

Advanced Level English Studies

I am writing in response to the letter by William Millis in *ET8* (October 1986, page 4) concerning the University of London School Examinations Board A level syllabus in English Language Studies for first examination in June 1987. Mr Millis reports an unhappy experience at a college which appears to have embarked on a course for the examination and then abandoned it and suggests that we were unable to help. The problem at the college appears, from the letter, to be lack of confidence in this new area of work.

We have held a number of meetings at the Board with teachers to consider ways of approaching Language Studies in English at Advanced level but when Mr Millis originally enquired we may not have been able, at that stage, to indicate with any certainty which colleges in London were preparing candidates. We now have a more comprehensive list of centres which have shown interest and whose teachers have attended meetings at the Board, should Mr Millis like to make a further enquiry.

○ K. Davidson, English Subject Officer, University of London School Examinations Board, England

Bilingualism should just happen

Hurrah for Brita Haycraft. I'd love to meet her. She's bilingual, she's natural and she's fun. Jean-Paul de Chezet, on the other hand, is funny. Does he mean to be? 'After all, I was human' – what happened? But, bless him, he's happy too, isn't he? And it takes all sorts to be bilingual [See *ET7*, July 86].

But my heart really goes out to little Emma Harding. What a family linguistic situation for a five-year-old. Does she realise, poor little bilingual, that, in particular, she will have to master the fact that the relationship between linguistic signs and their referents is arbitrary at a much earlier age than monolinguals? Maybe she realises it in French. It certainly takes a long time to work out in English. Given a particular set of external circumstances, bilingualism should just happen. As soon as we begin to theorise, reassess strategies, discuss frameworks of reference, the children, the 'bilinguals', become guinea pigs. They become self-conscious, aware of their gift as a 'problem'. Mrs Harding uses words like 'disadvantage', 'worry', 'disturbing', 'damaging'. Brita and Jean-Paul both refer to 'joy'.

However, I heartily concur with one sentence of Mrs Harding's – 'Do not let

yourself be pushed around by . . . experts'. And so I popped her in the bin.

○ Rachel M Cooper, Flüh, Switzerland

A trifling talking-point

I am impelled to write to you by one of those trifling expressions that people like me enjoying talking about, in this instance a phrase in 'The Usage Industry' (Tom McArthur, *ET7*, July 86). On p. 11 you write: '. . . a kind of shorthand that cannot mean much in Norway or Nebraska, Saskatchewan or New South Wales, leave alone in the big industrial cities or rural schools of the British Isles.' Why, I wonder, did you say 'leave alone' when in my view you could have said, and should have said, 'let alone'? Did you in fact intend that, or were you just being singular and eccentric *ad lib*?

○ Bertram Lippman, Coram, New York, USA

'Leave alone' comes more easily to me than 'let alone'. It may well be a Scottish preference; I am happy with either. David Crystal tells me that he would say 'let alone', but is willing to leave me alone. *Ed.*

Peckham's prejudice?

Shirley Peckham's prejudice against swearing – I call it that since no arguments are put forward as to *why* she is opposed to it – is, in my opinion, essentially class prejudice. It is social class which is the major, though not the only determinant, of who swears, and for a long time established ideas have ranted about it as 'indecent' and 'anti-social'. But, if looked at more dispassionately, are not working-class traditions of directness, expressiveness and honesty in many ways better than middle-class traditions of tact, circumvention and pretence? Class prejudice – both witting and unwitting – is everywhere, and nowhere more than in consideration of 'how to talk proper'.

○ John C Mullen, Asnières, France

Butting heads

Although the 'quality' newspapers generally have a style book which is supposed to ensure that their scribes maintain uniform standards of writing and avoid various bad habits, it is surprising how rapidly errors spread.

Within a few months the word 'head-butt' has spread throughout the national newspapers and was used last week on BBC news when Alex Higgins was alleged to have assaulted a

tournament official. The word is simply 'butt'. Butting is an unsociable activity performed especially by goats and irate humans using their noddle. It cannot be carried out using any other part of the person. 'Head-butt' is therefore not a word but has been taken up even by *The Independent* and the *Financial Times*. The BBC duty officer suggested that as it had been used on the 9 o'clock news it was a perfectly respectable word. The suggestion that they should adopt 'footstamp', 'handslap' or 'nosesniff' on the same grounds was not welcomed. Despite my one-man campaign to remove head-butting it's probably here to stay. Are there other examples and can *ET* campaign against linguistic fallacy?

