomes the lucrative style, and will be delivered next time.

Item (2) is similar, except that it appears to have no meaning at all.

An alternative explanation of these items is that the writers believed that they had something sensible to say, and were simply translating into the peculiar style which they believed was appropriate to reports. But the solution is the same: recipients should say that such a style is unacceptable, and refuse to pay the bill.

A similar explanation is almost certainly true of item (3). Essentially, the QC's message was something like this:

One reason for the bad debts was that the borrowers were often friends or relations of the people who approved the loans. This reduced the care with which risks were assessed.

This is no trivial statement, so the intention was certainly not to bury it. It just came out that way.

'In the street, QCs speak almost as sensibly as ordinary folk...'

This was not necessarily because the QC was incapable of clear thought. Somewhere between the brain and the lips (for this is from a transcript of an unscripted speech) the thought was translated into the language of the court.

In the street, QCs speak almost as sensibly as ordinary folk. They do not need lessons in clear thinking, speaking or writing. But the court seems to impose its own style. A reform of the language of the courts will occur only if judges demand succinct clear statements and stop QCs in their tracks when they start to ramble. However, so long as the judges not only tolerate rambling but actually ramble themselves, the language of the courts will remain as impenetrable as ever, and the efforts of the plain language lobby will be in vain.

Item (4) is different, since the piece was presumably designed to sell things. It ought to have failed. Assuming, then, that it was successful, we have to as-

sume that the readers of computer literature have learned to extract the writer's intention from context clues, irrespective of what is actually said.

For example, I take it that 'leveraging their existing investments' is supposed to mean 'getting longer life for their existing equipment', and 'an enterprise-wide messaging backbone' is an electronic mail network. The problem here is not in computer jargon or grammar; it is the use of bizarre expressions to describe these perfectly ordinary concepts. 'Leverage' is a jargon word, but it is from the jargon of accountancy, where its meaning is precise. It does not mean 'increasing the value of an investment by extending its useful life'. However, the concept of leverage and the concept of extending useful life have just enough in common to enable the imaginative reader to guess what the writer had in mind.

The purpose of the language used here seems to be to add mystery, and some readers may well enjoy cracking the code. But it is also possible that millions of dollars of additional sales are lost from readers who are already frightened enough of computers, and even less likely to buy if their inade-

quacies are reinforced by the use of language which is beyond their comprehension. Logical readers might indeed be unhappy about hitching their communications systems to the products of a firm which was palpably incapable of communicating.

The general conclusion from all this is that it is simplistic to believe that people write rubbish because they have not been taught to write clearly. Plain language enthusiasts should take this lesson to heart. There is almost nothing in the latest books which was not said by Ernest Gowers in *Plain Words*, published over half a century ago. The message hasn't worked because it addressed the symptoms rather than the causes, and the causes are that rubbish is not merely accepted, but is the norm. Until there is a readers' revolt, writers will go on creating such nonsense.

Nick Renton is perhaps best known as the author of Rules for Meetings and Rules for Voluntary Associations.

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.

Letters should be addressed to
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May/might

It seems to me that the contributors to the *Sydney Morning Herald* have never been taught the difference between *may* and *might*. The strangest example I have met was: 'Queen Elizabeth had a lot of suitors whom she may have married before Prince Philip.'

Mona Kesteven
Hurstville, NSW

A headline in the *Adelaide Advertiser* read: *Hospital stay may have saved girl's life*. To my wife and myself, this implied that the girl was saved. In fact, the story was that the girl was denied admission and died.

Russel Dann,
Henley Beach, SA

These confirm our fear that the old distinction between *may* and *might* is on the way out. We can regret its passing, but if the *SMH* and the *Advertiser* don't recognise the distinction, it is unlikely that *Ozwords* can save it. The sadness is that there is no other way of making the distinction with such elegance and economy.

Language taboos

May I suggest Gary Simes reads again those 'memoirs of World War I'. I think he will find that the shock came, not from those words, but from their eternal repetition; a revelation of the unbelievable limitation of vocabulary and thought.

Reputable publishers might also do well to remember that whatever the initial response to those words, the rapid and inevitable end is boredom.

