

## CORRESPONDENCE

From S.C. Crowther-Smith:

I write to express my satisfaction at continuing to receive your admirable *English Usage in Southern Africa*, all on the strength of my small contribution to your Cause made in response to an appeal in the Jhb. *Sunday Times* all of twenty years ago, when I was nearing the end of my 22 years' teaching stint at St John's College.

To show you that I have actually read Vol. 15 No. 2, I would comment briefly:

- (1) Tom McGhee (pp.36 seq.) is excellent. With regard to 'proven', I wonder whether you in South Africa are plagued as we are here by the 'refinement' of the word's being pronounced to rhyme with 'cloven', suggesting that the speaker does not connect it with the verb 'to prove' at all!
- (2) You recall (p.41) the Guardian's 'biggest asp disaster' headline. The same paper scored in Dec. 1971 when, in an attempt to get cars off the congested streets of Rome, the authorities experimented with a week of free public transport. Guardian headline: OMNIBUS GRATIS PRO TEM.
- (3) Perhaps your Committee is concerned with some of my recent bêtes noires:

SUMMIT used of a meeting between almost any important (or self-important) people: 'Pit Summit Collapses'. The original

'summit meetings' were of course those between Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt during the war - an acceptable usage.

MODERN-DAY (adj., as in 'modern-day technology'). I defy the user of this bit of pomposity to claim any 'improvement' on plain 'modern'. I suspect some echo of 'nowadays'; but that brings in the 'obsolete' conception of Parts of Speech, which would never do in the *modern-day* world, would it?

PRIOR TO, almost entirely banishing 'before' and 'until', in contexts where there is no nuance of *priority* as in 'prior claim'. 'Prior to 1975, he was living in America' is surely not acceptable?

AS NORMAL for the idiomatic 'as usual': 'Buses will run as normal on 2 January'. Incidentally, it should be 'as normally'. The lack of an -ly in 'as usual' has to be allowed as long established.

DONATE for 'give' or, if a more formal word is thought to be called for, 'present': 'The new pews in the church have been donated by Stricken Consciences (Pty) Ltd'. DONATION, from which the verb is a back-formation, is medieval, and can make a useful distinction, e.g. when a charity asks for *subscriptions* or *donations*.

MEDIA, CRITERIA, PHENOMENA AS SINGULARS!

Enough; I grow tedious.

All power to your elbow in what I fear is a losing battle.

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From Mr H.J. Orkin:

Mr T. McGhee, in an SABC radio talk, republished in *English Usage in Southern Africa*, Vol. 15.2, 1984, said of someone who had complained that the word 'again' was pronounced 'agen' by

broadcasters, that he could have discovered the correctness of the pronunciation if he had looked up a dictionary.

But the speaker himself, later in his interesting and able talk, committed a similar lapse. If he had consulted the O.E.D. he would not have spoken of "the ridiculous word, or rather non-word 'proven' instead of 'proved'".

The O.E.D. and volume III (1982) of its Supplement give, in addition to the well-known verdict of the Scottish courts, 'not proven', many examples of the non-legal use of the word. Thus 'proven principles', 'proven hunters.'

The Supplement quotes a sentence from *Dos, Don'ts and Maybes of English Usage*, by T M Bernstein (1977): "The form 'proven is used as an attributive adjective ... and particularly in certain technical locutions, such as 'a proven oil field.'"

There are a few other points in Mr McGhee's address which it would be interesting to debate.

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From Mr J.D.U. Geldenhuys:

*Applied linguistics (an unscientific view)*

Current language theories, structural as well as post-structural, set out and/or attempt to explain how language is constructed. This may be all very well from a scientific point of view, but from an applied linguist's it is not, as he is concerned mainly with meaning and shadings of meaning, which the current theories do not cover.

In an applied linguistics situation, such as the editing and/or translating of a text, one of the first premises is that the applied linguist has a thorough knowledge of the structures of the language or languages in which he is working. This knowledge is gained through a study of the languages concerned. When moving on to a study of editing or translating, the linguist is not seeking further instruction in the structures of the

languages to be used by him or explanations of how such structures came into being. He is concerned with meaning and its impact on what he is doing in a practical situation. Any study in applied linguistics that does not meet these requirements, is superfluous at best and lethal at worst, for it tends to kill meaning through ignorance.

Giving somebody a crash course in his intended field of endeavour is no proper way of teaching meaning, since it serves no practical purpose whatsoever to 'give' somebody legal phraseology in six weeks, or three hours of financial teaching, or what have you, in the fond expectation that he will then be able to apply language professionally in these fields. The applied linguist will have to gain expertise in his particular field of endeavour by applying his knowledge of semantics to it. There is no sense in training somebody for example to become an engineer and then releasing him to translate engineering texts. For however much he may love his subject, he will then still have to pursue semantical studies, which he cannot do at present, for no South African university offers these in a work-related context.

The shortest route then is to train somebody, who has an excellent command of a language or languages, in the finer shades of meaning to be expressed by those languages in a particular field of endeavour. Until this is done, all these so-called translating and applied linguistic courses will serve no useful purpose (always with the exception of applied linguistics in the sense of training somebody to apply a language in the teaching of it). At the moment the situation is that somebody who has for example undergone so-called translator training has to unlearn an awful lot, to shed a great deal of theoretical ballast, before he can be gainfully employed in translating. Therefore, unless this matter is set right by practising linguists passing on their craft to students, the old method of taking somebody with the necessary language skills and training him on the job will prevail.

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