

## *Speaking English*

*What follows is a transcript of a Radio 702 Talk-Show broadcast on 9 July 1990. Mike Mills, the host, interviews Ian Bruton-Simmonds, the author of the recently-published **Mend Your English** (London & Johannesburg: Ivy Publications, 1990. S.A. edition: R14,99). In the second half of the talk-show members of the public phone in and give their views. The transcript has been taken from a tape recording, supplied by Radio 702, of this particular broadcast of the Mike Mills Talk-Show.*

*The editors are grateful to Radio 702 and Mr Chris Gibbons, in particular, for their permission to publish this transcript in **English Usage in Southern Africa**.*

*A word about the transcript itself. Clearly, the editors' primary concern is to present the views expressed on the talk-show. These views, we feel, could provide a starting point for readers' own ideas on the wide and, perhaps, controversial subject of the state of English in Southern Africa. However, when it came to checking and editing the transcript, a further reason for publishing the transcript became apparent.*

*We had to choose between a transcript which was cleared of hesitations, false starts, and the minor solecisms that occur in impromptu speech and a version which was as faithful as we could make it to what is actually uttered. We chose the latter for the simple reason that it 'freeze-dried' a sustained and authentic example of English in use. Conditioned, as we all are, to reading English groomed for print, we thought it might be of interest to read the language in the form it takes when spoken. To do this meant the careful **inclusion** of all the utterances which an editor would normally neaten or excise altogether. The result is a transcript in which the dialogue may appear to be*

*strangely fragmented. In fact, however, it is the kind of language we use - and hear others using - all day long and, may we add, without communication breaking down.*

*Over and above the recording of the ideas expressed by the participants in the talk-show, what we also hope to do is to illustrate the measure to which our listening skills may serve as editorial filters. [Here we refer you to Finuala Dowling's 'The listener as psychic and sub-editor' which appeared in **English Usage in Southern Africa**, vol. 20, no. 1, 1989, pp. 36-44.] The examination of transcripts of this nature could lead to some interesting, perhaps even surprising, discoveries for teachers of English.*

*We realise that our 'freeze-drying' method is rudimentary and, in a number of ways, unsatisfactory. For one thing, conventional punctuation - which we are more or less constrained to use - is unquestionably inadequate in an exercise of this nature. For example, in the taped recording, pauses which occur in mid-'sentence' and in which speakers gather their thoughts, are frequently longer than the pause a full stop could achieve. On the other hand, separate sentences often run together with hardly a discernible pause at all. So, you will find a number of more or less arbitrary attempts to use conventional punctuation where conventional punctuation seemed appropriate, but, by and large, the maid-of-all-work is the dash. The dash, then, can separate a series of hesitations delivered in quick succession or it can signify a longish, reflective lull. Question marks, too, posed a problem: often what would logically be regarded as a question in print did not sound like a question at all in the tape recording, but more like a statement or a prompt.*

*Stress, intonation, and pronunciation, too, have suffered in the transfer from sound to sight. However, to have attempted a rendering of these features would have made the transcription an impossibly complex task.*

*We trust that, in spite of these shortcomings, the transcript will be of interest and we invite readers, if they are so moved, to submit their views for possible inclusion in a 'Letters to the Editor' feature in a later issue.*

*Editor*

Good morning. I'm Mike Mills. Welcome to my talk-show this Monday morning. I'm going to spotlight this morning a subject that is very dear to my heart, and one which is, I think, a favourite with many teachers, with critics, and those who defend the need for good language. In particular, it is the English language which we are focussing on this morning. My guest is Ian Bruton-Simmonds, who is author of a new book called *Mend your English*.

Mike: Ian, good morning. Nice to have you with us. Thank you so much for your time.

Ian: Good morning.

M: Tell us a little bit about your background before we get to the - the subject matter itself.

I: Well, I - I'm a South African (M: uh-hm) - er - turned British who learnt very little at school. My main - er - education came from the home, and my Dad's reading to me - er - Dickens when I was five (M: uh - huh) and poetry and so on. I think this - er - was the background to my education and that did more good than all the schooling.

M: (Laughter) I like the way you say you didn't learn much at school. [inaudible] isn't it? What - what - do you mean by that? Do you mean that you didn't learn much of substance at school?

I: Uh - well, the South African system, I think - er - pushes facts, - um - instead of critical - er - er - ability. (M: uh-hm) They don't ask questions, they give you facts and I think this has been - er - er - pervaded the system for years and years.

M: So too much emphasis on - on - on facts and not (I: Yes) enough on - on creative thinking (I: On creative thinking) and on critical thinking. I: Er - Teaching children to criticize - intelligently.

M: A little bit too much like Mr Gradgrind.

I: That's right (laughter).

M: Now that you - now that you mention Dickens - you've, you've subtitled the book, 'What you should have been taught at primary school'.

- I: Yes, well, if you don't get it right in primary school you will never get it right in secondary school or university and this is what is bedevilling our - our - er - system of education in South Africa. But not only here, it is in the rest of the world as well.
- M: What's gone wrong?
- I: I say... In the book it's - a - it's tragic really - um - I've always - er - er - believed that England is the - the hub of influence and what has gone wrong is that in two generations England lost its very best in the First World War and - er - in the Second. Now people don't realize that, in the Second World War, England lost more grievously than Russia - or Germany and the reason for this was that it lost its élite in the Air Force - and those élite - er - were so top class, I can't tell you. My brother's squadron - er - he was killed before he was 20 - he was a pilot - a bomber pilot. And - um - the er - I knew the whole squadron - er - 95 percent of them were killed. Two letters that came down - er - er - commiserating, the writers were dead before their letters arrived. Now people don't realise, - the Russians lost millions, but they were millions that they, eh - I won't say - it sounds callous to say that they could afford to lose - no one can afford to lose - life is - is - precious, but the British lost their very best. Now - er - in - the generations, in two generations after that, second-raters filled the gaps, and idiotic -er - ideas that came in in education which would have been laughed out off the stage - er - the - there wasn't the quality to do that. That is my theory.
- M: Right. Now, with that in mind that England lost the best minds and, more importantly, that second-raters filled the gaps, especially in education, it was one of those who decided that grammar was not important.
- I: It wasn't only one of those, it was a number. Grammar is not important to people who, whose English is - is shoddy, (M: chuckle) because it shows them up. Grammar is something that - e - you either have to learn or it

comes to you naturally from your home background. If you had a good home background - I mention this in the book - you don't need grammar because your ear has been tuned, you automatically do the right thing. But if your English is shaky, you certainly need grammar and that means that 90 - over 95 percent of English-speaking people around the world need grammar - and they didn't get it in the schools.