M. N. Brown
Manjimup, WA

I don't think Gary Simes would disagree. Nevertheless, some words seem to make more satisfying expletives (e.g. when I hit my thumb with a hammer) than others, and it is worth asking why. The frisson associated with taboo seems as good a reason as any.

If the taboo goes, the frisson goes, so the best way of getting rid of these words is to relax the taboo. But then what would I say when I hit my thumb with a hammer?

As a spoken-word journalist for most of my life (I am now 72) I cannot see how the taboos can relax, except in specialist programmes or drama. And then only with care: remember the public response to 'language' in the ABC drama *Phoenix*. Can these words ever be acceptable for news, current affairs or sport, for instance?

Gary Simes' opinion that 'a more complex situation-dependent set of rules' would apply is probably correct. In broadcasting, especially where advertisers are to be kept happy, this would certainly be so.

But things have changed. As an illustration of the sensitivity of the old ABC, I recall having a story of mine altered by a sub-editor in the 50s because it contained the phrase 'nature strip'. He made it 'road verge'. And in the 60s I had to go to higher authority to approve 'Riding the Wind' as title for a film on gliding.

Peter Baster
Maldon, Vic.

In the first edition of the *Macquarie Dictionary*, published in 1981, the last word on page 721 (carrying over to page 722) is THE four letter word, which coyness prevents me from typing. It should therefore be the tag word at the top of both pages, but it isn't. The tags are *fucoïd* and *fuchsïte* respectively, the latter being in fact the *ninth* word on the page (the first eight being derivatives of the untagged one).

Ruth Moss
Eastlakes, NSW

An example of 'situation-dependence', perhaps. You can whisper it, but mustn't shout it.

In the 1991 *Macquarie* the word is in the middle of a column, so we will never know whether their view has changed.

In the early days of World War II a friend and I, both in the AIF, were driving through Melbourne with his aunt, who was the very prim and proper wife of the commanding officer of a militia battalion. Somewhere along the way we came across a group of troops who were wearing forage caps. The Aunt remarked 'I do love those cunt-caps, Reg. Why don't you and Ken wear them?' As the blushes gradually faded from our faces, we realised that the colonel's lady had heard the expression somewhere in army circles, and that it meant nothing to her but the name of an attractive informal military cap.

L. K. Shave,
Edgecliff, NSW

About twenty years ago, when my friends and I were leading the revolution (never mind which one – any revolution would do) fearlessly from the pages of a student newspaper, we were often frustrated by the censorship imposed on us by Victor, our printer.

We knew that hearts and minds would never be free until we could say *fuck* whenever and wherever we chose, but Victor was more concerned with keeping out of court. So we were delighted when the magic word appeared on the sports pages of Melbourne's conservative *Sun News-pictorial*: 'Farmer was strong in the fuck...'

In our eyes this humble paragraph warranted a wider readership, so those vital lines of football reporting were pasted down, with acknowledgement of source but no other comment.

Unfortunately, the revolution did not take a great leap forward that week. Victor read every line, recognised the typo, and kindly typeset a single lower-case *r* which was pasted over the offensive *f*. No doubt thousands of students wondered why the organ of revolution had bothered to reprint so bland a paragraph; but then again they probably never noticed.

Jim Hart
Hawthorn, Vic.

Taboo words are weapons. Normally we keep them well sheathed. We brandish them to keep our enemies at bay by giving them blunt advice about what

they can go and get. Children use them to shock parents into accepting that changes in their relationship are, or should be, taking place. Occasionally, taboo words pop out of normally disciplined mouths when expletives are needed to fend off an imagined threat to our physical well-being. So naughty words are used either very deliberately, or involuntarily.

Of course there is an exception – the habitual and casual swearer who wears out all our valuable taboo words with misuse and overuse. Such people should go and get well and truly...

Ian M. Johnstone,
Armidale, NSW

Notion

Can anyone tell me when 'notion' came to replace 'idea' in Australia? Being from England, I naturally prefer 'idea' to the American 'notion'.

Stephen Langford
Paddington, NSW

Has it, and is it? From where I sit, *notion* has not replaced *idea*, and is not an Americanism. Certainly the OED refers to *notion* in the 'idea' sense as a well-established usage, with citations going back to 1605.

Incidentally, I am also not quite sure why the fact of being from England should 'naturally' make one prefer British usage. Some of us can't help using it, but that doesn't mean we prefer it.

