

## Converging pronunciations?

In her letter published in *ET*42 (Apr 95), Beverly Fairfax quoted from my article on *Estuary English* in *ET*37. She drew attention to some of the phonological features that New Zealand and Estuary English share.

Similarities in these two, and indeed Australian English pronunciation, are probably not a sociolinguistic accident. In all three cases RP (standard British English pronunciation) has at one time or another been the reference accent in an environment where London and south eastern English speech have been very influential. Indigenous or transplanted, these two main sound systems appear to have undergone similar levelling or synthetic processes.

If Australian, New Zealand and Estuary English have travelled on similar paths, this opens up an interesting line of speculation as to how they will be spoken in the future. Convergence is suggested as media exposure to one another's speech patterns grows. This is a two-way process with popular Australian and New Zealand television programmes and films being exchanged for British media exports which make ever-increasing use of Estuary English. At all events, conditions are favourable for future convergence, as Estuary English is closer than RP or General American pronunciation are to present-day Australian and New Zealand English.

David Rosewarne,  
Kingsway College, London,  
England

## A(n)-dropping

Regarding your editorial *Comment* in *ET*40 (Oct 94), 'Is it new way of speaking?', and Robert

Ilson's response, 'A(n)-dropping', in *ET*41 (Jan 95), I would like to report that a single issue of the *Guardian Weekly* furnishes the following three instances in running text:

- Martin Walker, p. 6: 'At lower level, the political operators were beavering away.'
- from the Washington Post, p. 19: 'A.P. is a professor of political science at American University.'
- Philip Hensler, p. 29: 'A recurrent theme is the identification of natural phenomenon with nationalism.'

*A Contemporary Grammar of the English Language* (Quirk *et al*, 1985) remarks: 'African and South Asian English ... often omit articles required in the standard varieties.' Sample: *They gave us hard time* (p. 28). And "in newspaper headlines, articles are often omitted: *US heading for new slump* (The US is heading for a new slump) (pp. 847 & 900).

Two instances of the omission of the indefinite article, which occur in the same issue of the *Guardian Weekly*, are, I would say, worthy of note in that the headline consists of a grammatical sentence: *Tory in sex-scandal resigns* (p. 11) and *Ethiopia takes step towards democracy* (p. 14). Could this point to the/a source of the stylistic innovation?

Nina Devars,  
The Hebrew University of  
Jerusalem, Israel

## Ut

In the proliferation of suggestions for a third agent inclusive singular pronoun one simple solution is overlooked. The pool of words in Latin, on which much of English is based, contains a source word meaning each of both, or both as each, the word *uter*. It is easily anglicised as *ut*, like we anglicized many other words.

*Ut* fulfills everything we need in this necessary pronoun. As "each

of both" it names *he* and/or *she*, *his* and/or *hers* as *ut's*, *him* and/or *her* as subject and/or object, and specific and/or general in "both as each." It also generates easily, as with *self*, e.g., *utself*. That is, it even contains, by definition, each of both (he and/or she) as subject and/or object, specific and/or general. It is also singular, not forcing the usage of a plural intending pronoun, e.g., *they*, to be used with a singular pronoun. Moreover, it feels like a pronoun: it has an affinity with 'it' through the final 't' and an affinity with 'us' through the initial 'u'. In fact, it fulfills everything we want in a third agent inclusive singular pronoun.

Above all, it is not "neutral": its element of inclusiveness includes both sexes as sexes by definition, as well as by intention. That is, it does not level sexuality to a powerless neutered energy, it highlights the power of difference and diversity in sexuality because it is based in reality and on rationality: there are two different sexes on planet earth. All around, it is economical: one word fits all needs.

Louise Gouëffic,  
Toronto, Canada

## What number son are you?

It is an undeniable fact that not all ideas that arise in my mind can be expressed as well in English as in my native tongue. I became aware of this when I was a high school student. One of my classmates asked me one day: "How will you ask a question in English that elicits an ordinal number as answer?" Despite being the best English-studying student in the class, or perhaps in the school, I could not answer his question. In the evening I sought the help of my neighbour, then a

lecturer in English, but his answer disappointed me. He said that there was no question word in English to ask this question.

