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The sections are clearly presented, with headings numbered and sub-sections making for ease of use. The extensive system of cross-references and the comprehensive index call for some work on the part of readers for them to be able to use these with comfort and confidence, but they do make the contents of the book readily accessible.

One minor omission is puzzling. The chapter on prepositions offered no guidance that this reviewer could find on whether a preposition is, or is not, an acceptable word to end a sentence with.

Robert Orr

Rose, Angus. *OUR LANGUAGE: A series of articles on the English Language*, Shuter and Shooter, 1988. R10,75.

English is such a language of inconsistencies that there is a considerable industry involved with explaining it and commenting on it to anyone prepared to listen. Angus Rose has considerable experience and expertise in the field of the English language, and it is both instructive and entertaining to read this offering of his. *Our Language* is a selection of 115 feature articles from *The Natal Witness* on the subject of the English language, some of which have already appeared in the pages of this publication. The range of interests tackled is wide and as each article is brief, the collection remains highly readable throughout.

Mr Rose's views on language are characterised by a moderate display of good common sense. Usage, according to him, is ultimately the crucial test, although various abstract ideals can, and maybe

should influence usage. That language should remain fluid and easy; that notions of correctness should always be viewed against the qualities of precision, appropriateness to context, and clarity, are ideas which seem to underlie a large proportion of Mr Rose's position. His style is fluent, his diction remains simple and accessible, and the flow of ideas is attractive and approachable. He writes well, and he writes good sense.

However, one may well want to debate with him whether or not these underlying notions are not perhaps circular. I suspect that Mr Rose operates from a paradigm in which certain notions of correctness are fixed, but he recognises that usage forces one to depart from 'correctness' in order to be intelligible to particular contexts. Admittedly, the formulation above is my own, but how does one gauge the clarity of a piece of writing without having to invoke the rules of language which give meaning, or distinguish between meanings, in the first instance? How does one judge the precision of a phrase, a sentence, without reference to the conventions contained in language? 'Things are wrong,' he writes (p.22, col. 2), 'when you can demonstrate that the faulty (poor, if you wish) English fails to do its job adequately.' Firstly, how can you demonstrate this without having a fixed yardstick, and secondly, if context alone determines the 'goodness' of a discourse, how can this relativity be learnt? I am not disagreeing with Mr Rose - I think I hold views very similar to his, but I am aware of these questions when called upon to justify my position.

The book is not given a list of contents, neither is the principle of organisation that clear. A selection of the titles gives the reader some idea of the range and scope of the articles. 'Doublespeak', 'Gobblede-gook', 'The Principles of Newspeak', 'Some diverting words', 'Picking up words' all seem to have to do with ideas on word usage and diction, yet they are not grouped together. Similarly 'Enshrined Values', 'Sexism', 'Equal Rights' deal with the inherent value structures which language reveals, yet here too there is no grouping together of these articles. A large number of pieces deal with specific points of what has been called 'grammar': 'The indefinite article', 'Several problems with hyphens', 'The

little apostrophe'; but here too, one cannot simply turn to that section of the book to seek guidance. This criticism of the lack of thematic grouping is really only significant if one plans to use the book as a reference tool, or an education aid to enhance classroom activities, but that is presumably where a significant proportion of the book's market lies. (These last mentioned articles are very good, giving general expression of the ideas behind the title, some ideas on context and appropriateness, and some examples: all of which could be very valuable to reinforce a grammar lesson, and provide a more human dimension to the rules.)

The intention of the book must be related to the point of origin of the articles. Newspaper articles are written for speed-reading, and for simplicity of statement. Newspaper readership is a popular, mass audience, and articles have to communicate with this audience. More emphasis has to be placed on presentation and on popularising the ideas, than would be the case in a textbook, or even a general reference work on the language. *Our Language* has both the strengths and weaknesses of these situational demands. It is presentable, it is intelligible and it should popularise the discussion of points of language. However, it might be too easy-going, and too simplistic if one were to want to use it to assist teaching, except, I would imagine for teaching English as a second or third language. In this instance, the tone of relaxed chat would be a considerable advantage.

Michael King