

## The story of 3M

Humphrey Evans ('The triumph of the TLAs', *ET31*) should be cautious before venturing into the world of commercial abbreviations. The American company 3M abbreviated their name from *Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing*, not 'Minnesota Mineral and Mining'.

The firm was founded in 1902 with the aim of mining corundum deposits by Lake Superior, Minnesota, and selling it to manufacturers of grinding wheels as a high-grade abrasive. What they actually mined, however, was a relatively worthless mineral called anorthosite. They used this to make sandpaper instead, so that this is the product that relates to the 'Manufacturing' part of the name. In 1925 one of their lab assistants invented masking tape, and this led to the famous Scotch tape and Post-it notes of today.

Adrian Room,  
Stamford, Lincolnshire,  
England

## Doubts about simplified spelling

"The SSS and its mission" (*ET30*) fills me with foreboding. Unless the Simplified Spelling Society has revised its recommendations from its earlier days, it would obliterate most of our helpful spellings in English (showing, for example, Latin, French, Teutonic etc. roots). These enable not only foreign learners of English but also native speakers to derive meanings from unfamiliar English words.

Not only that, English being an international as well as a national language, over-simplified spelling could make guesswork more, not less, difficult for foreigners in general by

concealing roots similar to their own native languages.

Further, just as when I was learning Italian I found French useful as an aid to guessing meanings of unfamiliar Italian words, my Danish friend, also learning Italian (but ignorant of French, though fluent in English), used English in the way I used French. When I expressed surprise, she replied: "Well, English is 50% derived from Romance languages!"

Of course there could be a case for some minor simplifications and removal of glaring anomalies (e.g. *bough*, *cough*, *though*, *rough*, etc.), but English variations in pronunciations of words spelt identically can also be useful, e.g. *présent* (at this time) and *présent* (introduce).

I fear that the sweeping changes advocated by the SSS (I have seen some of their reading books) would result in an esperantised English that would please no one, native or foreign. What would an SPS (Simplified Pronunciation Society) advise, given more or less our present derivative spelling? Wholesale phoneticism?

I suggest that the claims of both visual and aural memory be balanced against each other: most of us tend to lean more strongly towards one or the other of these, so that neither should be sacrificed to the other.

Most importantly, think of English-speaking children. True, they face spelling and pronunciation exceptions to the rules, but at least they only have to learn 60 irregular verbs, instead of the 200 of the reliably phonetic Italian language. Once a child, learning to read, has imprinted upon the memory the shapes of words as recommended by the SSS, then he or she would be rendered almost dyslexic and certainly orthographically crippled, should the experiment fail,

and something like the present system survive.

Think of that.

Anna Dunlop,  
Edinburgh, Scotland

## Re: The Kanadian Langweej

Al things remeenize the seem, inkludus the point witch you hav emfazised, that english is thretnizing tu split into 100 nu langweejs (wich or witch wil be also as irrasional az english)! Al the old, greet literatuur witch haz biin translized intu english wil mustize tu be translized intu 100 irrasional, vulgar, repulsiv, nu langweejs. The solusion iz simpel: the establishment ov wun *rasional*, konsistent langweej.

I hoop that you reportized that 1990, the Internasional Yiir ov Litarasi, ko-ordinized with maksimal kwiessense bai an obskurus organizasion in Toronto, for the U.N., waz an embarrassing *total feelur*. Not wun thing waz akomplished.

Ted Culp,  
Direktor, Internasional Union  
for the Kanadian Langweej,  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

## Welcome or welcomed?

At the bottom of *Post & Mail* in each issue, you print the comment that "Readers' letters are welcomed." For a long time I have thought how nice, and have wanted to ask just how you do that. Cambridge probably has an airport of some kind, and certainly railway and bus stations. Is there a welcoming committee that goes over there most days to greet the arriving post/mail? Maybe a small band of musicians salutes the arrivals as well.

Or possibly a "welcome

wagon" such as apparently appear in smaller U. S. towns (I have never seen one myself) parks in front of your offices loaded with comestibles and other goodies. Such welcomes are, I suppose, welcome. Maybe just a big smile from your receptionist, with a greeting such as "Welcome to Cambridge. Glad to see you" is proffered. No doubt there are other ways of welcoming that have not occurred to me. All the same, how charming that letters are *welcomed* there; I can hardly wait to see the treatment that this missive receives.

But seriously, folks, I do believe that the intended usage is *welcome* without the *d*. Your usage carries a more active connotation in addition to being a verb in the past tense. Nor do we reply to thanks with "You're welcomed." The enclosed part of an advertisement that appeared in an alumni quarterly published by my alma mater, the University of Southern California, carries the statement "All calls are welcome, . . ." The way things are going, both over there and over here, it's a real thrill when the colleges and universities, let alone anybody else, get something right.

Sarah Montoya,  
*Word-Watching*,  
Monterey Park, California, USA

*Editor* This letter was greeted by the Band of the Royal Marines, and its immediate predecessor by a mobile karaoke squad, singing 'I did it my way'. But equally seriously, folks, there I was thinking my sentence was simply the passive of 'We welcome readers' letters'. The comment will stay as it is, but

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Readers' letters are welcomed. *ET* policy is to publish as representative and informative a selection as possible in each issue. Such correspondence, however, may be subjected to editorial adaptation in order to make the most effective use of both the letters and the space available.

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## Language learning

"Students should learn a foreign language for best insight into the culture and psychology of a people."  
— Educator in Interview.

Happy land, uncommon, too  
Whose amical relations  
Are unimpaired by tussles with  
Capricious conjugations.

