

Editorial

For more than twenty years, Tottenham Hotspur Football Club fans have been using the word *Yid* (originally a slang expression for ‘Jew’) as an affectionate way of referring to their team. Although Tottenham typically have had a substantial following in the Jewish community, currently Tottenham fans also use the identity badge *Yid Army* to refer to themselves regardless of whether or not they are Jews. In 2013 the Tottenham fans made it onto the UK national news after Football Association and Jewish community groups condemned the use of the word *Yid* as offensive and inappropriate in a football setting. And despite the fact that Tottenham supporters rejected the FA’s take on the local use of *Yid*, London’s Metropolitan Police arrested three Tottenham fans for chanting of the Y-word. Even the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, got involved in this discussion, siding with the fans. He proposed that speech that is not motivated by hate, as with the affectionate use of *Yid* by the Tottenham fans, should not result in prosecution. In the end, charges against the arrested fans were dropped, and the police issued a statement saying that anti-semitic chanting directed at Tottenham fans is an offence, while chants by the Tottenham fans which use the term *Yid* are not. The case of *Yid* highlights the level of sensitivity that is needed when we deal with varied meanings of the same word. Interpreting the word in the way it is intended by the speaker is especially hard to achieve when the word projects different senses even in the same formal linguistic contexts. Moreover, it is not uncommon to see words being understood very differently by people who nevertheless live in the same space and time. One may here consider words such as *sick* or *wicked* which for some older people might still mean ‘unwell’ or ‘bad’, and for many adolescents ‘great’. Such variation in the use of words typically reflects a stage of semantic change where selected speakers introduce and spread the new sense among certain groups before the usage reaches the whole community. As a consequence, the two uses (an older and a newer one) coexist in the speech community, at least for a period

of time before one sense takes over. Ignoring the fact that different meanings of the same word may be salient for different speakers can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts, like the one pertaining to the word *Yid*. As linguists we should keep highlighting this socio-historical dimension of word meaning to those who are quick to disapprove of usage that is not typical of their own speech.

This issue of *English Today* has some considerable focus on the changing English language, and on responses to it by professional linguists and users in general. Lukač, contributing further from and inviting responses to the Leiden University ‘Bridging the Unbridgeable’ project, considers new and old authorities on language in the digital age. Heuberger and Brewer both focus on lexicography, the former writing on the place of corpora as evidence for dictionary makers, the latter considering the ways in which English is presented for children in dictionaries specifically designed for them. Straaijer’s review article examines language change from the standpoint of the latest edition of the iconic *Fowler’s Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, singling out some particularly pertinent examples, while Elmes spreads the net more widely over a broad range of neologisms. Prescriptivism being a common response to new developments in English, Marks most helpfully reviews a book with the cleverly ambiguous title of *Fixing English*.

A wide geographical and subject range is covered by other articles here. Murphy continues her series considering the American and British varieties, here questioning whether two names are even needed to distinguish them. Zhao considers the future of English in China amid reforms in language testing there, while Weyers sees its use as a matter of status in Colombia. The grammar of the verb in Cameroon Pidgin English is the focus of Ayafor. And in his paper Reynolds addresses translation between Chinese and English, as seen through the culturally vital matter of Taiwanese food culture.

The editors

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