In Malayalam, my native tongue – and I think, in all other Indian regional languages – one can ask an ordinal question. But in English there is only cardinal question. One can ask: “How many students in your school passed the exam with a first or a second class?” Its answer will be a cardinal number. One can also ask: “How many times did you appear for the examination?” Here also we get a cardinal number plus times as answer. In my mother tongue the ordinal question word is single, *ethramathe*. The Dutch vocabulary contains the ordinal question word *hoeveelste* (*hoe* = how; *veel* = many; *ste* is a suffix). The corresponding words of this nature can be seen in French (*quantieme*) and German (*wievielte*) too. Unfortunately, such a single word or an acceptable phrase does not exist in English.

The English seem to be uninterested in the ordinal number question. But we Indians are very much interested in asking such a question. So we have found our own ways of asking it in English. Some of us say: “What is the rank of Bill Clinton as the President of USA?” Others replace *rank* with *position* or *ordinal number* or *chronological order* or *numerical order*. And *as the President of USA* is sometimes replaced with *among the presidents of USA*. These questions are not acceptable as idiomatic to the native speakers of English. They label them as “Indian English”.

There is another type of ordinal question among the Indians: “Which of the presidents of USA is Bill Clinton?” This sentence

really has a British flavour, because *which of* is a commonly used question word in both British and American English. But *which of* is used entirely differently from this Indian use in British and American English. “Which of the dictionaries do you want?” and “Which of your brothers went to England last week?” are correct British and American English. Here, *which of* does not convey the idea of the ordinal number question. So the native speakers of English do not accept *which of* as an ordinal question word. They say that “Which of the presidents of USA is Bill Clinton?” or “Which of the American Presidents is Bill Clinton?” seems to be asking for some distinguishing characteristic expecting an answer like ‘the (richest/tallest/handsomest) one’ or ‘The one who (succeeded George Bush/raised taxes/etc.)’.

However, a recent letter that I received from Mr M. W. Evans, an English lawyer settled in Scotland, says that the above *which of* question is quite idiomatic and unambiguous. Mr Tony Hall from London suggests an implicit question using *which*: “Which President of the US is Bill Clinton?” He also says that the question will be explicit if the sentence is formed like this: “Abraham Lincoln was the 16th President of the US; which one is Bill Clinton?” Mr Clark P. Stevens from California supports this last question with a slight change: “If George Washington was the first president of the US, what is Bill Clinton?”

Sir Randolph Quirk, the most famous British grammarian of today, says that the ordinal question can be asked like this: How many presidents were there before Bill Clinton?” But this oblique question does not satisfy us because the answer to this question is not an ordinal number. Mrs J. E. A. Field, a British language expert, has said to me that “Where, in the numerical order of presidents of the US, does Bill Clinton come?” would be probably acceptable to the

native speakers of English. Being explicit and unambiguous, this question can be considered the best of all so far discussed.

I have recently come to know that it is correct in colloquial British English to ask “What number president of the US is Bill Clinton?” In my estimation, this shortest question is better than the last one in the foregoing paragraph.

Once a reader of my column on English in a Malayalam magazine asked me whether it would be correct to use *how manieth* to form an ordinal question. This question really interested me. *How many* is answered by a cardinal number like three, five and ten. eg “How many brothers have you got?” “Three.” Then what about using *how manieth* for an answer containing an ordinal number like third, fifth and tenth? Unfortunately, such an expression (“How manieth president of the US is Bill Clinton?”) does not exist in today’s English. A language lover from Britain writes: “However, I do like the idea of saying ‘how manieth’: I feel quite wistful that the word doesn’t exist!”

Suppose one of your friends is appearing for an examination for the third time and you want to know the last number of his examination, namely third. Then you could ask “How manieth time are you appearing for the exam?” Now you will have to ask: “What number time are you appearing for the exam?”