○ Michael Harmer, Chelmsford, Essex, England

A fulsome solecism

How many of those who use such phrases as 'fulsome praise' and 'fulsome banquet' realize they are using a pejorative? How many of them know that the root of the first syllable of *fulsome* is not *full* but *foul*? The Bard, for one, knew what *fulsome* meant. The Countess Olivia, complaining of the unwelcome mouthings of suitors in Act V, Scene I of *Twelfth Night*, says, 'If it be aught to the old tune, my lord, It is as fat and fulsome to mine ear as howling after music.'

Definitions of *fulsome* in dictionaries, at least in American dictionaries, do not include *lavish*, *rich*, *bountiful*, *opulent*, or anything like them. Some definitions they do include are *odious*, *repulsive*, *repugnant*, *lustful*, *disgustingly offensive*, and *excessively insincere*. I am amused at such solecisms as 'fulsome autobiography', 'fulsome chorus of praise', 'fulsome reception', and 'Gina Lollobrigida's fractured but fulsome English'. My favorite is the *New York Times* review of a symphony concert where the critic complains about his difficulty in 'digesting the fulsome program notes'.

○ Albert Kreindler, Riverdale, Bronx, New York, USA

An omalous affair

I wonder whether other listeners have noticed the very common habit of omitting the indefinite article when the following word begins with 'an' or 'a'? For example, a speaker will say 'It is an omaly that . . .' instead of 'an anomaly' and on a recent BBC Radio 4 magazine programme a speaker said '. . . It is not a tempt to reconcile . . .' instead of 'an attempt'. Every day one can hear 'It is a mazing fact that . . .' and so on. Can

it be only a matter of time before grammar books say 'The indefinite article is dropped when . . .', etc. In the same way if enough people over a long enough period of years say 'adaptation' instead of 'adaptation' the former will become a recognised alternative form.

○ R M Blomfield, Poole, Dorset, England

Travelling hopefully: a reply

Your correspondent Paul Thompson (ET8) is puzzled over the objections to the use of the word *hopefully*. Until about ten years ago the function of the word *hopefully* was to qualify a verb: e.g. – 'we shall play the game hopefully' (i.e. in the hope of winning). Then the word came to be used to express the feelings of the speaker or writer outside the structure of the sentence: e.g. – 'hopefully we shall play the game' (i.e. we hope that we shall not be prevented from playing the game). Thus, ambiguity arises. The word has acquired two separate and distinct meanings or uses. That is the objection to the new use.

German has two words for the two different uses: *hoffnungsvoll* (equivalent to the original English use) and *hoffentlich* (meaning 'it is hoped that. . .'), and it is thought that German immigrants into the United States mistranslated *hoffentlich* and that the mistake took root. The battle to prevent the new use taking root in Great Britain is probably already lost, but I look forward hopefully to my being proved wrong.

○ Ralph Simmonds, Edinburgh, Scotland

See also p. 16. Ed.

Apostrophes with abbreviations

I did enjoy reading Greta D Little's article in defence of the apostrophe (ET8) and I do hope that future editions of your most interesting journal will contain similar articles on the subject of correct punctuation.

There is, however, one use of the apostrophe which I find to cause much trouble and that is when it is used to indicate the omission of letters in the plural form of multiple-letter abbreviations such as those used for Direct Labour Organisations which is often abbreviated to D.L.O's. Furthermore, with the increasingly common omission of full stops after abbreviations such as an abbreviation becomes DLO's which, to me, suggests the possessive rather than the plural. I have been unable to trace the origin of



"Frankly, we're looking for someone who's had experience of using the entire alphabet."

the apostrophe in the plural of multiple-letter abbreviations although I recently came across V.A.D's (Voluntary Aid Detachments) on a printed ticket dated 1 July 1919 for an official visit to the Western Front battlefields of the Great War.

Greta Little closed her article with the question: Will the apostrophe survive? My feeling is that it will providing the rules as to its use are unambiguous and complete agreement is reached as to how the apostrophe should be used. The example I have given above, however, suggests that we have not yet reached that stage! Do you – or any of your readers – have any views on the use of the apostrophe as exemplified in this letter?

○ J C Brazier, Guildford, Surrey, England

Our policy is as uncluttered an appearance as possible, commensurate with clarity; hence, an editorial preference for no apostrophe in DLOs, 1980s, etc. Ed.

