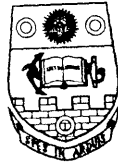


MISCELLANEA 36  
UNISA 1982



## ERRATA

The authors' names and full titles of the articles appearing in ENGLISH USAGE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, Vol. 13 of 1982, were omitted and are as follows:

1. REMINISCENCES AND THOUGHTS OF AN EDITOR -  
An interview with Mey Hurter
2. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND DEVELOPMENTAL  
READING - *P. Pienaar*
3. AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH - *W.D. Maxwell-Mahon*,  
University of Pretoria
4. TWO PLEASE? SPEECH DIFFERENCES BETWEEN  
MEN AND WOMEN IN A SIMPLE SERVICE EN-  
COUNTER - *Gary Barkhuizen*, Rhodes  
University
5. WORDS AS SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES -  
*T.D. Verryn*, University of South Africa

## THOUGHTS OF AN EDITOR

At the end of 1982, Mey Hurter retires after nine years on the staff of Unisa's Department of English. During this time, as one of the Editors of *English Usage in Southern Africa*, she has contributed to the growth of interest in South African English usage. In addition, Mey is engaged in the comparative study of South African literature in English and Afrikaans.

Kenneth Saycell has been on the same staff since 1979. He is Editor of *Crux*, a journal on the teaching of English, and is a member of the Central Executive Committee of the South African Council for English Education.

### *Question*

Mey, I find it interesting that a journal should have grown out of what was originally a dictionary project. How did you and David Adey come to join the Editorial Board of *English Usage in Southern Africa*?

### *Answer*

By 1974 *English Usage in Southern Africa*, in its dictionary form, came to an end. The first four volumes were in the process of being consolidated into what later came to be known as *A Dictionary of English Usage in Southern Africa*, by D.R. Beeton and Helen Dorner. Helen felt that she had completed her part and bowed out, leaving the stage to two nervous recruits, fortunately under the able direction of Professor Ridley Beeton. We were later joined by a dedicated Keith Richmond. We decided to change the format of the journal, since the purpose henceforth would be to record aspects of South African English usage in particular fields. At the same time the interest in usage in general would not be allowed to flag. Lists of words and expressions were, therefore, largely ousted by articles in

which usage was discussed. We also allotted space to reviews of such books as have a bearing on our subject and to enquiries and letters from our readers. Indeed, it was the correspondence which maintained the close communication between the Editors and their reading public.

*Question*

Did you find it difficult to get contributions for your journal?

*Answer*

Not at all, if my memory serves me. But perhaps recollection tends to cast a rosy glow over what is past. In retrospect, there seem to have been numerous manuscripts which had to be edited and proofread. About some of these I became most excited.

*Question*

What, for example, do you remember as being a really exciting manuscript?

*Answer*

Oh, there's no question about that. One of the outstandingly exciting contributions, to me, was the article on 'Gaal Argot'. Material had been collected at first hand and carefully compiled. The discussion reflected the interaction between English and Afrikaans, with a modicum of foreign languages, in the polyglot community of a large prison which draws its inmates from all levels of society. The resultant 'English' usage is both rich and startling. Who would have thought that whether one 'misluks' or 'loses out', the appropriately laconical response to fortune's blows would be: 'Yes - No'? And what, exactly, would the reaction of the man-in-the-street be to the admonition: 'Now don't lose your angry'? Unfortunately, I don't have time to refer to and quote from the many other memorable discussions, varying between the serious and the light-hearted.

*Question*

Did the Editors themselves contribute any articles relating to usage in particular fields?

*Answer*

Yes, we did. In the issue in which the examples of gaal argot appeared, we tried to emulate this discussion by publishing a list of what we called South African 'Schoolboyisms'. In this we were greatly assisted by readers. Would you, for example, recognize 'a tit oke' or 'a fietsicle', 'a long spraak' or 'a fat charf' if you were to be confronted with them? In a much

later issue I rifled the accumulated experience of many teachers in order to record the trials and tribulations involved in the teaching of English as second language. We, as Editors, did indeed contribute, but we would have been in a sorry position without the contributions of the public.

*Question*

Talking about the contributions of others, did you sometimes reprint articles from other publications?

*Answer*

Certainly, whenever they offered what would fit into our sphere of interest. Apart from the original articles written specially for us, chapters from books, papers delivered at conferences, light-hearted criticism culled from newspapers and journals, serious discussions on how and how *not* to use English, chapters from theses, all were grist to our mill. If the thunder has already made its impact elsewhere, why should we be precluded, with the thunder's permission, from sharing the echoes with our readers? Copyright holders were, by and large, co-operative. On only one occasion, as I remember, did we receive an emphatic 'no' to our request.

*Question*

You've referred to many sources, but haven't mentioned live interviews. Were such interviews published by your journal?

*Answer*

Yes indeed. We once had an interview with Dr Peter Raper of the Human Sciences Research Council on the subject of Onomastics. His infectious enthusiasm almost prompted us to accost complete strangers in order to demand how their hometown or their grandfather's farm came by its present name. An hilarious interview with Helen Dorner concerning the genesis of the *Dictionary* later assumed the guise of a sober article in our journal. Then, just lately, there was an interview with James McClurg, the well-known newspaper man, on the role of the press and newspaper writing in general. It is always interesting to listen to a man who is a master of his subject.