Overly

Am I alone in wincing at the use of the word *overly*? Its sense is already conveyed by the word *over* itself. It is certainly an extreme form of redundancy. Can one expect the addition of the suffix '-ly' to other adverbs? ratherly? tooly? quietly?

Mark Thawley
Melbourne, Vic.

It is not new – the OED citations go back to 1014. And it is not a redundant duplication: unlike *rather*, *quite*, etc., *over* cannot stand alone as a modifier. The -ly is added to enable it to stand alone.

Perhaps your objection is to its tone. *The meat was not overcooked* would generally be a neutral statement, while *The meat was not overly cooked* would probably be a pompous satirical euphemism for *raw*, and your real objection is to pompous satirical euphemisms.

Urning

I've wondered why this word doesn't seem to be in common use.

In the case of female homosexuals, we have the noun *lesbian*, which seems to enjoy a wholesome enough derivation via Sappho and Lesbos. It is neither taboo nor vulgar. In short, the word exists, has a precise meaning and is used.

In the case of male homosexuals, we have only a string of pallid or vulgar euphemisms. Yet various dictionaries (e.g. Chambers 1988) suggest that *urning* has a derivation that is as responsible as that for *lesbian*. It, too, is neither taboo nor vulgar. In short, it exists and has a precise meaning, but is not used.

Why not?

R. J. Meggs,
Echuca, Vic.

There is one very good reason why I do not use it: that I hadn't heard of it.

It is not in *ACOD* or *Macquarie*, which strongly suggests that it is not common currency in Australia. *OED*₂ tells us that it was coined in 1864 and is 'now rare'.

We could organise a campaign to make it popular, but I would not give much for our chances. If I were running a campaign, I would prefer to start from scratch with a more promising word: a *fingal*, perhaps, from the second name of Oscar Wilde.

Incidentally, the learned Dennis Pryor tells me that some doubt has been cast on the authenticity of Sappho's lesbianism.

Stranglish

I would like to point out that 'adnoun' has its place both in the history of English and in current usage (see *OED*). While specialists might use 'adnoun' to refer to certain aspects of substantive constructions, others simply use it to indicate the nominal aspects of those words that help hold nouns back from being verbs.

In my teaching I use 'adnoun' as a way of describing the function of adjectives. While we have many words in English that use 'ject' to mean 'thing' (object, subject, inject, reject, deject etc.) most students see no sense of thing in the word 'adjective'. It might make the task of teaching English grammar easier (more consistent) if 'adnoun'

was used as part of the set 'adverb – adjective'. Let's use the opportunity of disclosure that *Stranglish* provides to take back the language we already have.

Keith Russell
University of Newcastle, NSW

Bless my soul, we learn something every day. *Adnoun* has already been coined and is, it seems, both useful and used.

However, I am puzzled by the idea of making 'ject' mean 'thing'. This seems to me to be gratuitously misleading – we should either use sound etymological analysis or none at all.

But maybe I have missed the point.

Number problems

An ugly usage is becoming common – e.g. 'A group of researchers are investigating ...', evidently influenced by 'a number of ...'. This is jarring and unacceptable.

Thomas Riddell
Woodbridge, Tas.

For what it is worth, the only citation of the phrase in *ODQ*₂ makes it plural: 'A little group of wilful men ... have rendered ... (Woodrow Wilson, 1917). In short, it may be jarring, but it is not new.

Customers?

In Bathurst, we have a group of educators, doctors, nurses and social workers, who help asthma sufferers and their relatives to understand, and better treat, the problem.

We have been instructed by the NSW Health Department that we should henceforth refer to those who come for this help as *customers*, not *clients*.

To me, the word *customer* implies that money or something equivalent changes hands. Banks, shops and prostitutes have customers, but should the term be applied to those who attend a Voluntary Health Clinic?

Dr H. P. B. Harvey
Bathurst, NSW

The instruction would seem to be driven by the ideologically-sound notion that we should avoid terms which imply a hierarchy and are thus elitist. If so, I am happy to be ideologically unsound. I would be reluctant to use *customers* of people seeking professional advice even if they were paying. They are clients.