Bureaucrats and the apostrophe

The introduction to Greta Little's article *The ambivalent apostrophe* in ET8 asserts that other punctuation marks are fairly secure in 'literate' usage, but one cannot say the same for the apostrophe. As far as official government correspondence in the United Kingdom is concerned, that is the exact opposite of the truth. The only punctuation mark to escape official sentence of death is the apostrophe.

In the mid 1960s an order went out to employees in all civil service departments that when addressing correspondence punctuation marks must no longer be used. Presumably someone had worked out that this would save x million typist-hours and y million miles of typewriter ribbon. The

result has been to make official letters look even more bleak and unfriendly than before.

The one exception to the no-punctuation rule has been the apostrophe. If you receive a letter from the Home Office, you will find that their printed letter-heading is shorn of every stop except for the apostrophe in Queen Anne's Gate. It seems that civil servants cannot bear to be thought less than literate, and a correctly placed apostrophe is probably the clearest sign of superior literacy.

Dr Burchfield, in his book *The English Language*, suggests that the time is near when the use of the apostrophe to indicate the possessive case should be abandoned; it was, he points out, not introduced until the seventeenth century. The retention of the apostrophe as the sole permitted punctuation mark in addressing official letters seems perverse; its continued employment contradicts the normal employment principle 'Last in, first out'.

○ Alec Bristow, Thwaite, Suffolk, England

Asapping and eyewigging

Ean Taylor thought (ET8, Oct 86) that to *asdate* (a credit) is 'unique in being the only verb in English created by treating the *as* of an adverbial phrase as a particle to be prefixed to a noun'. Maybe, but there are some strikingly close formations shown in the world's largest compilation of transitive verbs, our *Wordtree*. Based on interviews with appropriate occupational specialists, we showed *as* prefixed to a past tense, and *as* abbreviated in a phrase.

One can *as-built* something like a building's engineering blueprint; he does so to correct it to reveal how the contractor actually completed it. And to act on something (like completing a report) before anything else, As Soon As Possible, is to *ASAP* it.

Whitney F Bolton sadly concedes that the expansion of nouns into verbs now involves even bodily parts. But he concludes by noting (ET7, July 86) that 'you can beard but not eyebrow. . .'. Sorry, but the verbal tide has engulfed the forehead. *The Wordtree*, with citations to reasonably literate sources, shows that the transitivity trend has produced: to *eye*, to *eyeball*, to *eyebite*, to *eyebrowraise*, to *eyeclip*, to *eyeglass*, to *eyelet*, to *eyelethole*, to *eyeserve*, to *eyewash*, to *eyewig*, and to *eyewitness*. The reason for this is not perversity. We are now moving from an era of descriptivism to an era of environmental engineering. And in cultural materialism, the techno-environment governs language.

○ Dr Henry G Burger, Editor, *The Wordtree*, Kansas, USA

Say it isn't so

One of the noticeable lacunae in colloquial, conversational English, is the lack of an equivalent for *n'est-ce pas?*, *nicht wahr?*, *non e vero?*, *no es verdad?* Americans get by with 'Huh?' or 'Right?'. The British use 'Right?' or 'You know what I mean?' The latter purely rhetorical question is sometimes put down sardonically or derisively in a manner that no Frenchman would ever dream of doing to the use of the equally rhetorical *n'est-ce pas?* Any suggested alternative that would be widely acceptable without attracting either criticism or particular attention? Just simply accepted, as on the Continent, for what it is – an elegant, courteous way of rounding off what one has just said. Is it not so?

○ Harry Morgan, Morden, Surrey, England

A brains teaser

How many brains does an aspiring student need to be admitted into university? If this sounds like a silly question, allow me to point out that it arose from the following statement:

'The pressure from school was to go to university. The feeling was that you went to a poly if you wanted a vocational course and did not have as many brains as you should.' (*The Observer Magazine*, 12 Oct 86)

Unless this was an ironical claim that there are distinct theoretical, practical and possibly other types of brains of which only the fortunate few possess

A dictionary of dialect terms: help required

I have been commissioned to write a dictionary of current dialect words, and intend that the proceeds from the royalties of this book should be donated to some third-world charity.