M: And this seems to have been something which has spread outside of England (I: Oh yes, yes.) hasn't it?

I: It's - it's in the States, it's all over the English-speaking world.

M: How can we redress that balance, or put the grammar back into the language so that people speak it in the way that it has a structure?

I: Well again I've said in the book that - er - the teaching people are hoping now for - er - redress from the schools, but I'm afraid that the rot has gone so far that - er - there are so many bad teachers in the schools, and you can't remove them or shoot them -  
(laughter)

- and the new teachers who come in, even if they are top class, have this enormous clog - e - to work with. The redress is simple and it is in broadcasting. Nobody should be allowed into broadcasting who is not top class and there should be criteria for this.

M: Fascinating. Let's get on to the media in greater depth then a little bit later. Going back to - to the very beginnings, what is language? What is it there for?

I: Well, it's the main - er - mark of humanity. Er - your language connects you with your society more than any other single thing, and - language is - e - the person, it's - it's his roots, it's his everything. As Ben Johnson said: 'Speak, that I may see thee'. So nothing shows a man so clear as his language. So it's a - it's a guide to seeing a person's nature, character, everything, everything.

M: Is it a sign of intelligence?

- I: Oh, yes, oh yes, and the wonderful thing about language is that it can help intelligence, it can raise it, if you take it seriously. The words that you use can actually help your thinking.
- M: Why is it then that we have now this, this, problem that we have brilliant scientists that cannot express themselves. Can't put their thoughts into writing.
- I: They may be brilliant, but, I don't believe that they could ever be great.
- M: They would be greater, in other words, if they had a good language (I: That's right.) base?
- I: I'm not, I'm saying something, er - I - I say great, they cannot be great, brilliant and greatness ...
- M: ... are not the same thing.
- I: ... are not the same thing. Er - there is not one example in the whole of English - er - of a great scientist not being an artist in English. Newton: superb. Farraday: superb. Einstein, whose, wasn't - er - er - English - er - speaking: superb English. You cannot be a great scientist unless you have artistic feeling and artistic feeling comes out in your language. If you're - if you have artistic feeling, bad language appalls you.
- M: So this would apply to businessmen today?
- I: ... yes indeed.
- M: to politicians?
- I: ... indeed.
- M: but everybody ...
- I: Everybody, everybody. The politicians now who - er - are on a public platform boring us, they'd have had tomatoes and eggs chucked at them 200 years ago (M: chuckles)
- ... by a more discriminating audience. (M: Laughter)
- M: What about vocabulary? Is it important to have as broad and extensive a vocabulary as possible?
- I: Oh yes. Er - the two things with vocabulary is one, have an accurate vocabulary, rather a small one and an accurate one, than a large one and flabby. But - er - the larger one's vocabulary, of course, the more power of language one has.

- M: It - it - it - these are the tools (I: Those) - for expression?
- I: Exactly.
- M: OK. But, it's, it's an anachronism isn't it, that - that these days the amount of education that you've had indicates how effectively you can communicate with people?
- I: Yes, indeed ...
- M: ... it is not longer true, is it?
- I: It's not longer true. The paradox now is that if - if I wanted to collect the most uneducated people, ill-educated, I'd rush off to the universities and find them in the - er - sociology departments - er - all over the world - er - flabby thinkers, and the - it shows in their language.
- M: You make a point in the book, that if you were to talk, to a cockney worker, for instance, in the United Kingdom, he would make more sense with his colourful, yet perhaps restricted vocabulary, *and* perhaps not as high education, you'd make more sense, than the college graduate who is full of flowery English?
- I: Absolutely. Absolutely.
- M: So we, we've gone wrong. You make the point in the book th - that there's a reason for this and you bring up two points - er - or two influences in our language, the Germanic and the Latinate. Could you elaborate on this?
- I: Yes, er - English is an extraordinary language. It's unique in being a mixture of two mighty streams. One of the Germanic and the other the - the Latinate. Now the Germanic, most of the Germanics are easy words like - er - home, dog, hell, God. Er - one doesn't need to look up in the dictionary. But, the more precise words, the - the - er - Latinate, the longer words - er - one needs to be precise with them. And the mark of an ill-educated person is one who cannot mix them. He will insist on using long words because he wants to sound impressive, but he gets them wrong, he botches them.

- M: Right. So - the mark of someone who speaks the language well is the person who knows exactly how to use the big word when it is precisely needed. But he also doesn't use it in place of a small word where a smaller word would suffice.
- I: Suff - a smaller word is always the better, if it - if it's - if it gives the meaning.
- M: And the person who speaks good language is - in - automatically a good communicator?
- I: Of course, because he speaks simply.
- M: Uh-hmm. Now what about English in - in Africa. I - I think of - of a num - a number of classic examples that - that - that I have heard of people who obviously don't have English as their mother tongue, but it's their second language. They come in - in - into the media. I remember the classic example that we had in Zimbabwe, on the occasion of the engagement of the Royal couple, Charles and Diana. We had a - a broadcaster who came along and told us that Prince Charles who was the 'hair' to the British throne was to be - was to be - er - married to Lady Diana Spencer the daughter of 'an eel'.
- (laughter...)
- I: Beautiful.
- M: And I think we've all heard the - the delightful example regarding the FA Cup, but it didn't come out that way. What about English in Africa and - and how do we cope with these problems?
- I: Well the message - er - which seems to have - er - s...gone home now is that English is the key to education in Africa. And - er - there's only one way to come to it really, and that is again, I get back to children and - er - you'd, to come to good English you've got to read the best books; you've got to read classics, and be sure what classics are. Er - there's no other way.
- M: What are classics in your - in your mind?
- I: A classic is a book that is judged by educated people of taste over generations to be a great book. And it lives, it carries on. Dickens - er - will carry on when you and I

are dead and forgotten because it's so well written. And educated people, the minority, carry it through to the next generation.

M: Is there not a problem though of - of ramming this down children's throats before they ready for it? After all, Dickens is, if you read the full version of *Oliver Twist* for example, that - that's fairly heady stuff for a child to read.

