

Anyone for noone?

I sense the 'not in my lifetime' school of language change at work in Anita Kern's assertion (*ET21*) that we must fight the 'needless insertion' of a hyphen in *no one*. After all, everyone, anyone, and someone have long since been compounds, as have nobody and nothing. It would be just as logical to campaign against the needless insertion of a space in *no one*.

One could argue a special case for *no-one* on the grounds that when it becomes *noone* (as it already has for some people), it looks as though it should be pronounced differently. This-one merely notes that such considerations have not stopped the development of words like *coordinate*, *cooperation*, and *readjust*. I would like to see an article in *ET* on how lexical items progress from phrases through hyphenation to compounds.

Jillbob Newton,
Bournemouth, England

Thingamajigs and mudguards

The Umbrella Man of a popular song some years ago did his repairs for you 'with what he called his thingamajig', and I have no difficulty with 'Thing you may jig(gle)', being sure (until I looked in *Chambers*) that *jig* was a verb similar to *jog*. Certainly my siblings have so used it. I note that on p.72 the word suddenly becomes *thingamijig*, (corrected later). Conversely, I do not think I have heard *thingamabob*, always and only *thingamibob*.

Now why does Baumgardner regard *mudguard* (p.61) as a Pakistani word? My father's car had mudguards, as did all cars until the guards became fused with the body as its wings. There are plenty of bicycles in this village,

and they have mudguards still. If Americans call them *fenders*, and use them as such, it is no wonder they get bashed.

F. F. Ross,
Alne, North Yorkshire, England

Lookit

A minor quibble with Allan S. Kaye's delightful article 'Watchamacallum' (*ET21*): He analyzes the American child language form *lookit* as containing the pronoun *it* (p.73). I believe it derives from *look at*: *Look at that* is interpreted as verb *look-at* + object. Children don't say *Look that*, so they wouldn't say *Look it*, but they do say *See that*, whence the analogous sequence *Look-at-that*.

Dr Sheldon Wise,
Director, English
for Specific Purposes,
Rockville, Maryland, USA

Grammatical lift-off?

Grammar enthusiasts among *ET* readers will be interested to note that the present perfect tense may be legitimately qualified by a specific time adverbial in the context of news broadcasts. Here is a headline from the BBC World Service News of 23 February: 'A European Ariane space rocket has exploded two minutes after lift-off.'

Chris Cleary,
The British Council, Algiers,
Algeria

Humorous definitions

In his review of the latest (1988) edition of *Chambers English Dictionary* (*ET21*), Ewald Standop rightly emphasises that the Dictionary has lost none of its originality.

He does not mention one orig-

inal feature, however, which draws many dictionary-watchers to *Chambers*. This is its incorporation of 'humorous definitions', subtly scattered through its pages. They include the following: *éclair*: 'a cake, long in shape but short in duration'; *perpetrate*: 'to execute or commit (esp. an offence, a poem, or a pun)'; *Pict*: 'in Scottish folklore, one of a dwarfish race of underground dwellers, to whom (with the Romans, the Druids and Cromwell) ancient monuments are generally attributed'; *picture-restorer*: 'one who cleans and restores and sometimes ruins old pictures'.

There were howls of protest from some readers when these were omitted from earlier editions. They were restored in the 1983 edition, however, when a few new ones were added. One was *man-eater*: 'a woman given to chasing, catching and devouring men'.

All these and doubtless many more are still there in the 1988 edition, making *Chambers* possibly unique in its deliberate inclusion of definitions of this type.

Adrian Room,
Petersfield, Hampshire, England

Positive and negative

I have just read Chris Upward's letter (October 1989) on quotation marks. Surely in the expression "so-called 'democratic'" 'so-called' is redundant, since the single quotation marks suggest that although someone is calling something democratic it isn't? On the other hand, once you have used the expression 'so-called' you don't need to quote what is so-called.

Weightier matters demand our attention. For example, the falling into desuetude of many an adjective. This is a consequence

of the preference of many people, often Americans, for 'positive' and 'negative' over more specific adjectives. Thus we have sports commentators referring to a positive lead (big? decisive?), businessmen referring to a positive profit (big? welcome?), BBC newscasters referring to Mr Gorbachev arriving in a positive atmosphere (friendly?), as if an electric storm is raging, and the GCSE Examining boards promising that credit will be given for positive achievement. How positive achievement differs from achievement pure and simple is a matter for bemused speculation. What about a positive response to a diplomatic initiative? Is this a favourable response or might it be a hostile retort or an SS missile? 'Feedback was overwhelmingly positive!' declares the lively young reporter, thereby contriving to impede communication by using the jargon of communication.

But let us not be too negative. Think of the advantage there is in not having to search our minds for adjectives like 'nasty', 'uncooperative', 'lazy', 'unfriendly', 'unsatisfactory', 'destructive', 'unenterprising' and so on: we can simply use 'negative', thereby achieving trendiness and imprecision at the same time.