If any of your readers can spare the time or energy to jot down any dialect words they know that are *currently in use*, I should be most grateful to have them. I need to know where the words are used (e.g. in what county) and precisely what they mean. Any other information (e.g. who uses these words: old people, young people, working-class people, middle-class people, etc.) will also be valuable. Please write to:

○ Dr Martyn F Wakelin, Senior Lecturer in English, Department of English, Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, Egham, Surrey TW20 0EX, England



the whole range, I find the use of *many* here awkward, indicating that *brains* is treated as a count noun, when it would appear to be meant as a synonym of *intelligence* (which sense, according to *OED*, has more usually taken pl. form than sg. since 16th century). There seems to be a conflict here between notional concord and grammatical concord, similar to the cases discussed in Quirk's *Grammar of Contemporary English*, with grammatical concord given preference in this case. One could think of other words, like *lungs* or *wits*. Is there a more elegant way of quantifying such plural forms, or would one indeed say of a runner who had lost a race that he did not have as many lungs or, in tactical matters, as many wits about him as he should?

○ W Eric Schlepper, St Augustin, West Germany

The double pluperfect

Regarding the double pluperfect, Bolinger (in *Intonation and its parts*) has suggested a rhythmic explanation, while in several publications I have suggested a phonetological and a morphological explanation. The first notes the assimilation of 'd to [b] and then to nothing (e.g. *goo'-bye*, *they better*; see my *English phonetic transcription*, p. 96) and explains that a 'deletion' that poses no problems elsewhere does pose problems after counterfactual *if*: So *If I put* is strengthened to *If I hadda put*. (The /v/ of 've and of is of course often dropped before a consonant, especially if the preceding vowel is unstressed; the reduced vowel is used after modals and *to*, as in *Can she-a done it?*)

The morphological explanation, which is not incompatible with the phonetological one, is based on W Mayerthaler's concept of morphological iconicity: The more (or less) marked a form, the more (or, respectively, less) marked it should be. Since the pluperfect is fairly marked (as tests

using *be/get*-passives, etc., show), it should have greater formal marking – which is a reason why French and German also have double pluperfects. Incidentally, the pluperfect is not used so much for time simply anterior to a past time, as one often reads, but for time anterior to a past time that did not end before that past time; e.g. *Relations became strained before that*, but *Relations had become strained in recent months/by then*.

○ Prof Dr Charles-James N Bailey, Technische Universität, West Berlin

On Kensdale on Dinesen

The review by Simon Kensdale of the re-issue of some late works by Isak Dinesen (October 1986) suggests that *ET* made three serious mistakes. First, it asked for a review of works of imaginative literature, notice of which one would not have expected in a magazine devoted to the English language as language. Second, it asked Mr Kensdale to review the works, though his vague and unsupported views suggest that he is more likely to be a linguist than a skilled literary critic. Third, it asked for a review from a person who apparently is unfamiliar with Dinesen's best works – *Seven Gothic Tales*, *Out of Africa*, and *Winter's Tales*, none of which are referred to, but upon which her high reputation is based.

Thus, we are treated to such perverse or inane opinions as '... though there's nothing much wrong with Dinesen's work, there's little in it to get

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 subject to editorial adaptation in order to make the most effective use of both the letters and the space available.

excited about, either'; '... Dinesen's gift was only oral: she lacked the ability to transmit [sic] it [?] to paper'; '... she never produced a work of art.'

Mr Kensdale's main critical fault seems to be his lack of understanding that Dinesen wrote, not 'realistic' fiction like Jane Austen's, but romantic (in the sense that Hawthorne opposed the romance to the novel) fiction; that even when dealing with apparently down-to-earth characters and events, she sees them philosophically and fantastically. I could go on to list my favorite stories by Dinesen and explain why I (along with Ernest Hemingway, Hannah Arendt, and Robert Langbaum) think they are outstanding and original. But why bother, when your reviewer seems neither to have read them nor to have read anything about them?

○ Professor Leonard Moskovit, Department of English, University of Colorado, Boulder, USA

ET's interest in Isak Dinesen lay in the Danish background to her writing in English. Simon Kensdale is a litterateur and not a linguist. *Ed.*

Spelling reform plans, please

Twenty five years of teaching children with reading difficulties has convinced me that there is a need for a reform of English spelling and so I have been very interested in the series of letters

The fascinated herd boy

Who said the veld is barren?
When the inner walls of the houses
have been cursed by the
spiders' eaves.

Graze in the green lands,
and let me into the boundless
oceans.

My hands have not been fouled.
I am just a visitor in the city.

○ Siphon Nakasa, Umlazi Township,
South Africa

which have appeared in *ET* over the last two years from a variety of writers who have felt the same need and who, like myself, have made some attempt to develop a system of phonetic spelling.