I: Well you open the door perhaps to the most important thing that I can say, in this interview, and that is, that if you ram anything down a child's throat - er - you spoil it, you kill it. A child shouldn't be told that it's a classic. He should be read to by his parents, or - er - grandparents, people that he loves and - er - they should read the good stuff without telling him that it's great. His own natural taste will build up.

M: Now what sort of age are you talking about here? Sh...are - are you suggesting that we should read Dickens to a child aged five?

I: Well, I'm a normal chap and I was read to when I was five. Er - I can remember *Bleak House*, weeping at the - at the death of little Nell. Not - er - I'm sure that - er - a - 80 percent of the book went over my head but it doesn't matter, the flow of language - er - something stuck.

M: Do you think that one should juxtapose - a - a reading of Dickens with - books which are more geared to the child's age?

I: Oh, yes, certainly.

M: So, that's - you - you're not condemning those who'd (I: Oh, no!) written children's books?

I: Nor comics - nor comics - er -

M: They - they have their place(?)

I: They have their place, to get the child to read, to read - er - for pleasure.

M: Uh hmm. When - what about street talk? When we think of English growing and - and - er - moving with the times, all sorts of distortions come into play. Words

are used, they are sometimes over-killed - a - their meaning changes with society. Is that a good thing? or a bad thing?

I: Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad. People who will excuse the bad will always say, it is their stock phrase, you can't say that's wrong because the language changes. Now change can be - er - good or bad and - um - if it's bad, as I've given examples in the book, this weakens the language. For example, if you use 'massive' when you mean 'big' there is no other word to take the place of 'massive' - er - if you are using it in its - in its - its proper sense and to - er - , say that the - there was a massive hole in the side of the ship is an idiocy. Now if children are properly taught in the schools what to look for they will pick that up.

M: Very quickly (?)

I: Hmmm

M: What about the situation where somebody, for instance, could say oh - 'Joe Soap down the road earns a lot of money', or he could say 'Joe Soap down the road, he's got megabucks'?

I: Well there's nothing the matter with that. That expresses it clearly: we musn't be pedants. Pedantry also - er - turns people off and - a - I must say that pedants coming, speaking about English, writing to the press, complaining to the radio, have done a lot of harm because they - they - they - they go contrary to common sense.

M: So common says the language must move (I: The lang...) the language must stay alive(?)

I: Every living language must change because one generation has different intellectual - er - uh - needs from another. So it must change. But, it should be intelligent. The change should be intelligent.

M: So there's a very fine line between the point where a - a - language is still alive and growing and that point where the changes are to it's detriment?

I: That's right.

- M: And - and we've got to watch that very carefully?
- I: That's right, and educated people do that - do that automatically.
- M: One of the points that you make in the book is that the English language has - has a m... - has a massive vocabulary. It soaks up words from all over the place.
- I: All over the place. Yes.
- M: It must have one of the biggest vocabularies of all languages(?)
- I: It has the biggest.
- M: Is that a problem?
- I: It is a tremendous problem, because there are so many words with slightly different shades of meaning and to get it right you've really got to struggle - no - no one can be perfect in English. I mean even Shakespeare made his mistakes.
- M: Yes ... (laughter).
- I: So, don't jump on a person because - he - he - he blunders - er - the wonderful thing about Partridge which I recommend, Partridge's *Usage and Abusage*, a book that I recommend in mine - er - is the wonderful humility of the man, where he criticizes other people but he criticizes himself as well ...
- M: ... himself as well. (Laughter) What about advertising? Now, surely that has been one of the, perhaps most clever and yet possibly also one of the most destructive forces in language?
- I: I deal with this in the book, and one of the things, if I were asked about South Africa, one of the things that shocks me most is that, there has been, to my ears, no criticism of advertising perforce coming into our homes. Now it is no use saying that you can turn off your television, you can turn off your radio, - er - in the U.K. - you - you can - you can beam in on the BBC, if you object to advertising. Now, that is wrong. A society that - er - doesn't - er - exclude that it's like having visitors in your house that you don't want. They come in at the door, they don't knock, and - um - the appall-

ing thing is that if you ask children, as I have done, to recite or sing, what do they sing, these children, English-speaking with 2 000, more than 2 000 years of a great culture behind them, they sing advertising jingles and they recite advertising - er - (M: Slogans) ... slogans and what have you. Now, this is appalling.

M: But on the other hand it shows how effective they've been, doesn't it?

I: It does, yes. (M: Um) So the - the second-rate of advertising - er - a man - er - generally - I am saying generally. Not - I don't want to insult all advertisers, but they go into advertising because they can't write. They have a desire to write - and they - um - It's really the - the glorifying of the second-rate by second-raters.

M: So, again second-rate advertising, you're saying, which naturally is - is the larger amount is - is detrimental to English? The clever and intelligent advertising is - will not harm the language?

I: Ahhh, wonderful, the best advertising is superb.

M: Yes, the punnery ...

I: Yes, beautiful, beautiful some of the best - some of the advertising that - er - is on TV here is outstanding and the - the British - er - advertising. But my point again is that one - it shouldn't be forced on one. One should be... Nor should Bach or - or Shakespeare be forced on anybody.

M: Right. We - we spoke about English in Africa a while ago. Er - English is - is the most widely spoken language of the globe - and we think of what's happened to it in America. (I: Don't ...) Any comments on that?

I: Yes, don't knock the Americans. Er - I speak very highly of them in the book. Er - they have done some good to English. Let me give you an example - um - that was criticized, and I saw once in the English press: the 'downing' of an airplane. Gosh, you couldn't put that shorter and that came from America. Better than 'shooting down', we know what 'downing' is.