I am reminded of the practitioners of Orwell's Newspeak enthusiastically getting rid of unwanted adjectives and replacing them with such creations as 'double plus ungood'.

John Rook,
Enfield, Middlesex, England

Xlish, Ylish & Zediano

Some names for hybridised Englishes can be felicitous, some not, as demonstrated by Adrian Room's list of '+lish' examples in *ET21 Post & Mail* (e.g. *Japlish*, *Russlish*, *Hunglish*, *Spanglish* and presumably *Danglish*, OK, but *Swenglish*, on these lines, could emanate from either Sweden or Switzerland). *Franglais* has been

Words to daunt

The carton's here and I behold
Three little words are printed bold,
(guaranteed to make me tremble)
Namely: EASY TO ASSEMBLE.

Alma Denny,
New York

so well publicised that I had never heard of *Fringlish* (why not *Frenghish*?) let alone seen it in a dictionary, I am afraid that I find his *Pinglish* less Polish than Chinese in flavour and more Chinese than his *Chinlish* (how about *Chenglish*?), though I have to confess that I have failed to dream up an alternative for anglicised Polish: not, of course, polished English! As for *Germlish*, its unpleasant connotations would perhaps disqualify it in favour of *Deutschlish*? And let us not forget the more subtle differences between *Brenghlish* and *Amerenglish*.

Adrian Room suggests *Italish* instead of *Itanghiano*, as in the title of my article, 'Parliamo Itanghiano' (*ET18*). I had originally invented *Italese* (italiano + inglese) for a name for this anglo-italic hybrid, but thought the Italian name of *Itanghiano* more appropriate and evocative for a mongrel lingo concocted in Italy.

There is clearly a need to distinguish e.g. anglicised Italian from italianate English (even if the former is more prolific than the latter). A Hungarian long resident in Britain, discussing Hunglish, referred to its opposite number, words in English borrowed from Hungarian (e.g. *huszar*, which is corrupted, *paprika*, etc.) as *Engrian*. On similar lines I once wrote two articles for non-Italian-speaking English speakers, the text, except for the linking words, consisting almost entirely of Italian words already

absorbed into English (e.g. *aria*, *spaghetti*) and derivations common to both languages but with their Italian endings (e.g. *possibile*, *probabile*, *lettera*, *quantita*, *elementare*). *Instant Italian*, in fact, since it was so easily guessed. I called this carefully selected language *Enghiano*.

Paul Jennings invented some current names for English hybrids, his masterpiece title being *Minglish*, a polyglot form of English. 'It is an existing language, spoken and written all over the world,' he wrote. 'It is used by the writers of guidebooks, menus and visitor's literature.' (e.g. from a hotel in Turkey: 'Flying water in all rooms; you may bask in sin on patio.')

He described this rich mixture of malapropisms, misspellings, misprints and howlers, which he could as well have called *Manglish*, thus: 'The glorified tongue of Minglish is hopping to become a language for unitting all the heman race and so bring understanding and botherhood.'

I am reminded of the story (again, I think, from Paul Jennings, or at least from *The Observer*) of the shop in a tourist quarter of London which displayed the following notice in its window: 'We speak Danish, Swedish, Yiddish and Rubbish'.

Anna Dunlop,
Edinburgh, Scotland

'Native' v. 'non-native' speakers

I am a little uneasy about Sir Randolph Quirk's mention in *ET21* of René Coppieters's research on 'native' and 'non-native' speakers of French. We must not jump to conclusions regarding possible implications. It was an excellent piece of research, exemplary in the way it was conducted and presented, but, as I am sure René Coppieters would be the first to admit, a great deal more work and more thinking are required before we can draw any safe con-

clusions. Let me mention a few points.

In the first place, two groups of 20 and 21 people, respectively, can hardly be considered statistically significant in a matter that involves millions and millions of people.

Secondly, and more importantly, 'native' and 'non-native' speakers are not two precisely defined categories. Even among 'natives', who might be thought to constitute a fairly homogeneous lot, one sometimes finds surprising variations, and an interesting example occurs among Coppieters's research subjects. One of four Italians was out of line with the other three in her perception of tenses (Italian and French), apparently because she came from a part of Italy where there is a regional differ-

ence. Yet we are told that all the subjects were well educated, so she must have learnt standard Italian in her Italian school. In the English-speaking world, where in some quarters the very word 'standard' makes hackles rise, there are likely to be equally striking differences among the 'natives'. One wonders, too, how to classify people with an L1 learnt for only the first four or five years of life and since abandoned and largely or entirely forgotten. Some Welsh people fall into this category. And does a *Schwyzertütsch* speaker who has learnt High German in school qualify as a 'native' speaker of German?