Experience with the phonetic spelling of Esperanto has emboldened me to develop my own system which I believe to have considerable merit but I would like to see the suggestions of your other correspondents and learn what principles they have followed in the compilation of their systems. I am aware that one of my own weaknesses is a lack of experience of non-British English.

May I therefore suggest that in the near future you dedicate either an edition of *ET* or a series of articles to attempts from all over the world to formulate phonetic spelling systems? This would surely be a worthwhile

venture for your excellent magazine.

The editor might like to suggest a passage of prose to be transliterated by anyone submitting a form of spelling.

○ Arnold Pitt, Leominster,
Herefordshire, England

No spelling reform plans, please

I'm mildly saddened – though not surprised – to note that some of your readers are still pursuing the chimera of 'simplifying' English spelling. Scholars have been chasing this particular wild goose for more than four centuries; they haven't caught it yet and, I submit, never will – and never should.

English spelling is unquestionably inconsistent, rendering identical sounds in different ways (*so, sew, sow*) and different sounds in identical ways (deaf, ear, meat). 'Logically', then, it would be a Good Thing to spell as we pronounce, since both children and foreigners would find phonetic English much easier to learn.

Or would they? If we are to spell as we pronounce, who's 'we'? My wife's aunt from Liverpool used to mike loovly sponge cake; Cape Codders will tell you that Cape Caud is surrounded by wotta; some New Yorkers heat their houses with erl boiners; Texas seamstresses pen up the him of a dress. And some Australians, I'm told, think that a bison is a plyce where yer bythe

Esperanto versus Airspeak: THE FAILURE OF ENGLISH?

There is increasing evidence that English is unworkable as an international language, that it is breaking up into dialects in Africa and, at an international level, it is proving dangerous as the language of air traffic control.

Spanish air traffic controllers are now using Spanish to their own pilots, against specific regulations and in contravention of international guidelines. They are doing so because they feel it would be safer for them to use Spanish as the language of operation, rather than English.

The following air accidents were due to misunderstanding arising entirely from the use of the English language or the use of English was a contributory factor.

25 Feb 1960 American plane and a Brazilian over the Gulf of Guanabara. The American pilot did not understand the pronunciation of the English spoken by the control tower officials. About 100 died.

Jan 1966 Air India plane (Boeing 707)

crashed into Mont Blanc. All 117 passengers perished. The Air India pilot did not understand the instructions given by the Geneva control tower, according to the Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation in India.

10 Sep 1765 Air crash over Zagreb. 176 killed. One factor was that the air controller panicked and gave a warning in Serbo-Croat which neither pilot knew.

27 Feb 1977 Santa Cruz, Tenerife. 577 killed. Dutch pilot misunderstood the English of the Spanish control tower and two Boeing 747s collided on the ground.

25 Apr 1980 Tenerife. Boeing 727. 146 killed when plane crashed into mountain. Official report 'The message was given in non-standard air traffic phraseology and proved to be ambiguous.' Spanish air control.

Since English is mispronounced, mistrusted and avoided clearly it is not the solution.

An Esperanto Parliamentary Group has been formed, with a membership of 204 MPs, who will be demanding an explanation on why the Official Secrets Act has previously been used to block publication of these statistics.

○ Press release for the Centenary of Esperanto, 1987

The Zamenhof legacy

'The Planned and the Ethnic' (*ET*8) aroused mixed feelings in the linguist that I am. Of course, I heartily approve of Zamenhof's highly noble ideals, and I am quite happy (and not at all surprised) to learn that UNESCO is supporting the 1987 centenary celebrations. Zamenhof's unflinching love of mankind, his pacifism, his belief in the necessity of a universal religion ('hillelism') are all highly laudable pursuits, but it seems to me that the creation and development of Esperanto is a risky venture tinged with idealism and artificiality. In fact, can a linguistic medium develop successfully if it is not used by people belonging to a certain – even if imperfectly delimited – linguistic community? (Admittedly, the

yer fyce.