- M: You're - you're thinking though about the way they abbreviate other things like 'July 8' as opposed to 'July the 8th' or 'the 8th of July'.
- I: 'July 8' is clear to me and - er - quite passable. It's even shorter than 'July the 8th'. (M: Um) So I'd pass that straight away. But when the Americans - er - lengthen the language, when they use long words - I think 'lift' is superior to 'elevator'.
- M: Uh hm - uh hm.
- I: 'Motor car' - 'car' to 'automobile'.
- M: Um - so they - they have a propensity to being perhaps a little long winded and using big words again for impressiveness?
- I: That's right. But if you take the best American writing today and the best British, they're comparable ... (M: It's fine) ... they're comparable.
- M: So, it's important for the language to - to mould itself to the society which is using it?
- I: Quite.
- M: And, that way it stays alive(?)
- I: That's right, and to be - er - guided by its best - er - by its most educated people, not by the - the - er - gutter.
- M: Um. Ian, what about this - this gasbag English and the clichés? This is something you - you spend some time on in the book.
- I: Well, I put it in the book, and the - the old - er - chestnuts like - er- 'at this point in time' ...
- M: ... yes 'at this moment' ...
- I: ... 'right now', ...
- M: ... yes ... 'at the end of the day' (laughter)
- I: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.
- M: 'I honestly and sincerely believe' is something that you bring up as well.
- I: Well, again the - the idiocy of our... it's crept in everywhere. For example - er - a politician shouldn't say it. It's quite unnecessary that he sincerely believes. Every belief is sincere. Hitler's belief was sincere. It may have

been idiotic, it may have been bad, it was in fact, not may have been, it was appalling, but it was sincere: he really believed it.

M: And if he really believed it he is also being honest. So there's no need to say ...

I: ... yes ...

M: I honestly and sincerely ...

I: ... yes ...

M: believes.

I: ... of course ... of course ...

M: ... All he had to do was to say 'I believe'.

I: ... of course ... of course ... Nor does a politician, when there has been a bomb blast - er - let us say the IRA have put in a bomb, it's not necessary to say 'this dastardly thing'. 'What a cowardly' ... we know it is, we ordinary people know that. All you need to say is - the - we - we're taking action to catch the - er - perpetrators.

M: Brevity is something that you - that you stress.

I: Yes.

M: For effective communication(?)

I: Of course. Brevity is the - a - hallmark of all the great classics, and - a - nothing can be a classic unless it is brief.

M: And succinct?

I: Indeed.

M: To the point?

I: Yes.

M: In rectifying the problem as you see it you have homed in on the media in a big way; you have said, yes it is important for a child to grow up in a home where good language is spoken, where good language is read. You've stressed that it is important that the - that the - the teachers have a role to play. But, most importantly if we want a quick fix for this problem, it's the media. It's the media.

I: Uhm - what I have suggested in the book is that - er - the BBC is the most influential - er - organization in the world now for English. (M: Um) Er - the BBC's in-

fluence is in America, even with people who don't realize it. Now, no one should be allowed on the BBC - the - the oafs that I have heard - er - (M: Chuckle) on the BBC who don't know the difference between 'replica' and ['model?']. Who - er - are so ignorant that they can't even be hit with ridicule. What on earth are they doing on the air?! They should be taken off and only top class people should be taken in. I have suggested a - um - an annual competitive examination, the same as used to apply to the Indian Civil Service. Now that annual competitive examination raised the Indian Civil Service to probably the finest civil service the world has ever known. And it did it with competitive examinations; only the elite could get in.

M: Interesting.

I: And the message again, that - er - I would give is if society doesn't respect it's élite, if it pretends that every Jack is the same as the other, that society is bound to fail.

M: So we've got to look for the élite ...

I: ... yes ...

M: and we've got to get them into the media(?)

I: Of course, and - a - not only into the media but - in - in all, if you respect, if you don't respect them - them because it is the élite that actually save your society when it's in a - in dire straits.

M: But as far the - the improvement of the English language is concerned, you see it as being very important for those in the media, and I presume you are not just speaking about radio and television, but also the newspapers ...

I: ... newspapers ...

M: ... it's the written word too that matters.

I: The written word is important but nowhere near as important as the spoken. That makes a [?] - that - that goes straight through. The other thing I have spoken of is music, also tremendously important. Now if I had said it - er - people would think I'm a mutt, but - a - I do

say it and then let me - er - er - consolidate. I think that music is the most important cultural - uhm - influence ... and - er - it goes right to the soul of a person. Er - Plato said that music is the most important single factor in the whole of education and Aristotle agreed with him. Now, they weren't drunk when they said that, and we must look again very carefully at the music that's being put- er - into the youngsters by the advertising industry. I went recently to, well a few years ago, to a well-known junior school, - er - English-speaking, and - er - questioned their top class. Eighty seven percent - uhm - had never heard of Bach, and this is an English-speaking school. Now - er - the - the great majority of them preferred pop. Nothing wrong in pop, a person who says he doesn't like pop tells me that he is not musical. But, to be indiscriminating - er - and not to know the difference between rotten pop and good pop and not to know Bach at all - er - or Beethoven or any of these people, is - is appalling.

M: It says something is very rotten within the system(?)

I: Absolutely rotten ... absolutely rotten.

M: You also devote quite a bit of time in the book to - to the grammar. You - you - you'd focus for instance on where the colon and the semi-colon should be used, the comma, the apostrophe ...

I: ... yes ...

M: ... u - a - because we seemed to have forgotten these things(?)

I: Of course.

M: And - and here, this is where the press comes into play, doesn't it?

I: Yes, indeed.

M: They - they have an important part to play(?)

I: Of course.

M: So you've squarely placed a responsibility on our shoulders here in ...

I: ... That's right ...

M: ... the media to say, 'Listen guys, you have got to get it together'.

- I: Indeed.
- M: My guest is Ian Bruton-Simmonds, author of the book *Mend your English*, and that's what were trying to do today. The number to dial if you would like to talk to him and air your views on this subject is, Johannesburg 3310702, that's 3310702 and -a - I'm sure Ian will be like - would be delighted to - to - a - either agree or - or to disagree with you. We know - we know the answers: the media's got to pull it right; we've got to get our adults reading to children and speaking to - to their children; we've got to get good teachers into the classrooms, that, that's ... [break in recording]
- Mary: ... can't help noticing that the newsreaders do it. The papers do it. How can you stop this?
- M: I am glad you raised that, because that's one of many things which Ian tackles in the book, but go ahead Ian, what - what's ...
- I: ... I actually deal with this in the book. I quite agree with you that - er - 'from' is better. It's - it's more logical, because it - it - shows that it's - it's a difference - a - puts pe ... - er - put things apart, it puts the comparison apart. But don't glare too much because - er - the Americans - a - very often use 'to'. It's not a crashing mistake, but - a - it's much better to use 'different from'.
- Mary: But every time I hear it - it's like some's boxes my ears.  
(Laughter)
- I: The [?] go one worse they say 'different than'.
- Mary: Oh, gosh, yes.
- M: You're right they do.
- I: Now don't glare at them either.
- Mary: You know - you know what I think should happen ... you know cigarettes carry a warning - er - you know when you're referring to the media and - and the harm they do and that they could put it right, perhaps they should now carry a warning, you know before each advertisement: it should either say or you - you should hear 'This could be dangerous to your English'.