Gregory Mann, of Nundah, Qld, writes:

Why do we double up the possessives in phrases such as 'this is a book of mine' and 'he is a friend of Jimmy's'? Where did English get this kind of structure from? As I recall, the French don't have it (... *ami de moi*) and Latin denoted possession by the genitive case alone.

And, while we are on this point, why does *He is a friend of Jimmy* seem to be an acceptable (to my ear) alternative, while the construction *He is a friend of me* just won't wash?

Our pedant-in-residence writes:

A host of questions. Let's try to sort them out.

Our possessive *s* seems to be a vestige of an Anglo-Saxon genitive case inflection, but the fact that people use it without having heard of genitive cases or inflections says something about the mechanism by which grammar is transmitted: not by learning grammar, but by imitation.

A formal grammarian might say something like this: possession can be represented in English either by the use of the possessive (= genitive) case, e.g. *Jimmy's friend*, or by using the preposition *of*, which can govern either the objective or the possessive case, e.g. *a friend of Jimmy/Jimmy's*.

The choice between objective and possessive case is a matter of sense and idiomatic usage. It seems that the stronger the sense of personal possession, the stronger the tendency to use the possessive case. Thus (to modify the example slightly) *a photograph of Jimmy* must have Jimmy's likeness on it but could belong to anyone, whereas *a photograph of Jimmy's* could have anyone's likeness on it but must belong to Jimmy. This distinction is useful because *Jimmy's photograph* could mean either.

If you find this explanation wholly satisfying, you are easily pleased. But it is a start. Let's see how far it takes us:

No, we don't say *Jimmy is a friend of me*, but we do say *Jimmy is a Friend of the Earth*, not ... *of the Earth's*. All manner of explanations could be given for these: Perhaps *a friend of the Earth's* would be somebody who gets Christmas cards from the Earth, whereas *a friend of the Earth* would be someone who sends Christmas cards to the Earth; we might compare our use of *friend to* and *friend of* (a distinction directly paralleled by the Latin *amicus mihi* [dative] and *amicus mei* [genitive], which caused Latin grammarians some heartache).

Forms of the possessive case

The possessive *s* was originally fully attached (as it still is in German – *Das Wandern ist des Müllers Lust*). We insert an apostrophe, i.e. *Tourism is the miller's desire*. (The apostrophe was originally used before both plural and possessive *esses* to indicate that an *e* had dropped out, but is now a possessive indicator; those who use it on plurals today lose credibility, though it was still common until the 17th century.)

The possessive *s* survives without an apostrophe in the possessive forms of some pronouns: *that book of ours/yours/theirs/hers/his*. Some grammarians call these forms *absolute possessives*, but I can see no merit in this. The 'possessive case' description makes better sense to me. (The word *whose* is the regular possessive form *whos*, respelt.)

The alternative possessive ending, *-n*, exists in Australian English exists only in the word *mine*, the possessive case of *I*, but others survive in some British dialects, where they would say *that dog of yours*. It can also be heard in the archaic *thine*.

Case in the kindred languages

Mr Mann's appeal to other languages is a good strategy, not because we can always see where we got our usage from (though it occasionally helps this way) but because trying to translate makes us realise the oddity of our own usage.

The case structure is more extensive in German than in English, extending to articles (e.g. *der* has a possessive *des*) and adjectives. Many German dialects, however, chop off the distinctive word endings, and the Dutch *de* and English *the* can be regarded as similar syncopations. Some Germans believe that Dutch and English are just very bad German, and I confess that sometimes, when watching an Ingmar Bergman movie, I have felt the same about Swedish.

German dialect speakers also have trouble with *mich* (objective case) and *mir* (dative case), leading to the tedious riddle:

'Was is richtig: lass *mich* machen oder lass *mir* machen?' (Which is right: let *mich* do it or let *mir* do it?). Either answer gets the response, 'Näa, lass einandere' machen' (No, let someone else do it). Hoots of teutonic laughter. It's quite funny the first time.

The French case structure is even more vestigial than ours, being restricted to the pronouns and having a maximum of three forms, subjective (e.g. *je*), objective (*me*) and the miscellaneous one, *moi*. In *Parlez-moi d'amour*, *moi* is a dative; in *venge-moi*, it is an objective; in *moi et toi, nous irons* it is a subjective; in *c'est moi*, it is a demonstrative (which incidentally gives us a good pedant-proof explanation of our own usage, 'It's me'). And (as in Latin) they sometimes use *à* where we might expect *de*: *sa tête à lui* rather than *sa tête de lui*.