A standard phonetic spelling for English would have to be based on some standard English pronunciation - which simply does not exist. That is, my phonetic spelling will inevitably be someone else's irrational spelling, and vice versa. Unless, of course, we are to contrive a different spelling for every English dialect, worldwide - which would raise far more problems than it would solve. My own enjoyment of British writers would be markedly diminished if I had to read them through a veil of unfamiliar spelling - and the same would apply to American writers and British (or Australian, or Anglophone Indian) readers. Worse - 'simplified' spelling would make most reading harder, not easier, because it would make obsolete every existing bit of printed matter in English. Shakespeare's archaic vocabulary and syntax make him heavy going for most of us even today; if all we knew was phonetic English, he would be as inaccessible to us as Chaucer, alas, already is. Likewise with Milton, the King James Bible, Mark Twain and the *OED* - just for openers. Or shall we 'translate' the entire contents of our great libraries into the new spelling? Thuh maind boglz!

English spelling, irrational though it is, performs an absolutely essential job: it enables anyone who can read English, anywhere, to read anything written in English, anywhere - today, or during the past four hundred years.

concept of 'linguistic community' is a very fuzzy one.)

Besides, a language is in a perpetual state of flux, whereas Esperanto is more or less condemned to fixity, even though some neologisms are regularly incorporated into it. Can Esperantists hope to achieve (any sort of) communication in a satisfactory way?

Arnold Pitt seems to regret that the English language has so many varieties: but does this not reveal its strength rather than its weakness? The human mind being what it is, isn't linguistic multiplicity preferable to utopian - nay, impossible - linguistic unity? Attempts at systematic unification - whether philosophical or ideological - are bound to fail. Look at the state the EEC is in, to take the example of politics. The efforts made by Esperantists are doubtless praiseworthy, but one cannot help expressing doubts as to the ultimate success of their enterprise. May I draw the readers' attention to the fact that English has not 'broken into dialects', as Stanley Nisbet puts it (it depends what one means by 'dialect', at least, and his sentence is far from clear). Besides, it makes me smile to hear about the 'relative simplicity' of English grammar, which unfortunately

The Hit-the-ceiling Department

Brotherly love within me dies
Whenever a bloke says 'reco'nize'.

I'm just a savage Paleolith
When I hear, 'Meet me corner
Fi'th'.

○ Alma Denny, New York, USA

'Simplified' spelling would end all that, for which reason alone it belongs in the limbo of theoretically admirable but practically ridiculous schemes. Readers under the impression that English spelling is uniquely irrational should brush up on their French, in which the simple sound O is spelt in (count 'em) eight different ways, as in *au, faux, haut, eau, eaux, os, gogo* and *pot*.

○ Robert Claiborne, HP Publishing Inc, New York, USA

Analphabetic disorders

The article on illiteracy, 'A Social Disease?' (*ET8*, Oct 86), inspired me, as a lexicographer, to do a little research on definitions of *literate, literacy, illiterate, illiteracy* offered in various dictionaries. I was, frankly, astounded!

· As an Anglo/French speaker and teacher, with years of experience in

Africa, I had always firmly believed that 'illiterate' = *analphabète* (unable to read or write) and conversely that the 'faux ami' *illettré* = uneducated. This distinction, in my opinion valid, is made clear in the latest edition of the *Concise Oxford French Dictionary* (which I edited) but in *Collins-Robert* the two French words are given without distinction under English 'illiterate'. To make matters worse, *Le Petit Robert* defines *illettré* (mod.): 'qui ne sait ni lire ni écrire'. I turned for confirmation to the latest monolingual English dictionaries. Chambers under 'illiterate' gives: unacquainted with literature; without book-learning; uneducated; ignorant and (in fifth place) unable to read. *COD* (rather better) has: uneducated, esp. unable to read.

I accept that a good dictionary is descriptive rather than prescriptive, but I wonder to what extent dictionaries and lexicographers have encouraged rather than reflected the pejorative use of 'illiterate' and 'illiteracy'? Curiously, 'literate' appears still to mean 'able to read and write', although I would have expected and accepted 'able to express oneself in writing', and 'literacy campaigns' still appear to aim to teach people to read and write. Obviously, there is some deprecatory undertone to the negative forms of the two words which leads the majority of literate (educated?) English-speakers to use them in a pejorative sense and

is a deep-rooted myth. And don't you think that P Thompson is going too far when he writes that English is 'a creole of Anglo-Saxon and French'? Anyway, some of his 'false friends' are not 'false' at all to a Frenchman: *barako* = 'baraque', *salto* = 'saut(er)' (cf. Spanish 'saltar'), to take straightforward examples. No ill feeling!

May I compliment you on *ET* - I have enjoyed every issue so far. The Post and Mail Section is a particularly welcome addition to the magazine.