(Laughter)

I: I agree with with you ...

Mary: ... [?] your English.

(Laughter)

M: Thank you, Mary, ...

Mary: Pleasure.

M: Have a good day. Isabel is my next caller. Hello Isabel.

Isabel: Hello, Mike

M: Yes, good morning to you.

Isabel: Er - I'd just like to agree with that last comment Mary, because - um - I feel that you should put the same warning before every news broadcast in this country, because I think the standard of - well not only - um - the spoken English on the news is dreadful but the written English in their captions, you know when their, when they have their little captions up (M: Yeh) - um - they can't always even get the spelling right.

(Laughter)

M: Yes.

Isabel: It's dreadful. I phoned into them countless times. It just - I - I can't explain the feeling it gives me when I see such mistakes on something that should be, it should be a custodian of people's English speaking - er - habits. But - a - what I wanted to ask Ian was - a - does he that - uhm - having an- another language like Afrikaans - er - does great harm to - er - written and spoken English? 'Cause I must say that I'm - I'm sure that it does, because I am sure that many things that are correct in Afrikaans kind of get translated into English where they are glaring faults.

M: Well, if - its - it is true, isn't it, if - if you look at our good friends across the way, in the SABC -er - when things are directly translated you can hear that they may be thinking in Afrikaans but in English the - the grammar or syntax is incorrect.

Isabel: Oh, its terrible. I'm not [?] ...

- M: ... But now, but now hang on. Lets - lets see what Ian's got to say about that because - er - it's interesting you talk about other languages and whether it's good to learn them or not. Ian what's your thinking on that?
- I: Oh, the - er - an - another language can do no harm if you learn it - a - properly. It can - it can actually expand your - a -. But all I'd say is that - er - Afrikaans is a wonderful ... I spoke it - er - before I went to school. Uhm - it's - it's a wonderful racy language. But - er - gosh, I wish I'd had ... I wish I had Latin instead of Afrikaans ...
- Isabel: Oh, I did Latin at school ...
- I: ... Greek instead of Afrikaans and - um - er - I'd be a much more rounded person.
- Isabel: I'm absolutely fascinated by the origins of English. The - the - the - all the different languages which came to make up our language and - um - it - it just makes me - makes me feel like crying when I hear people abusing because it is such a beautiful language to know and such a useful language to know. Er - a - you're speaking about a subject that is so dear to my heart, ...
- (Laughter)
- M: Well, I'm so glad you enjoy it. I - I must compliment you as well Isabel because - er - Scottish people, generally speaking, speak very good English.
- I: Lovely accent she has.
- M: That's a lovely accent.
- Isabel: Oh, great.
- (Laughter)
- M: *Of course I've got to say because I've got a Scottish wife.*
- (Laughter)
- M: Thanks Isabel. (Isabel: Thank you.) Bye Bye.
- Isabel: Bye.
- M: Going to Penny next. Hello Penny.
- Penny: Hullo.
- M: Yes, good morning to you.
- Penny: Good morning, Ian. Hullo ...
- M: He's listening to you ...

I: Hello, yes. ...?

Penny: Ja - Ian, I'm an Afrikaans speaking South African, ...

I: ... Yes ...

Penny: ... but we were taught English properly, I think. Now will you please explain to me the difference between 'amount' and 'number'. We were taught that you can never say 'an amount of people' and I've an hang-up about it. It's wrong, isn't it?

I: Well, it's ab - totally wrong. It's wrong idiom ...

Penny: ... But they do it all the time! (general laughter) all the time ... [?]

I: Whenever you hear that you just tell them.

Penny: Hey?

I: 'Fewer' and 'less' is the same ...

Penny: Of course, it's the same thing.

I: ... I actually mention that in the book - a - 'fewer' and 'less' - er - 'fewer - er - people' and you get 'less sugar'.

Penny: Yes, well we were taught that 'amount' - er - you can weigh or measure. That's a - just a simplif...d way of doing it.

I: That's right.

Penny: And 'number' you can count.

I: That's right.

Penny: So the first person you must please talk to is John Berks. He's the worst for doing it.

(Laughter)

Penny: I even wrote to Jill Mills to ask her to speak to him ...

M: ... and? ...

Penny: ... But she didn't.

(Laughter)

Penny: I think maybe she was frightened. I'm certainly too frightened to talk to him.

(Laughter)

M: Well, Penny, you speak very good English - uhm - ...

Penny: Well, I went to an English medium school and we did have an excellent teacher.

M: ... I'd I suppose that [?]

Penny: ... and - uh ...

- M: And what about your parents? Er - this is something very important, I think, because there's been this old wrangling between - er - English and Afrikaans families and - and there was at - at one time anyway - it - it was sort of almost forbidden in certain Afrikaans families for their - their children to speak English. I - I'm not say that as a generalisation. I'm just saying it was happening in some families ...
- Penny: Yes, can I tell you something awful? My father was such a big Nationalist that he was determined that his daughter would speak English better than any Englishman. Not that I've succeeded completely. (Laughter) But that was his idea.
- M: But did you - did you speak English with him at home?
- Penny: Not at all.
- M: Not at all. So you only spoke Afrikaans?
- Penny: We read English, but I went to an Afrikaans school up to standard six and then I went to the Girls' Collegiate in Port Elizabeth due to circumstances, 'owing to' I think is the right way ...
- M: Oh no; there's another one: 'owing to' or 'due to'. Let's - let's talk about that for a moment Penny - uhm - Ian ...
- I: Well I mention this, ...
- M: You - do you - you do mention this in the book?
- I: I mention that - er - in - in the book, and - er - it's again a mark of of er - er - proper English. And if you just say - er - er 'owing to is caused by' - er - 'due to is caused by', just translated you'd get it right. They don't tell them this in the schools.
- M: Hmmmm
- I: But - er - I mention this in the book and it - I think it's dealt - a - with pretty thoroughly there.
- M: Hmmmm. O.K. Thank you Penny for your call. I'm going to go on to Jackie next. Hello Jackie.
- Jackie: Hello Mike.
- M: I think you're also Afrikaans, aren't you.
- Jackie: Yes, I am. (Giggle) I would like to speak to Ian because I have a baby, it's now four months old and my husband is English but I'm Afrikaans and I would like to know if

he can give me a few suggestions as how I can ... get my child to speak proper English. 'Cause I mean I don't have the ability to, always have the tenses right, the grammar right, you know that type of thing. And I would just like to know as ... what do I oh - to do - do - you know to help him to - er - er - ...