I know of no modern language which has the extensive and precise inflexions of Latin and ancient Greek. Kurdish, perhaps? Who knows? (And that is a genuine question, not a rhetorical one.)

Conclusion

Formal grammar will get us so far, but sooner or later we have to invent some rather more sophisticated explanations. The problem is that the explanations given by modern linguists are, in my experience, more satisfying to their inventors than to the world at large, i.e. I find them sometimes more bewildering than the usages they purport to describe.

In any case, we must always remember that a usage is good because it is used by good speakers and writers, not because it is good grammar. Grammar trails along behind, trying to provide an explanation or description of good usage. If good usage cannot be explained within the grammar we are using (which often happens), it is a shortcoming of the grammar, not of the usage. Mr Mann's ears seem to be reliable, irrespective of whether we can say why.

The Zero-Coupon Syndrome or Making Money Make Sense

STEPHEN CALDER

FINANCE, and the financial markets, are much more visible growths in the urban jungle than they once were. Most of us have heard of the *all ordinaries index*, even if we're not quite sure what it is. When it comes to investment and superannuation, the undergrowth is so thick with jargon that, for many, just starting on the path towards understanding is daunting.

So imagine the plight of those who must report daily on the share market, bond and currency markets, or write personal investment columns for the daily newspapers.

A certain amount of jargon is unavoidable. Newspapers, for example, cannot be expected to explain concepts such as *coupon* and *yield*, *put* and *call options*, or *compound interest*, every day for the benefit of those readers new to financial topics.

So financial journalists must assume a certain amount of knowledge on the part of readers. If you're not sure how a change in the share price affects its dividend yield, you will be forced to find a basic textbook or to try the dictionary for enlightenment.

But even the best dictionaries tend to turn in patchy performances in this area. The latest edition of *Mac* (*The Macquarie Dictionary*, 1991) is streets ahead of the first edition (ten years older), but even here much of the jargon is inadequately explained.

Dividend yield, *Mac* tells us, is 'the dividend shown as a percentage of the last sale price'. This is fine as far as it goes, but it leaves out an important element: the figure must be a full year's dividend expressed as an *annual* percentage if it is to be useful for comparing returns on shares with those on other investments.

What is a *call option*, also known simply as a *call*? *ACOD* (*The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 1992) defines it in the following terms:

9 *Stock exch.* an option of buying stock at a fixed price on a given date.

Again this is not inaccurate, but we

should also be told that the opposite of a *call* is a *put* (option to sell). This is given in *ACOD* only under the word *put*; neither entry points to its corresponding opposite.

When it comes to futures contracts, *ACOD* misleads with the preliminary label *Stock Exch*; the vast majority of futures contracts are traded not on the stock exchange but on the futures exchange.

Mac does better, placing information about *calls* and *puts* under the headword *options* and defining both *futures contract* and *futures exchange* without reference to the stock exchange. But neither *Mac* nor *ACOD*

There is no simple solution to the problem; the only course is to maintain a balance between clarity and brevity, avoid jargon and technicalities as much as possible but using them when necessary to save space and avoid repetitive explanations. *Floats* and *rights issues* cannot be explained daily.

Those with financial products to sell and explain to the general public face a related problem. Here, jargon must be avoided or fully explained, and in areas such as insurance and superannuation there are now rules requiring plain English.

Matters of style, especially consistency of style, can be a stumbling block to a large organisation. Documents are typically written by several authors, not all of them aware of the havoc they can create by using divergent spellings and forms of words.

I recently had the task of creating a style sheet, or list of standard spellings and forms to ensure internal consistency, for a large insurance organisation. Most of my suggestions were accepted, but I ran into trouble with *rollover*. This word has a special financial use in Australia, relating to the investment of a superannuation payout with a Government-approved institution.

The company had already decided to spell *rollover* as one word for the adjective and noun. So far so good. But one of its documents contained such phrases as 'why rolling-over makes sense' and 'if you decide to roll-over your payment.'

They agreed that making it one word ('why rollover makes no sense') was absurd, and accepted *rolling over*,

*Dictionaries just do not
have the space to provide
technical detail...*

gives any real idea of the potential complexity of options markets or how they function in practice.