*Question*

You've mentioned some exciting articles; but surely you must have had some disappointing or irritating experiences?

*Answer*

Certainly. One needs a drop of vinegar to counteract the sweetness. Naturally there were 'downs' as well as 'ups'; some simply irritating, others amusing. Some years ago a contributor submitted an article on 'a possible origin of the

three-dot technique' in Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. On publication we found to our horror that his second quotation, which was supposed to demonstrate the poet's two- and four-dot variations, still sported a uniform series of 'three-dots'. This unfortunate slip of course made nonsense of the writer's argument. Then there was the occasion, in our 1981 issue, when the gremlin took over once again, in a book review, and mischievously rendered some deliberately misspelled words in impeccably correct spelling. The reviewer's criticism of the author consequently disappeared into thin air. You may imagine my embarrassment, once, when I printed a heated reply to John Scott of the *Cape Times* who had criticized our acceptance of the expression, 'It's vrekked', as an *English* schoolboyism. I went to the trouble of proving that the structure of the expression is wholly English and referred scathingly to Scott's 'spurious inferences'. Much to my discomfort I discovered later that his barbed comments were invariably part of his habitual friendly, and sometimes not so friendly, raillery. I had, of course, fallen for the ploy. And then, to heap Pelion on Ossa, 'Gao! Argot' emerged twice in this angry vindication as 'Goal Argot'. We were fortunately spared Mr Scott's undoubtedly amused comment. Once, during Professor Beeton's absence, a student's letter to UNISA NEWS was referred to us. Our reply discussed the word in question and in the process referred learnedly to Fowler's *Modern English Usage*. Instead of calling it a day, we went on to state audaciously that although Beeton and Dorner, in their *Dictionary*, find the word acceptable, we disagreed completely. On his return Professor Beeton simply remarked: 'I have read your scurrilous letter to the Press', and never referred to the incident again.

#### *Question*

Up to this point, we've been discussing your experiences as Editor, but I'd like, if I may, to spread the net a little wider and to ask a few questions about the role of a journal like *English Usage in Southern Africa*. Most English Departments, at English-medium universities at any rate, place a great deal of emphasis on literature, but little, if any, on the study of language. What are your feelings about the place of language in a university English Department curriculum?

#### *Answer*

It may appear that, in our concentration on literature, we are in danger of neglecting language. But logically this is impossible. In view of the fact that in the study of literature our only vehicle is language, it seems clear that we are concerned with (and about) language, and continually involved in it. In the marking of scripts we are forced to look at the student's use of language so as to discover what he is trying

to convey. We not only point out errors and weaknesses and suggest improvement, but also make it clear to the student that our final mark is based on the quality of his writing as well as the quality of his argument. And in any case, close criticism presupposes that one looks carefully at the way in which language is used. One cannot escape language.

*Question*

Don't you feel that there's a need in English courses for a more formal study of the English *language*, especially as so many of our students go on to become teachers of English?

*Answer*

A built-in language course at undergraduate level would be ideal. I'm not thinking of elementary formal grammar, as such, but a course in 'writing' at the level of sophisticated criticism which is required of students of literature. One mistakenly assumes, for example, that first-year students are capable of opting for the precise noun or verb, instead of dolling up their statements with the usual plethora of adjectives and adverbs. We have to accept that, in many cases, their flabby writing has *not* been 'tightened up' before they reach us. What is done by lecturers on scripts is obviously not enough. The result is that many graduates go out to perpetuate the type of inept writing which was theirs when first they registered for our courses. Yes, I would welcome a language course, but realize that there may be practical problems to overcome before it could be introduced.

*Question*

What is the relation of a journal like *English Usage in Southern Africa* to the so-called 'science' of linguistics?

*Answer*

Our whole approach is geared to popular interest in language rather than to linguistic studies. There are a number of scientifically orientated journals on language which acquit themselves of their task quite superbly. Their readers are usually academics and others whose field of research may be linguistics. The more popular character of *English Usage in Southern Africa* has attracted the ordinary man who does not normally read articles on linguistics. Our reading public is made up of businessmen, teachers, and those who are just simply interested in language and the way it's used.

*Question*

It seems to me that there is another way in which this journal differs from a linguistic journal. From my reading of past issues, I've gained the impression that the Editors have adopted

a fairly prescriptive stance on usage. Is this a valid impression?

*Answer*

You're right. Prescription to some extent has been, in the nature of things, forced upon us. Articles usually take a firm stand on what is correct and what is not. And calls for help naturally elicit a prescriptive response, no matter how tentative it may be. It's difficult to imagine a purely descriptive reply to the plaintive question: 'Does a certain section of our news media *have* to refer to the Prime MINISTER, as though the distinction were between him and Prime BEEF, instead of between him and the members of his Cabinet?'

*Question*

Looking back to 1974, when you joined the editorial board, would you say that the effort has been worthwhile?

*Answer*

The experience has been a mixed one. Irritation and exasperation were mixed in equal quantities with enjoyment and excitement. No matter what I may forget about this period, I shall always remember the camaraderie, the co-operation and the unflagging sense of humour of my co-editors. I account it a privilege to have been associated with them.

K.J. SAYCELL

'POMOLOGY'

*Pommy* - everyone knows this is the Australian word for an Englishman

What about these?

*Furphy* - a rumour

*Toey* - a nervous person

*Grunter* - a promiscuous woman

*Bludge* - to scrounge

A.D.A.