

## ‘GRAMMAR-PHONE’: A LINGUISTIC LIFELINE

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The English Academy of Southern Africa has introduced a language advisory service - promptly dubbed 'Grammar-phone' - which can be used by anyone with a problem involving grammar, syntax, spelling, pronunciation or semantics. It is essentially a community service, operating on a local and regional basis, and is aimed at promoting better English by offering practical guidance in matters of usage.

*How the service works:* As implied by its nickname, 'Grammar-phone' is primarily a telephonic service, as nine-tenths of enquiries received can fairly promptly and easily be resolved. Advisers are members of the English Academy who are suitably qualified and have access to basic reference works. They offer their services voluntarily and free of charge, and can be contacted by telephone at specified times. In larger centres there are panels of advisers and several numbers can be dialled during office hours or in the evening, from Mondays to Fridays. In country areas where only a few advisers are available, hours of consultation are, necessarily, restricted. Posters and pamphlets, notices in local newspapers and regional news broadcasts are among the methods used to publicize the service: its success depends not only on public awareness of the existence of such a facility, but on readily available information as to when and where advisers can be contacted. The service will, we hope, in due course be expanded to cover most parts of the country: at present, however, there are many towns and large areas which are unrepresented. Enquiries will in such cases have to be addressed to the Academy office in Johannesburg.

Organization at local level is being kept as simple as possible: the emphasis is on direct contact between members of the public and individual advisers in their area. If the adviser is faced with a problem he cannot satisfactorily resolve, he can refer it to a language consultant (for each panel or area one specialist consultant has been appointed). Problems involving more detailed research are referred to the Academy's central advisory panel at Unisa, which in turn can draw upon the resources of the *Dictionary of South African English* and its experts at Rhodes University. Advisers are being asked to keep a record of enquiries dealt with: these will be collated and may provide useful pointers to common errors, trends in usage, and 'South Africanisms'.

*Some pros and cons:* Language advisers will answer queries to the best of their ability: they cannot, of course, guarantee that their answers will always be correct; nor can they - or the Academy - accept legal responsibility for advice given. Advisers do not provide a translation service, edit material, suggest answers to competitions, tackle 'homework' questions, or render a regular service to business or government concerns. They are however willing and able to offer practical guidance to anyone who in this multilingual country is at a loss for the right word or phrase, the precise meaning or proper use of terms, the best and most effective way of saying what he or she wants to say, in English.

Anyone wishing to know more about the language advisory service or 'Grammar-phone' contacts in his or her area, should get in touch with the Administrative Officer, English Academy of Southern Africa, Ballater House, 35 Melle Street, Braamfontein 2001 (or tel. Johannesburg 3394611).