Nor could we realistically expect them to. Dictionaries just do not have the space to provide technical detail; we need a specialist work like Edna Carew's *The Language of Money*, an excellent attempt to give Australians a full explanation of financial jargon.

But journalists cannot assume their readers have access to Carew at breakfast when the financial columns are devoured simultaneously with the morning cereal. Even those with Carew on the shelf will probably not have the time or inclination to check a meaning before scurrying off to the office.

Coppell, Bill, *Dictionary of Abbreviations and Acronyms*, Wilkinson Books.

I am so glad that someone has compiled this book, and even more glad that it wasn't me. Collecting '37000 of the most commonly used, and not-so-commonly used abbreviations' is a task which should surely be worth an OA.

The range of information is dazzling. If you find yourself on a CA flight to DLC, the book will tell you which airline you are on and where they are taking you.

Of course, the problem with writing a book like this is to know when to stop. If this book has any shortcoming, it is that it concentrates on contemporary and Australian usage but gives little help with oldies and foreigners: there is no mention of the Russian NKVD and KGB, the French TGV and SNCF or the Chinese FEC and

★ *The Zero Coupon syndrome* (continued) without the hyphen; but they insisted on keeping to *roll-over* on the grounds that this was the form used in the relevant legislation. No argument of mine could prevail against the might of legislation taken as Holy Writ by armies of lawyers and accountants.

I can still see no justification for the hyphen in 'to roll-over'; in fact there is a better case for hyphenating the noun.

The only usage guide I could find that mentions *rollover* specifically is the *Penguin Working Words*, which gives the single-word form but unhelpfully states that it has 'come to be used as a verb, noun or adjective.' This advice would seem to result in 'if you decide to rollover your payment', which borders on catachrestic.

Logic says the linking hyphen is unnatural. How would you hyphenate 'he decided to roll his superannuation payout over'? The organisation's representative told me she assumed legislators had hyphenated the verb because *roll over* had a special meaning that linked the words together, but I fear she had been bamboozled by the lawyers.

Stephen Calder is a professional communicator specialising financial markets.

RMB, to pick just six which are commonly encountered by Australian readers. Nor is there much help with obsolete Australian terms: NSWGR and ES&A, for example, are not there.

The explanation is given in the introduction. The author states that he set out to record abbreviations and acronyms which are 'used by present day Australians'. As the ES&A bank has gone, the name is by definition not used and hence removed. Within this brief, he has done very well indeed.

However, it does limit the usefulness of the book. Speaking for myself, the abbreviations and acronyms which I am most likely to want to check are those which I encounter in old or non-Australian books and newspapers. Hence this book specifically excludes the information I am most likely to want.

Conversely, however, it would be very useful to journalists in New York or London wrestling with stories from Australia. And of course it is splendid within its own aims: as a vivid snapshot of an aspect of the living language at a moment in time. If this is what you want, it could hardly be bettered.

Moore, Bruce, *A Lexicon of Cadet Language at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, 1983-1985*, ANDC, \$22.50.

What do you think an *acca germ* is? Well, *acca* is short for academic work, and a *germ* causes a disease. So, an *acca germ* causes a disease in relation to academic work, or, as Bruce Moore explains it:

acca germ an insidious virus which attacks the *acca-immune* system of a hitherto normal and healthily unacademic cadet and frenzies him with a sudden urge to do some academic work.

Sharp-sighted readers will realise that the publisher is the body which produces this newsletter, so we sought an independent but well-informed reviewer. The College has attracted an astonishing bevy of non-military talent to its ranks, and one of these is Geoffrey Ingram, who was given a room in Duntroon to write a history of ballet in Australia.

We asked him for a review. The result is fascinating, but scarcely qualifies as a book review. So here it is, on the *BOOKS* page but separated off from the reviews by a double rule.

GEOFFREY INGRAM

Slang and the Human Body

The first time I walked across the campus at Australia's premier defence academy, popularly known as ADFA, I was unprepared for the body language of the young cadets. Even when walking solo or with their colleagues from one class to another they were obliged to proceed, as though marching, with stiff arms and eyes straight. I was heading for the English Department where I was taking up residence for a few months to prepare a paper on the history of the performing arts in Australia.