M: O.K. Let - let's see what Ian's got to - got to advise you.

I: The answer is so simple and easy: get good books - er - for children. Er - I can recommend now - er - *The - er - Wind in the Willows* (Jackie: Um.) - er - *Treasure Island* - well *Wind in the Willows* (Jackie: Ja, I know about that.) *Treasure* - er - the *Pooh* books - er - even Enid Blyton. And if you read that to your child every night - er - say from - from the age of two - er - read every night so that the child looks forward to it, you'll give him something so valuable. And may I say something else that will help as well? Please cut off - er - the - er - radio and television for pop - er - until the child has developed a taste for really good - a - Mozart, Bach - er - and so on. (Jackie: Ja) And play that to the little thing - er - ...

Jackie: And not the noisy stuff(?)

I: ... before he's - a - three. (Jackie: Uh.) Couldn't be simpler, could it?

Jackie: Ja, well, it sounds simple, but I don't know ... because I mean I grew up in a house where English was never ... I mean, my parents still can't speak that good English. I mean, because we grew up on a farm, the only, the only guy that - a - I ever heard speaking English was the - at the ... grocery shop, you know, that type of thing.

I: I can hear from your accent that you're Afrikaans but there's nothing the matter with the - with the accent, provided you read good stuff. If you read Dickens with an Afrikaans accent, you'll give your child the most valuable thing you could possibly give him.

J Well, thank you very much.

M: All right, thanks Jackie.

Jackie: O.K., sure. Bye-bye

M: Of course, naturally, I suppose, youngsters could be left next to the radio and listen to the talk-shows, as well.

(Laughter)

M: Providing there's good English being used on them. Oh, dear. Er - King, good morning to you.

Mike: Yes, Mike King.

M: Hi.

Mike: Yes - um - I'm - er - I was listening with great interest to your programme. Ian Bruton-Smythe ...

M: It's Simmonds - Bruton-Simmonds.

Mike: Bruton-Simmonds, sorry. I've - you know - you - you - the - th... - the particular dialect of English, that perhaps we share, is something that was imported - er - I think from the court of King James, its - and it - the middle class English introduced it into South Africa. And I've often considered that if Cockney was acceptable in the Court of King James, then Cockney would be what we'd all be speaking and what our own particular dialect of English would be - would be taken in the same context that we say look at the Cockney di - dialect. I think your cause is a very worthy cause - er - but I think you're - uh - if I must - I must criticize you, in that your - a - you - you appear to be - er - harking back to some - a - a particular dialect of English, and a - and an archaic form of music - er - whereas I think the language is a living language ... and every - every - er - group of people, the interpretation, I think contributes to the English language and rather than force them to - to accept a standard that probably the Kings and Queens themselves didn't speak - er - I - I think is unfair. I think rather make the language a living language. Provide a standard - a particular dialect that we speaking could provide a standard. But encourage the language to live and encourage - um - other languages even to be incorporated like the English language incorporates (M: How ...) many words.

M: King, how interesting that you've raised all this because - er - this is something we haven't touched on before. But Ian I want you to - to reiterate it again: this fine

point between where the language stagnates and dies, because it remains - a - in its ancient form and doesn't move, and yet, at the same time it - it - it does not lose its - its structure - uh - its - its syntax and its standard that King is talking about. Now I - I'm sure you are in favour of that.

I: Well - er - , if a language - a - if you don't base your language on the best - er - people who use it - er - if you base it on the second best, you - you're on a down ... your're on a downward slide. Er - language ... it ... - our language is based on the great writers - er - Shakespeare, Johnson, Milton and - a - if our modern generation pays no attention to them, and - a - attends only to the rubbish that is - a - spoken in the streets, - er - the language must deteriorate. It's as simple as that.

Mike: I - I disagree. Er - you know you talk about rubbish. Again I - a - I think must accuse you of being very patronizing towards a particular small dialect that is spoken by a very small percentage of the English-speaking people in the world. Now - a - the Cockney language to me, Cockney-wit is a living language, it's - it's tremendous to listen to. I find it highly entertaining ... - er -

I: Hear, hear ...

M: Hang on, King - er - Ian's agreeing with you here, he's not - not disagreeing.

I: We're speaking of different things - we - we're ...

Mike: But I think ...

I: ... we're not on the same line.

Mike: But my argument is he's being patronizing. I - I don't accept the particular dialect that we're using as necessarily being a standard. I think this standard is being very quickly lost.

I: ... I agree with you ...

Mike: and - uh ...

I: I am agreeing with you ...

- Mike: But I think ... rather than criticize the other dialects that are emerging, encourage them as part of a living -a living language.
- I: Um - I go to great - a - lengths and pains to say that what I don't deal with is dialect. I don't deal with accent or, indeed, spelling. Now, it may interest - a - people to know that Shakespeare's pronunciation, it has been - er - said, of 'love' for example, was 'luv'. He had a different dialect.
- Mike: But you would have criticized him today if he had [?]
- I: No, certainly not. You see I am agreeing with you, you have to -. Either I haven't express ... expressed myself clearly, or you haven't heard ...
- Mike: What's - what's - what's your definition then of the street language?
- I: Er - if a person speaks inefficiently and - uh - he says, for example, 'at this moment in time' when he means 'now' - that is bad language. That is the sort of language that I'm criticizing.
- Mike: Well, at - at one point 'at this point in time' or 'at this moment in time' might have been acceptable as an innovation; it's now become a cliché, so ...
- I: Yes, it's a cliché that wastes time.
- Mike: All I - all I'm saying is that - er - I think the living language is a thing to be encouraged, rather than harking back to a dialect that is very fast disappearing. [?]
- I: May I say one thing? It's - it's - a - if we - er - any society or any person that doesn't look back to the past - er - is - er again on a downward slide. If you don't respect the past and you don't know what's happened, you're incompetent for the present.
- Mike: Well - a - that's - that's a very profound statement you're making.
- M: O.K. King. Thanks for your - thanks for your point ...
- Mike: ... Thank you very much ...
- M: ... Thanks for your call. Bye bye
- M: Er - going on to Nicole next. Nicole, hi.
- Nicole: Hi, Mike. (M: Yes) May I speak to Ian please?