Do you have any other suggestion to ask an ordinal number question? If so, please write to: O. Abootty, Cannanore City, 670 003 Kerala, India

## The Ballad of Beautiful Words

David Crystal’s article in the April issue on “beautiful” words, reminded me that years ago I had clipped and filed the ballad I enclose. My filing is so haphazard that discovering the copy amazed

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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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43 Crossword answer

me, and I had not made any note of the date or source. The reprint was in the little pamphlet that Merriam circulated to teachers, and I haven't tried to track down the date. McCutcheon, who was a cartoonist with the *Chicago Tribune* died in 1949. But I thought it might be interesting as another collection of somebody's notion of beautiful words.

Robert Gorrell,  
Reno, Nevada, USA

Amethyst, airy, drifting, dell,  
Oriole, lark, alone,  
Columbine, kestrel, temple, bell,  
Madrigal, calm, condone.

Emerald, swallow, tawny, dawn,  
Silvery, starling, lane,  
Radiance, rosary, garland, fawn,  
Pastoral, valley, vane.

Crinoline, crimson, crystal, croon,  
Troubadour, flagon, flown,  
Caravan, amber, laurel, moon,  
Tamarine, tendon, tone.

Chivalry, convoy, clamor, cling,  
Hurricane, highland, dream,  
Journeyman, mariner, sailor,  
wing,  
Mandarin, tarn, redeem.

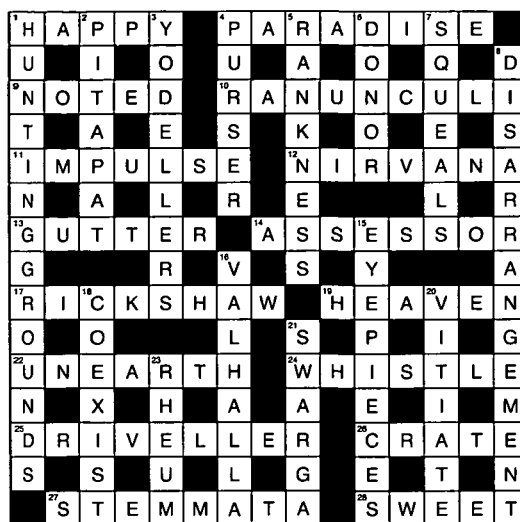
Imperial, ermine, helmet, lance,  
Gondola, glory, glade,  
Calendar, sultan, darling, dance,  
Melody, minstrel, maid.

Dominion, destiny, danger, dare,  
Revelry, drone, dragoon,  
Tourmaline, treasure, fortune,  
fair,  
Olden, gold, doubloon.

Smoldering, somber, tumbrel,  
tomb,  
Indigo, ember, shorn,  
Sonorous, sorrow, clover, doom,  
Pendulum, dirge, forlorn.

Charity, gloaming, garnering,  
grain,  
Curfew, candle, loam,  
Benison, mother, lassie, swain,  
Children, evening, home.

- John T. McCutcheon



THE VERBATIM-DSNA AWARD

The Dictionary Society of North America announces the VERBATIM-DSNA Award to support lexicographical study and research. Funded by the magazine *Verbatim: The Language Quarterly* (edited by Laurence Urdang) and administered by the Dictionary Society of North America, the VERBATIM-DSNA Award will support one or more lexicographical projects during 1996 with awards ranging from \$500 to \$2500. Recipients of the Award will also receive an attractive certificate.

Requirements

1. Applicants must be members in good standing of the Dictionary Society of North America.
2. The proposal must be for a project in lexicographical study or research. Its budget may include costs of travel, tuition, materials, subsistence, and related expenses.
3. The proposal should include the following parts:
  - a. project name.
  - b. a statement of the project's immediate goals and expected long-range results.
  - c. a description of the methodology or procedures proposed for achieving these goals.
  - d. a summary budget of the total expenses for the project, with an identification of other sources of support available for the project.
  - e. a one-page biographical resume for the applicant.

The proposal should total no more than three pages, single spaced, including the one-page resume.
4. Four copies of the proposal (with a self-addressed, stamped postcard for acknowledgement) should be sent to John Algeo, President DSNA, P. O. Box 270, Wheaton, IL 60189-0270.
5. For the 1996 award, proposals must be received by December 1, 1995. Awards will be bestowed and full payments made in January 1996.
6. The society requests that it be sent copies of any publications arising from the support accorded by the Award.