My particular subject was ballet and my only physical training had been as a dancer. Strict physical discipline was not unfamiliar to me. But I was unprepared for a discipline that seemed to carry beyond the studio or the theatre. Seeing those young cadets in their first weeks of training made me begin to realise that service in the defence of your country demands more than in other professions. When I took up my office and sat overlooking the parade ground the full realisation soon came upon me that service people move on a much larger stage than most. Theirs is a very large and tough world indeed.

It was not surprising, therefore, for me to find that the *Lexicon of Cadet Language* was pretty down-to-earth reading. Prepared

on the initiative of the very man who had invited me to ADFA and is presently its Rector, Professor Harry Heseltine, it is a very worthwhile contribution to the understanding of language and its uses. Heseltine is fully apprised of the variety of approaches to communication that profession and circumstance force upon people.

The language of personal bonding which we call slang has always to be seen in context if it is to be fully understood. The slang brought together at military establishments over decades has its own special character to deal with its own special problems. Probably the most special of all is sexual emotion. The operative slang becomes intensely body-oriented with multiple alternatives for the sexual organs and

their associated competences. In situations where people have to live, as well as work, in close proximity for long periods this is inevitable.

I was reminded of the difficulties this can impose upon the individual when drinking with a young cadet lieutenant near the completion of his training at ADFA. It was in the Officers' Mess after I had been long enough at the Academy to find myself comfortable in what was to me an unusual environment. I have never known military service, though I have lived through a war in which three brothers served, one at the cost of his life. While I am not unfamiliar with Clausewitz and von Moltke, living examples of the military arts turned out to be different kettles of fish.

As I approached the bar the lieutenant, of whom I had some acquaintance, had asked me if I would do him a favour. Would I put on the flaming red tie which he held in his hand. I agreed. Then I sought an explanation. It was this. Did I see the other young officer standing at some distance with another group, but eying us off? I did. The other fellow had been sharing quarters with my drinking partner for three solid years. They had worked, trained and lived together day in, day out. 'I love the bastard and at last I have an excuse to hate him. He borrowed my tie and wore it without asking.' Those men would break up in a few weeks and go their separate ways.

The lexicon compiled by Bruce Moore is meticulous in its detail. It conveys the nuances and delicacies of an often indelicate form of expression. Looked at objectively and with a little compassion it can provide an insight into the frustrations of a community of young people living under special circumstances. It should also prove a valuable resource for anyone having to cope with the difficulties and frustration of youth in the wider community – wherever they are found.

There are two distinctive features about its vocabulary that apply to any group



'They are complaining that your body-language is offensive.'

divided from the bulk of society for whatever reason. There are those words and expressions that help to bind the group together with special and usually hidden connotations, and those that issue a blatant challenge to the rest of society to keep off whatsoever territory the group regards as its own. The most significant and potent in the latter category are those dealing with sexual behaviour.

Every group has a recognised sexual pattern to which its members adhere at least in theory if not in practice. This pattern underlies the value structure and any threat to it constitutes a threat to the whole fabric. From out of this intimate reticulation of accepted sounds and gestures flow the well-springs of emotion upon which collective action is dependent for its power. Once a body of people consolidates this particular emotional pattern loyalty becomes a force and violence an option. The Duntroon lexicon illustrates how this sense of power is cultivated within a group where loyalty and violence mark the parameters of professional responsibility.

Copies of *A Lexicon of Cadet Language at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, 1983-1985* can be obtained from all good bookshops or by sending a cheque for \$22.50 to The Australian National Dictionary Centre, 16 Balmain Crescent, Canberra, ACT 2600.

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Editorial Policy

- In general, I see *OZWORDS* as talking about problems in specific areas of discourse rather than pet pedantries.
- Other things being equal, I will go for an article on Australian usage before one on international usage. An article on (say) American usage would be appropriate only if it were discussing the problems of Australian readers and hearers.
- Other things being equal, I prefer articles on topics which are not covered in existing standard references.

I don't mind breaking one or even two of these guidelines, but breaking all three at once would suggest a hazy editorial policy.

Length

No article should be longer than it needs to be. Thus there are plenty of topics which can be covered in 100 words, but others which need 2000. An article would have to be peculiarly fascinating or well-written to be worth more than 1000 words.

Payment

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