Try to study le francais  
Frenchmen place no curbs  
On the use of the subjunctive  
Of reflexive active verbs.

Try your luck with Latin. Its  
Declensions you will yammer,  
Yet never get to meet the Roman  
People, just the grammar.

Next you tackle Spanish. Now  
The Spaniard talks in idiom.  
You'll never get to know him well  
Unless he can get ridiem.

Evidence on how to know  
A people is emphatical:  
You can do it better if  
You do it ungrammatical.

Alma Denny,  
New York

readers' further comments are of course, as always, welcome(d).

## Naming biocontrol agents

I have enclosed some pages from the *Grower* of 2 July 92, regarding new trade names. English, it seems, is under review – even in the smallholdings.

Alan Rae,  
Greenock, Scotland

*Editor* We reproduce below part of *Perspective*, the column in the *Grower* written by Dr Colin Perkins of Pershore College of Horticulture, because it vividly illustrates the fey creativity of the names of new bio-products:

'Over the last few years as biological control has become

more important, more biocontrol agents have been made available in the UK. They are now regarded very much as products and some, like pesticides, have both an active ingredient name (the Latin name of the organism) and also a snappy trade name. This makes a lot of sense in the case of microbial pesticides like Bactospeine, Mycotal and Vertalec, where the biocontrol agent is formulated and applied almost as if it were an agrochemical. However, proprietary names are increasingly used for predators and parasites, presumably to give them a market image.

'Some are simple plays on the names of the agent, for example Phytopack used in the past by Bunting Biological Control for the mite *Phytoseiulus persimilis*, which feeds on the two-spotted

(red) spider mite; and En-strip used by Koppert for the chalcid wasp *Encarsia formosa* which parasitises the scales of glass-house whitefly. Similarly, the Agricultural Genetics Company market *Steinernema feltiae* under the name *Nemasys*, since it is both a nematode and the nemesis of the larvae of the vine weevil and sciarid flies.

'Proprietary names may also feature the name of the target pest, for example *Spidex* for the two-spotted spider mite predator and *Thripex* for the mite *Amblyseius* which controls thrips.'

## English-medium schools and English/Urdu hybridization

I want to develop a point which Prayag Tripathi made in his article, 'On Real and Unreal Teachers' (ET25) – the mushrooming of private English medium schools in India. Interestingly, this phenomenon is enjoying an equally strong growth in Pakistan. The official language policies of the two countries may have been different, but the aspirations of their middle classes, as expressed in their attitude to English, is remarkably similar.

The educational establishments, which enjoy a status similar to the public schools of Britain, and after which they were modelled, have rarely afforded entry to those who are not from the most privileged sectors of Pakistani society – the super strata of the bureaucracy, the armed forces, the landed and political establishment and the seriously wealthy. That left the entrepreneur to step into the breach and to provide the middle classes with an adequate facsimile of those establishments with which to satisfy the aspirations they had for their own children.

The problem with an entrepre-

neur's approach to addressing a fundamental social need is that the times-scale within which he wants a return on capital, and the amount of capital he wants to invest, can result in standards of accommodation and often of teaching that vary from good to unacceptably low. The schools which have sprung up along the boulevards and main roads of the major cities in Pakistan are converted residences boasting names like the Centre for Advanced Studies, the Foundation Public School and numerous others like Sunshine and Bay View which are possibly more appropriate for bakeries than places of learning. However, the unifying factor in both the more ambitious projects, and those run on a shoestring, is that the medium of instruction is English. This is the basis on which admissions are attracted. (The institution of the unreal teacher really comes into its own here. Almost always a housewife, sometimes an unemployed male graduate, without them and the pay they accept the project would be unviable for the investor.)

So how much more English is being spoken and written in Pakistan since people are voting with their cheque books to get into the English-medium? Judging from the quality of writing in the Pakistani press, the facility with which the language is used seems to be diminishing rather than increasing. But the more interesting phenomenon I have observed is that an increasing number of English nouns, as well as whole phrases in English, are being used in everyday Urdu conversation. For example family relationships "mother, father, brother, sister" and a quaint expression "cousin-sister", "cousin-brother" have largely replaced their Urdu equivalent. Similarly "early in the morning", "within a week", "next year" seem habitually to be expressed in English. Then there are terms for which the Urdu

may not be known to the speaker because he first came across the concept in English, such as "glamour", "sex symbol", "motivation", "corruption", "generation gap". The Urdu press also expresses them as such, with English transliterated to Urdu, which can be difficult to decipher.

A fairly typical example in a young girl's conversation would be, "*Mein to early in the morning he jaag jati hun. Meray father mujhay school drop karnay kay baad office jaatay hein.*" (I usually wake up early in the morning. My father drops me to school before going to his office). And in an adult's "*Fee hamarey politicians main to commitment hai hi nahein. Corruption imi badh gai hai keh common man kay liye life bohot hi difficult hai?*" (Our politicians are totally lacking in commitment. Corruption has made life particularly difficult for the common man).

So are we witnessing the growth of a particular kind of non-native English or is this part of the evolution of Urdu? To me such conversation betrays more an insistence by the speaker that a certain level of attainment in English has been reached. Where an abstraction is expressed in the language in which it was first encountered, and so means more to the speaker, this is understandable. But why should commonplace words be substituted? In any event the phenomenon is rampant and appears to be irreversible. Whether it enhances literacy and expressiveness in the long run remains to be seen, but at this stage it produces a particularly awkward language and style which suggests an insecurity in identifying completely with Urdu and an inhibition, or inability, to use English effectively.

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