○ François Chevillet, professeur de linguistique anglais, Université de Grenoble, France

Buggies, jets and hot-air balloons

With reference to the interview with Arnold Pitt on the status and claimed advantages of Esperanto ('The Planned and the Ethnic', *ET8*, October 1986), it seems somewhat presumptuous, to say the least, to describe English as the steam engine of world languages and Esperanto as the jet aircraft, when the language of international communication actually used by *real jet*

aircraft is English! As far as becoming a world language is concerned, Esperanto has signally failed to get off the ground - indeed compared with the progress English is making, Esperanto is slipping back fast. Far from its being a waste of time to learn English, as Arnold Pitt claims, English is by far the most useful language in the world, while there seems to be no point whatever in learning Esperanto, except to cultivate it as a hobby like collecting matchbox labels. As a hobby, Esperanto does nothing but good - it definitely promotes international contacts among its devotees. But as an international language of wider communication it is entirely irrelevant; history has decided in favour of English. Latin may well have been the 'horse-buggy' of world languages, as Arnold Pitt says; following the same analogy French may be said to have been the post-chaise, but English is both the steam train *and* the jet aircraft, while Esperanto is the hot-air balloon, preserved and developed by a band of enthusiasts, but without practical applicability.

○ Graham Pascoe, Ottenhofen, West Germany

to ignore their original meaning. I have noticed, particularly in schools, an unfortunate tendency to use newly-current specialised words, half understood, badly assimilated, such as 'spastic' and 'dyslexic', in a pejorative sense. It seems that 'illiterate' has fallen into this category.

I see little hope of rehabilitating 'illiterate', at least until it is replaced by a more impressive term, perhaps one which means inability to cope with computers? So where do we go for now? *Analphabète* obviously needs a new English translation – perhaps, 'non-literate', as you propose. It appears to have the merit of being completely factual and not to lend itself to pejorative use. I would also suggest that the use, or misuse, of these words depends a great deal on the starting-point of the user. It is probably difficult for the average person in W Europe or N America to accept the concept of genuine 'illiteracy' (yet it exists and genuine illiterates suffer), whereas in Africa and elsewhere in the Third World, illiteracy carries no stigma but indicates a problem to be faced.

○ Dr Joyce A Hutchinson,
Edinburgh, Scotland

The coming of TEIL

Recent experiences of some of my students ought to teach us native English speakers a lesson about our own language. One of them, who really speaks English quite well, is an employee of a large Japanese company. He was invited to go to Hawaii to take part in an international forum in which he was to make a presentation of Japanese business methods. After attending several sessions of this gathering of Pacific rim countries, he discovered that he could hardly understand a thing, due to the high level of English used by the many PhDs present. PhD-level English is appropriate in American or British universities, but it is definitely not appropriate in international conventions, in which 40% of the attendees are non-native speakers.

Even highly educated native speakers of English don't seem to understand the proper use of English when used as an international language. Many intelligent non-natives study English all their lives without ever reaching the level of standards that educated native speakers impose upon themselves. It is unreasonable that they should be expected to. Yet, in conference after conference, organizers and other participants think they have had a successful convention, while a high percentage of attendees were left out. We native speakers need to be trained to speak our own language in a new

way in multicultural/multilingual settings. English has become the *de facto* language for international communications. When Japanese and Russians talk, they use English. Mexicans talking to Malaysians use it, as do Arabs to Germans and Chinese to Indians. The list goes on and on. Our PhD friends and colleagues did not realize that their language had the same effect at the conference as if they had been seriously deficient in vocabulary.

Many of us native speakers are grateful that we were born speaking the language of choice around the world.

Perhaps we subconsciously feel that we don't need to study it as a foreign language, because we already speak it. It is a natural feeling, but it is very inadequate. We do not realize that English no longer belongs to us alone when we use it as an international means of communication.

Even those among us trained to teach it as ESL/EFL (English as a Second Language/Foreign Language) too often teach it as though we were making an immigrant's entry into our society a bit easier. When English is used as an International Language (EIL), in

English from 5 to 16: The responses to the responses to the responses

I fear that discussion about the curriculum in English in England and Wales (*ET9*, Jan 87) has now become sufficiently general to be labelled a 'debate'. In educational circles, that term has much the same chilling implication as the 'vote of confidence' that haunts football managers. Something Must Be Wrong.