M: Yes - a - as loud as you can please. We've got a bad line here.

Nicole: O.K. Ian, I'd just like to know, you know at school we were always taught 'my father and I', or [?]ing 'so-and-so and I', and you hear a lot of well-known, or - or sort of public speakers talking about [?]ing 'so-and-so and me', and I'd just like to clarify which is actually correct(?)

I: No question, the first is correct and the second is - is illiterate.

(Laughter)

Nicole: So - so it is definitely 'so-and-so and I'?

I: That's right. 'Betw' ... - 'between' and 'between you and I' is wrong.

M: Yes

Nicole: O.K. All right ...

M: That - that - there's that ...

I: Between you and me is right.

Nicole: O.K. All right. The other one I'd like to know is, when you're speaking on the phone - uh - when you say, may I - is it 'may I speak to so-and-so' or 'may I speak with so-and-so'. 'Cause that is - that is another one that confuses a lot of people, and I'd just like to check on that one.

I: Doesn't really matter, but I'd say 'speak to'.

Nicole: 'Speak to', O.K. All right, super. Thank you very much.

M: O.K Nicole. Bye bye ...

Nicole: Thank you Mike. Bye bye.

M: From Nicole to Nick. Hello Nick.

Nick: Hello Mike.

M: Yes?

Nick: Uh - I've got a interesting question to ask your guest today. It's about that programme *Skattejag*. You know, that's on television where they - er - er - where they search for treasure in the helicopter.

M: Yes - yes. We know - we know the one - the one you're talking about. Can you get to the point, Nick?

Nick: Ja, well I'm interested in the name-places and the history of those name-places, that - where they find this treasure. Uh - I was interested in rather in the English or in the Afrikaans, you know, describing those places. I wonder if he just could enlighten me on - er - anything

...

M: Hang on. Sorry Nick, I don't - I don't understand what you are asking.

Nick: I mean you know in the history of the places where they find the treasure in that programme.

M: Yes?

Nick: Uhm ... Ja I - I was wondering whether you - your guest could enlighten me on the language that they spoke in those places originally.

I: I am afraid that - er - I can't because I don't know the programme. I have never seen it.

Nick: I see.

I: Sorry about that. (Nick: O.K.)

M: Thank you Nick. Bye bye. On to Joan ... hello Joan.

Joan: Hello, Mike.

M: Yes, go ahead.

Joan: Now you're are going to hear a Chesshire dialect. I am from Chesshire, though I have been here 40-odd years and I still cannot understand why the people here do not know the difference between 'woman' and 'women'. (M: Chuckle) A person will say to me, 'Oh, there were so many woman there' (M: Laughter) and I'd say 'How many?' 'Oh the room was full.'

(Laughter)

Joan: They haven't got a plural ... for 'woman'.

M: O.K. you, you've raised a common problem, I think, in this one ...

I: Indeed, I agree with you entirely, but even more serious than that is getting mixed up between 'lady' and 'woman'.

(Laughter)

Joan: And there's 'dynasty' and 'dinastie'.

M: Absolutely.

Joan: Well, I just don't know. I think there's too much taken from America and - eh - the American's do not speak good English.

I: Ah, now I don't agree with you there ...

Joan: ... Don't you? ...

I: ... I don't agree with you there. I think you'll hear some of the best - er - er - America is a vast place, and er - uhm ...

Joan: Well, I worked with a lot of them in the war ...

I: Yes.

Joan: And that's how I picked up all the different things they said, and one said to me, 'We'd like a language of our own'. I said, 'You got one, bad English'.

(Laughter)

M: Joan, thanks for - for raising the point. Um - I - I do agree with you that - that the American influence has been very strong in this country, but who do we have to blame for that? We have Equity to blame for that, because they've not allowed the English programmes through, so, er ...

Joan: Exactly!

M: ... who can blame the Americans for taking advantage?

(Laughter)

Joan: O.K. Thank you ...

M: Thank you, Joan. Bye bye ...

Joan: Bye bye.

M: Olivia, good morning to you.

Olivia: Hello Mike, I'd like to thank you - uhm - for a very intelligent and articulate show. I always enjoy listening to you very much.

M: Thank you. Oh, you're nice. You can come onto the show anytime you like.

(Laughter)

Olivia: I'd love to, I'd absolutely love to.

M: Anyway what's the question you have for Ian, for Ian?

Olivia: I don't have a question, I'd like to share some of my experiences as a person who has spent - er - something like 9 years you know, off and on, teaching English to

adults. Uhm - you know who've come for courses to upgrade their English and I have found that I have actually had to teach them basic grammar. Many of these people are people like doctors - and - professors. You know, just ordinary people as well. But I have been horrified and appalled to find that they didn't even know something as basic as a verb or a - a verb having to agree with its, the subject ... in the sentence ...

M: But now who do we - who do we have to blame for this? Now Ian ...?

Olivia: Well ... Sorry, may I say something? ...

M: Yes; yes indeed ...

Olivia: ... I think that the level of teacher training in this country is appalling. Especially as far as English is concerned. Look at the English that is being taught in our schools today. Many of the teachers ...

M: Its not just here, is it?

Olivia: No.

M: ... it's a world-wide problem. And - and here's a question I'd like to ask you, because you've been a teacher. I wonder if other languages don't suffer just as much as English. I mean, has - has German slipped; has Afrikaans slipped in the way that it's been taught?

Olivia: You know Mike, I think that - eh - for a language to - uhm - survive, as - er - Ian has said, its, it has to change you know, a little. Uh - new words have to come in, you have to make new words. I have a nine year old daughter who asked me who invented the first words, and, you know, its virtually an unanswerable question. That - eh - I just feel if you're taught language as it's supposed to be taught and Ian made a point earlier on about learning Latin - I never had the chance to learn it but if you're taught, you know, your - your grammar - uhm - the parts of speech, how they fit together, how to construct a good sentence. You know, things like that. It - that learning can be extrapolated into any situation in your life. If you're a scientist, you will be able to apply the logic that you learnt ...

