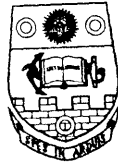


MISCELLANEA 36  
UNISA 1982



## 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

## WORDS AND RELIGION

One need not be a Marxist to believe that the criticism of society begins with the criticism of religion. Scratch a sermon or prayer and you will find a social class with its fears, aspirations, embarrassments, cohesive forces, and even its loves and hates.

Extempore prayer in the English speaking segment of the Methodist Church in South Africa furnishes an example of this class-bound character of religious denominationalism. It is a remarkably durable phenomenon which has withstood to a considerable extent the corrosive action of time, altered circumstances, distance from its place of origin and exposure to ecumenical contact with other groups.

A full-scale investigation of 'Methodist English' is, of course, well beyond the scope of this article, which pretends to nothing more than being a tentative probe based on haphazard rather than genuinely random examples, which have been gathered as opportunities presented themselves. Notwithstanding this lack of systematic and comprehensive observation *prima facie* evidence seems to exist for the hypothesis that certain characteristic phonological, syntactical features which are discernible in South African Methodist English have their roots in particular areas of England, and in distinct social classes from those parts.

A Methodist minister or lay preacher will, for instance, invariably summon the faithful to their orisons with the words 'Shall we pray', instead of the typical Anglican usage 'Let us pray', which translates the Latin 'oremus'. The tone of voice, the stress on the words, and the response of the people all make it clear that 'Shall we' *functions* as the precise equivalent of 'Let us'. No question mark is implied at the end: 'shall we pray?'

This use of 'shall' stems from West Yorkshire, according to Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* - an area with a strong representation in Methodism ever since the early days of Wesley's preaching. Wesley in fact began in London, struck out towards Bristol, and then turned to Yorkshire and adjacent industrial areas, and concentrated on the labourers.

Once the faithful are at prayer it is highly likely that their leader will repeat the phrase '.... and we do thank/ask/beseech thee' several times. The precise function of 'do' in these phrases is obscure. From the way it is uttered it clearly does not imply 'we DO thank thee (although it might not seem as if we do)'. The 'do' is very lightly stressed. Can it be that it is one of several similar audible signals that the congregation is not in the everyday world of common speech, but in a sanctuary, and one, moreover, decorated with verbal souvenirs of its early days, and that this is the main function of the 'do'? If so, it must be assigned to the same category as 'just', which is bound to appear with equal frequency.

'Just' is not used to mean 'righteous', nor 'exact', not even the South African colloquial equivalent of the Afrikaans 'net' ('netnou' - 'just now'), but either as a term of endearment or intensification. 'O Lord do thou just hear us' or '... do thou just bless him'. The tone of voice suggests something along the lines of 'go on, it's not easy, but you can do it; be a sport', or 'bless him very, very much' - the Yorkshire, Somerset, Warwickshire, Wiltshire and Dorsetshire usage (Wright).

'Undertake' has a portmanteau function, and its usefulness probably accounts for its very great popularity. It appears to serve as shorthand for 'we don't know exactly what to ask you to do, but she needs help of some sort: please act on her behalf'.

The three above mentioned words may well appear in a single petition: 'O Lord we do pray, just undertake for us'. The meaning is indistinct to the outsider (I can't speak for the Lord) but the emotions which these words stir in believing breasts is evidently often intense. From various quarters one catches murmurs of 'Yea Lord' - 'Yea Lord', and these may inspire the intercessor to greater efforts, and to imitation: 'Yea Lord, Yea, we do beseech thee, just undertake ....' This could be borrowed from the Revised Version of 1870 (Luke 10:21), where it translates the Greek *nai*. The King James Version renders this 'even so', which is perhaps more adequate. Luke was using *nai* to represent the Hebrew *Amen*, which is a strong affirmative. Methodist indebtedness to the Revised Version is rather surprising considering the hostility which greeted its publication, particularly in evangelical circles. It took about 50 years for

the translation to gain wide acceptance, which seems to indicate that Methodist usage might have some other parentage, or perhaps have exerted some influence on the translators in 1870, or even that in this instance it shares a single source with the R.V.

'Amen' is, of course, also used in Methodism. As in other churches, the word serves to indicate the conclusion of a prayer. It is the pronunciation of the word which marks a boundary between Methodists, 'Ay-men', and Anglicans, 'Ah-men' - the latter being closer to the Hebrew, the former stemming from the Latinized version of the word. This was, of course, current in the Middle Ages, and did not die out among the agrarian and artisan classes when the academics rediscovered Hebrew in the 16th century.

The distinctive Methodist pronunciation of 'Jesus' - 'Gee-zus' is less readily explained. Orton, Sanderson and Widdowson's *Linguistic Atlas of England* offers no direct evidence. Neither does Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary*. If the name is broken down into its syllables, and these are compared with matching syllables in other words the results are inconclusive. One may affirm with some confidence that the current pronunciation has roots in English dialects, generally those of the midlands or North East, but beyond this there is uncertainty, at least for someone not thoroughly familiar with those regions through personal contact.

The pronunciation of 'once', 'wheel', 'hear' and 'twelve', particularly by more senior Methodist clergy, is more easily recognized from Orton, Sanderson and Widdowson as belonging to the areas of heavy industry, and thus of more intense Methodist preaching over the centuries. This, taken with the other indications mentioned in this article suggests that a systematic and comprehensive study would establish the pedigree of Methodist English beyond reasonable doubt.

Research by the German department at the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of Natal has, according to discussion with those involved, yielded similar results as far as the German spoken by people around the Hermannsburg area of Natal is concerned. Here a policy of strict separation from the rest of society has led to the preservation of an archaic form of German, believed by its speakers to be 'purer', and serving to identify them quite readily as a distinct religious group of notable piety within Lutheranism. In this instance, however, the distinctive dialect is in daily use. In Methodism, it belongs to the sanctuary, where, apart from affirming the identity of the social class using it, it functions as a verbal stained glass window, heightening, by its unnatural tones, the sense of other-worldliness in worship.

The sharp distinction between 'labourers' and 'gentlemen' so

characteristic of English society for centuries loses significance and function in post-colonial settings. Ecumenical contact between denominations exerts its levelling effect, and several younger South African Anglican bishops, less acquainted with grammar and the classics than their predecessors, have recently been noted to imitate the 'shall we pray'. Imitation, indeed, plays a major role in the preservation and diffusion of these linguistic (bad?) habits. That, and the unconscious desire to signal that 'I am one of you', or 'I measure up to your expectations'. Absence of a written liturgy such as the Book of Common Prayer in no way implies complete spontaneity in worship. The opposite, in fact, is true. It is difficult to come up with new phrases and ideas week after week, and there is the human urge to be reassured of membership of a group. The result is a characteristic pattern of speech with features recurring as predictably as those of any printed liturgy.

#### ARMY SLANG

<i>Soldoedie</i>	-	a female 'serviceman'
<i>Durban Beach</i>	-	detention barracks
<i>Induna</i>	-	a senior officer
<i>Vuiluil</i>	-	a decrepit soldier
<i>Kettie</i>	-	a rifle
<i>Mooi-moo's</i>	-	the 'step-out' uniform
<i>Meat pie</i>	-	a military policeman
<i>Bangled</i>	-	used to describe the fact of someone caught doing something wrong

A.D.A.