It would be disingenuous to feign ignorance of why we are being treated to extra large helpings of gloom and despondency. Nonetheless, it's worth it just in order to make the point that whilst there are many issues over which schools might be thought to be in crisis, the teaching of English is not, exceptionally, one of them. The 'debate' is a hot house plant feeding on the oxygen of publicity that the press seem willing to accord anybody who wants to sound off about declining standards. This point is worth reiterating. There is no observable reason for all the huffing and puffing that is going on. If you want to turn to the 'objective' indicators of performance then the message is a reassuring one. Exam results have never been better, the APU has not identified any cause for concern. At a more subjective level, there is probably a greater degree of consensus amongst English teachers than there has ever been. The GCSE National Criteria for English might cover only the later years of Secondary Education, but they add up to a coherent set of curriculum principles, based on contemporary understandings about how language works, and they represent a very powerful agent for change. For the first time ever, examining at 16+ is being seen to have a benevolent effect on teaching in Secondary years 1–3. As Pam Czerniewska reported in *ET9*, the National Writing Project is both prompting and reinforcing this change. If it weren't for this awkward debate about how we're in a state of crisis, everything would be fine.

In such a climate, it's difficult to know how the National Association of

Teachers of English should respond. If we're uncritical, we're complacent. If we concede that maybe everything is not perfect, then we stand condemned of incompetence. Either way we're at the sore end of the argument.

In the end, however, there's not much doubt about where, in this debate, NATE can be found. We welcome *English from 5 to 16: the responses* as a return to sanity and a basis from which to move towards 'a (nationally agreed) statement of aims and objectives'. That doesn't mean that we aren't allowing ourselves the luxury of some dissent. The treatment of Years 5–11 looks like the work of a Secondary specialist, and signally fails to represent best practice in what most Primary school teachers would call not 'English' but 'language and literacy'. The comments about race, class and gender are lukewarm, and remain detached from the central curriculum thinking that characterises the document. NATE would wish to promote a view of language that emphasised the cultural charge that is embedded within it and is inseparable from it. It is more than a matter of 'equal opportunities', it is a matter of how language works, and how it should be discussed in the classroom. In the long run, perhaps the least satisfactory aspect of the document is that whilst its heart is in the right place, it has failed to lay to rest the spectre of 'grammar' teaching that stalks the land. Maybe every generation of English teachers is condemned to rehearse those arguments endlessly. For those who have been here before it feels as if the clock has been turned back 20 years; for the rest of us, it's a chore that has little relevance to the real job of how to encourage children to use and understand their language more successfully.

○ Patrick Scott, Chair, National Association of Teachers of English, 1984–86, Sheffield, England

contrast with ESL/EFL, it is usually not an exercise in someone wanting to learn how English speakers think or talk. Even though such good things may be learned, it is not usually the purpose of the meeting. Most non-native speakers have their own set of values and their own ideas. They do not want to be dominated in meetings by people who are more fluent in the language.

In using EIL, we native speakers should learn that it is not 'up to them' (the non-native speakers) to make all the changes necessary for communication. We cannot allow ourselves to dominate international forums simply because we have a greater command of English. Nor can we insist that others follow our culture-specific expressions. This language does have enough flexibility to permit reasonably good exchanges of ideas without the use of, for example, slang and argot. EIL must tolerate a variety of different cultural values and ways of thinking. If we allow ourselves to dominate such meetings, we will some day suffer, because we will not have heard some very important ideas.

I do not intend by this piece to suggest that any level of achievement in English competence by non-natives is acceptable, or to become an apologist for places in the world, like Japan, where English is taught in a manner

that can only be described as insufficient. In any place where students study foreign languages by concentrating only on reading and writing, without also working on listening and speaking, someone is guilty of either not being responsible, or of ignorance. Today's world requires balanced skills.

Like any language, EIL needs well-defined standards, especially at the beginning competency levels. As oral and written abilities improve, however, it becomes increasingly difficult to define such levels, and the will and desire to overcome gaps in knowledge areas, natural biases and shyness, for the sake of communication, becomes ever more important. Both native and non-native EIL speakers need to care that the other people present are both being listened to and understood.

As native English speakers, let's see ourselves as equal, and not superior partners in international assemblies. The way we speak 'our' language should vary in such situations as much as it does when faced with formal or informal situations at home. We do it for our friends, our potential friends, and for ourselves.

○ Walter Newport, Toyama International Center/Toyama College of Foreign Languages, Toyama City, Japan

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