I: Hear, hear.

Olivia: ... uhm, as a - a student of English, or a student of whatever language, because they, they all have, you know, a certain construction that you have to follow. If you're a scientist, you will be able to extrapolate that and actually apply it, you know, when you're - if you're doing research on ...

M: Whatever ...

Olivia: ... you know, cancer in mice ... In teaching ...

I: [?] points I agree with.

Olivia: Yes. It teaches you a logic that you will never lose, ...

I: Absolutely ...

Olivia: ... and I'm absolutely delighted to hear somebody saying on the radio, 'Let your children listen to Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert'. All those, eh - you know, because that is where you get a good grounding. I enjoy pop music ... I have a varied ...

M: Perhaps what - perhaps what you're - in fact, what you're telling and what Ian has told me and what think I've learned this morning is that we need to - to get the balance back. ...

Olivia: Yes.

M: ... We've focused too much on - on contemporary music and contemporary speech and contemporary standards without hanging on to what needs to be hung onto from the past which is good structure and if - if we lose that, then as Ian says, we - we lose everything. But if - if the language hangs on to what's important, but also manages to - to manipulate and to move with the times, then we have got it all.

Olivia: You know Mike there's - uhm - sorry I should be speaking to Ian too because - um - from what I have heard I - he's a person I would love to meet and I'd love to talk to at great length. I really would. Uh - er - when I was at - at college, our Philosophy of Education teacher, we were dealing with the concept of freedom, and she said to us, 'The ultimate freedom can only exist within a set of rules'. You can't write poetry unless you

adhere to a certain set of rules. T. S. Eliot wrote wonderful poetry. He pioneered free verse but he - he had the same discipline that Shakespeare had when he wrote his sonnets.

I: Indeed.

Olivia: ... and that is something that we've lost and we need to get back desperately.

M: Olivia you better get this book then.

(Laughter)

Olivia: I prob... - I will be getting it definitely.

M: All right. Thanks for your call, Olivia. Nice to talk to you.

Olivia: Thank you.

M: I'm going on to Wiekus[?] next. Hello Wiekus, you have an interesting thought.

Wiekus: Eh, yes. Hello Mike.

M: Yes, what is your thought?

Wiekus: Uh - yes, I'd just like to ask Ian, eh - eh - you talked ear- earlier on about er - rather learning Latin, or Greek at school than Afrikaans and er - I'm Afrikaans myself, and we get a lot of people that, at our English schools, well you have to learn Afrikaans. Don't you think it would be more relevant for them to put their - er - hearts more into it than rather just learn it and after school you know, they just forget it? 'Cause you get them later on not understanding you when you try to talk Afrikaans to them. And - er - they'd rather speak English to you and some people just plainly refuse to speak Afrikaans to you.

M: O.K. I - I think I get what - what you're, you're saying is - er - you're - you're suggesting that Afrikaans is - is an alive and relevant language for this part of the world. Rather learn that than Latin. Is that what you're, you're saying?

Wiekus: Especially in our country, ja.

- M: All right. Now - now you've raised the point should - should English people in France, for instance, learn French - er - because it is relevant and - and valuable to them because they can communicate with French people(?) Let's see what Ian's got to say about this.
- I: Yes, I must agree with you. Uhm - we should certainly know Afrikaans - er - to make ourselves - er - friendly to the Afrikaners that - that we - er - uh - speak to. I, myself, I count myself as an Afrikaner. I spoke it fluently before I went to school and I think it is a marvellous language. It has punch and - er - wonderful wit. But I must say that - er - er - if for English, if one knew Latin, if - if I had for example Latin at my fingertips ... I did Latin at school but it was - it was a bad ... it was not the right type of teaching ... not only in this country the same - er - I think incorrect teaching of Latin is in England as well. But if I could speak Latin, er - if I had Latin, if I could read - er - Virgil at sight as easily as I read Shakespeare - er - I'd be an incomparably more cultured person.
- M: Yes, but now as, I think what, what (Wiekus: Ja) Wiekus is - is also asking between the lines, is, isn't Latin, it's not spoken by people any more, it's - it's a dead language. It didn't move with the times ...
- I: ... It didn't, but it is a great help to English. Tremendous help to English. It, imp - it - er - er - it is a boost, it improves your English.
- M: Should - should it be taught over and above a different language which might be more practical in common - in common usage today?
- Wiekus: ... Yes, that's what I ...
- M: ... I think that's what he's asking.
- I: Well, I don't think that for an English sp- speaking person any language could be more important second language than Latin. A Frenchman doesn't need Latin because Latin - a - French is based entirely on Latin. A German doesn't need it because there is hardly any Latin in his language. But we need it because half our language is Latin.

- M: So, perhaps our children should learn English at school as well as some Latin ...
- I: Indeed.
- M: ... as well some Afrikaans ...
- I: Indeed.
- M: ... or French, or German or Flemish or whatever ...
- I: Exactly ...
- Wiekus: They do have, also have Latin at sch - at school but - er - I mean the attitude of some teachers are that maybe like you said that teach Latin not - er - too well and that's the attitude to Afrikaans too. (M: Um) Maybe some teachers see English as so superior to Afrikaans that they don't see the need for the people to ... to have to be able to speak Afrikaans that well.
- M: Mhh - I'd - er - O.K. your last question, I think between the lines is are we saying that English is more superior than Afrikaans and - and what's your answer to that Ian?
- I: Well the answer is a brutal one, it is, of course it is. So it's - its a greater literary language. Far greater.
- M: Does it make it any - any more important for South Africans, though, than Afrikaans?
- I: Far, the hinge of education the entire - er - hub of education in - in South Africa is English, not Afrikaans.
- M: Should we stop learning Afrikaans? Must Afrikaans die?
- I: Good heavens, no! I should be very sorry to see that.
- M: O.K. Ian thanks very much for your time. Thank you Wiekus for your call. The book is called *Mend your English* and its - er - available in - in bookshops now, I think I'm right in saying, Ian is it?
- I: It is, yes.
- M: O.K. Uh - thanks - thanks for joining us this morning.
- I: Thank you.