

We avail everything here

Much of the pleasure (and sometimes the pain) of editing *ET* comes from background correspondence. For example, Kembo Sure's article 'Falling standards in Kenya?' appeared in *ET*32 (Oct 92), and not long afterwards he wrote again, for my comments on the following usages:

- Please, avail yourself for the interview at 8.30 a.m.
- Make sure you avail all the documents to the Commission on nomination day.

Noting that such uses are common in East and West Africa, he asked whether there was any other dialect from which they might have 'filtered into Africa'. I replied that to the best of my knowledge neither usage occurs in the British Isles, North America or India. It seemed to me therefore that *avail oneself for* ('make oneself available for') and *avail (something)* ('make [something] available') must be unique Africanisms.

Not long afterwards, however, I was preparing for this issue a group report taken from the *International Publishers Bulletin*, and ran right into:

- In terms of productivity it is no longer enough to avail information. (See p. 40, upper Col. 1.)

So, however rare this usage may be, it is farther flung than Africa. My current assumption is that both usages are back-formations from *available*: as *edit* was from *editor* in the early 19th century. The result is comprehensible but disturbing, and for many people, of course – in Africa and elsewhere – both are deviant and not to be encouraged. I would nonetheless welcome other examples of these and similar developments. This is a theme to which I hope to return shortly. It may prove as interesting as *themselves* (see p. 62).

Meanwhile, in this issue we have two further articles on Africa, one by Gaurav Desai, the other by Rajend Mesthrie (both of Indian extraction). The global mix is compounded in the piece on Singapore by Duncan Forbes (of Scottish provenance), the comments on usage by Terttu Nevalainen (our first Finnish contributor), the assessment of writing styles by Daniel Chandler (a media theorist in Wales), and the review of spelling checkers by Whitney Bolton in the U.S. of A. Say not the struggle naught availeth.

Tom McArthur

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A call for papers: In *ET*'s files we have cuttings/clippings from a wide range of British and North American newspapers, and a scattering of material from many other sources. If readers would care to add to our files by sending in occasional (titled and dated) materials from their local newspapers, etc., this would be a great help in widening the range of usage which we can quote.

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