'Non-natives', being a negatively defined category, are bound to vary much more. A differently selected group of

research subjects might well have produced a very different result. Coppieters's group contained the following L1 speakers: American, British, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Farsi. They were all engaged in academic or similar work; they had lived in France for an average of seventeen years and appeared to be fully at home in French and in their French surroundings, but only six of the twenty-one had no foreign accent. With two exceptions they had all had formal training in French, but none of them had specialized in French.

I wonder about the non-natives' training in French. The questionnaire that was used in testing them covered mainly such things as *imparfait/passé composé*, *il* or *ce*, and the place of the adjective before or after the noun – relatively subtle distinctions, yet all of them ones which should have formed part of their training. If they had been better trained in French, might they not have done better in the test? I tried one or two of the questions on my son, who had done A level French, and he seemed to cope fairly well. And my own formal training in French, which I received in Denmark well over fifty years ago, also seems to have equipped me quite well. I have never lived in France; nor has my son.

What I am unhappy about is a tendency to assume that there is a mysterious, semi-mystical difference between two groups of people, natives and non-natives, a difference which affects for ever the way their minds work when handling the language concerned – something to do with the way their minds are 'wired',

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.

A novelist's alphabet

You can amplify, argue, aver, advocate,
Bluster, bark, bellow, burst in or berate.
You can contradict, chuckle, complain or cajole
(The c's could quite fill up a bottomless hole).
Declare disaffirm, disagree, deprecate,
Ejaculate, emphasize, expostulate,
Fulminate, fib, fawn, fire back and flush,
Grant, grate, groan, grouse, grumble, giggle or gush,
Homilize, hiccup, hiss, hoot, hesitate,
Interject, interrupt, infer, intimate,
Joke, jibe, jeer, josh, jolly, kid, kibitz, keen,
(Just three for k, no more to be seen),
Lie, lament, lash out, lecture and leer,
Moan, mutter, mumble, (the m's are unclear),
Needle, nudge, note, nod, nag and narrate,
Opine and observe, and, yes, obfuscate,
Pontificate, promise, pronounce and proclaim,
(I'm getting the feeling the p's sound the same).
With question and query the verb quip qualifies,
As do rant, ramble on, rally, rage, rhapsodize,
Shrill, shout, swear, shoot back, smile, speculate, splutter.
(If u jumps the queue I can now insert 'utter').
After the break come tease, testify, trill,
Vow, volunteer, waffle, warn, whisper and wail,
In Oxford extol and explain and expound,
And y's like yell, yack and yodel abound.
And these will all do, but I can't get around
The problem of z-words to put into play
For writers who want a new way to say 'say'.

Philip G. Thornhill,
Thornhill, Ontario, Canada

as some people would put it. This assumption is very similar to the Whorfian hypothesis in its outré form, in which we are all regarded as imprisoned within our respective languages and the thought forms that they impose upon us, with apparently no chance of escape across the language barrier. There is also, I fear, a link with ancient beliefs associating differences in language with tribal or national differences and assuming that these matters are all congenitally determined. Now a theory that implies unbridgeable mental differences should only be accepted as a last resort, if there is no other explanation available. And I believe there is an explanation; I think an escape route exists through improved language teaching and, most important of all, through improved language *learning* – because it must of course be realized that the learner himself will have to make

a great effort if he is to rewire his mind.

Paul Christophersen,
Cambridge, England

Editorial error

On page 64 of my article 'The Indigenization of English in Pakistan' (ET21) it is erroneously implied that women in Pakistan wear coat-trousers. The quotation cited (*The Frontier Post*, 4 November 1986) in fact refers to Pakistani schoolboys. The phrase 'regarding women's dress' was inserted in my original text during the editing process. I would appreciate it if you could clarify to your readers that this was an editing error, not the author's error.

Robert J. Baumgardner,
Co-ordinator, English
Language Program,
The Asia Foundation,
Pakistan

● *Editor* The brief gloss 'regarding women's dress' was added routinely in order to, as I believed at the time, make the sentence in question less opaque to readers unfamiliar with the Indian subcontinent. Having lived in India and not Pakistan, however, I misinterpreted the phrase *shalwar-khamis* as referring to women's dress, which is true for India but not for Pakistan, where, as I have now learned, it is the name for the national dress of Pakistan, both for males and females. There appear always to be problems in handling English across cultures. I unreservedly apologize to Robert J. Baumgardner for introducing error into such a lucid text and hope that it has not caused offence to any Pakistani reader. Small knife-edge decisions of this kind have to be made all the time. Occasionally, alas, the knife slips.

CROSSWORD

ET22 CrossworLd solution

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29	R	E	C	A	P		30	C	O	R	K	S	C	R	E	W		

ET21 CrossworLd winners

The winners of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, the prize for our January 1990 crossword, are:

- A. D. Barnes, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, England
- M. B. Bonar, Hyogo, Japan
- Jane Nelson, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, England
- Sybil Sarel, Birsay, Orkney
- Gibb Webber, Anderson, Indiana, USA

ETYMORPHS

Answers 1a; 2b; 3d; 4d; 5c; 6c; 7d; 8b