

CORRESPONDENCE

From Mr J.D.U. Geldenhuis, Glenvista:

With reference to the article *Infinitives, Gerunds and Participles in Economic Context* published in volume 15.1 (1984) of your journal, I should like to point out that examples (d) and (e) on page 27 should read '(d) The economy is depressed by a rising interest rate pattern that increases commodity prices' and '(e) The economy is depressed by a rising interest rate pattern, which increases commodity prices'. If the word 'pattern' is omitted in both instances, as published, the economic conclusions drawn become a little difficult to follow, as a single interest rate could not have the effects attributed to a number making up a pattern.

This raises another important question in that those of the 'pure "British" English' ilk would contend that a pattern cannot rise. In 'a rising interest rate pattern' the American or German-inspired overpedantically agglutenated construction, as Mr Tom McGhee would have it judging from his article *The State of English* in the same issue of your journal, provides a very interesting as well as brief way of indicating certain complex economic concepts. The new pattern created by rising interest rates is emphasised in the case of 'a rising interest rate pattern' while in, for example, the more 'British' English version of 'a pattern of rising interest rates', again judging from Mr McGhee's article, the more evenly spread emphasis on 'pattern' and 'rising rates' would lose the implication of a new set of circumstances prevailing as in 'rising interest rate pattern', which could obviously lead to other economic conclusions than those adopted in the article.

In short, I am saying that the difference in meaning between 'rising interest rate pattern' and 'pattern of rising interest

rates' is that the 'American' English implies a condition and the 'British' English an event - the 'American' being more opinion-like and the 'British' more factual. This then is not merely a question of 'cant', as opposed to 'honest to God' phrasing, but a matter of different intent - which often is the case with so-called Americanisms creeping in. I would therefore contend that the state of English is excellent, thank you very much, and reflecting the increasingly complex world through increasingly complex, but perfectly understandable, structures.

Hence I would not agree with Mr McGhee at all - the English of some writers may be escalating negatively in a death-seeking downspiral mode, but that was so even in Dr Johnson's time. At present the language is more vibrant and vital as well as, yes, more viable than ever.

J.D.U. Geldenhuys

From Mr J.H. Taylor, Johannesburg:

REVIEW OF *Finansiële Teksvertaling*

As an accountant continually confronted with terminological problems in our bilingual country, I find *Finansiële Teksvertaling*, the book reviewed in Volume 15.1 of your magazine, interesting and an essential aid for the purposes for which it is intended. In the light of my problems and the way in which *Finansiële Teksvertaling* solves them I should like to take issue with a few points raised by your reviewer.

First of all, on page one the writers do not contend that 'n mens moet skryf soos wat 'n mens praat'. If your reviewer reads this page more closely, it will become clear to him that this is exactly what they are not advocating. Further, I believe that the reviewer entirely misses the point when he refers to certain stylistic measures employed by, for example, accountants as typical of the 'stilted, inflated quality of officialese'. Closer reading of *Finansiële Teksvertaling* should convince him that there are great differences in meaning between them and possibly less stilted varieties. As to the 'orotund obscurity' of Henry VIII's style, your reviewer should perhaps consider the prose style of Frederick the Great which, apart from being even more obscure - not

to mention orotund - is, I am sure, just as irrelevant to the English or Afrikaans produced by, for instance, accountants in South Africa today.

Defining a term as 'any word or expression' obviously defeats the object, for again in accounting, for example, we do not just use any old word or expression to refer to a particular financial concept.

Then we come to the very interesting 'Romaans/Germaans' eschatology, or is it scatology, in view of what I have to offer below (no pun in anticipatory retrospect please). Granted that 'cheese' and 'butter' derive from Romance origins - so does the root of the word 'cacare' (it seems that some of my friends are very 'Romaans' at least along the digestive tract), but this does not prompt me to advocate using the 'suiwer Germaans', which sounds more like sliding along the ice in English than the terrible 'Romaans' Anglicism buried somewhere in 'cacare'. Surely *Finansiële Teksvertaling* concerns itself with obvious choices between coeval 'Germaans' and 'Romaans' words such as 'aanvaarding' and 'akseptasie', which can make quite some difference when a merchant bank is doing either one or the other to a bill.

As to 'Überschuss' and the possible coterie - or dearth of - emotional meanings of that in German or, for that matter, Serbo-Croat, one only has to think of the role that made Wena Naude famous as 'Oorskotjie', which definitely was not 'neutral or positive' in Afrikaans in South Africa earlier this century, thereafter, today, and probably also in the future. What about 'supercacare'?

Using the terms 'lugubrious' and 'salacious' in describing the results of efforts to translate the term 'equity account method' seems to me very apt indeed, considering the wayward attempts encountered in every turn of phrase wrongly employed in this service.

Finally, I should like to thank you for this opportunity of reviewing your reviewer's review.

J.H. Taylor

Our reviewer replies:

I should like to respond to Mr Taylor's comments firstly by quoting two sentences from page 1 of *Finansiële Teksevertaling*:

Een manier om duidelik te kommunikeer is om eenvoudig te praat of te skryf. Ons bemoei ons hier hoofsaaklik met die skryftaal, en daarom sou 'n mens kon sê 'n mens moet skryf soos wat 'n mens praat, sodat dit wat geskryf word, duidelik is.

In my review, my comments on 'n mens moet skryf soos wat 'n mens praat' were mainly concerned with the misleading nature of the statement made in the two sentences quoted above. The apparent simplicity of spoken language is often deceptive as can readily be seen from any verbatim report. Perhaps the point will be better made if I quote from my somewhat more explicit original draft in which I observed that merely writing as one speaks is no guarantee of simplicity or clarity, especially 'if one considers that spoken language can be anything but straightforward'. And again: 'Hence I also find it distinctly misleading to equate spoken language with simplicity. Instead it would probably be better to advocate aptness of expression, which implies optimal simplicity and economy where these are appropriate.'

Note, too, that in the review my comments on this point are appropriately qualified by the following sentence: 'The writers of *Finansiële Teksevertaling* emphasize the necessity of choosing terminology in accordance with its context; they therefore qualify their otherwise misleading advocacy of simplicity'

With regard to the charge that I have entirely missed the point about the stylistic measures discussed on pages 5-6 of the book, it seems to me rather than Mr Taylor has missed *my* point, which was not to deny that the type of construction at issue (almost exclusively used in the sentences quoted as examples on those pages) could ever be justified by needs imposed by the context, or that accountants are particularly culpable in respect of this type of language usage, but merely to stress the institutionalized nature of such heavy-handed writing so that the reader may know how difficult it will be to eradicate this tendency. My historic reference should be seen in this context as an indication of how firmly entrenched 'orotund obscurity' has become owing to ancient usage. Mr Taylor's objection that Henry VIII's practices are irrelevant to accountants today seems mistaken. The powerful, pervasive and insidious influence of such traditions on *all* language practitioners should not be underestimated. Forewarned is forearmed.

With regard to the objection to the *Collins Dictionary* definition

of a 'term' I can only say that Mr Taylor seems wilfully to be misrepresenting it. Surely what is meant is that any word or expression *can* be given the status of a term, and not that *any* term can signify *any* concept!

As regards 'Romaans' and 'Germaans', suffice it to say that 'ordinary' in the term 'ordinary shares' is derived from Latin, and the term is at least hybrid.

In the case of 'oorskot' methinks Mr Taylor is lapsing into the sort of irrelevance he accuses me of. His example is not taken directly from the accountant's sphere of activities whereas mine is. In fact he merely underlines the fact that the case is debatable.

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