

## Some bouquets

Just received my latest issue of *ET*. I haven't even read it yet, but know I will enjoy it immensely, as always! However, I have to write to tell you how much I like the new, smaller size of the magazine. Superb idea.

Bonnie Beeferman,  
Barrington, Illinois, U.S.A.

I think *ET* has improved its appeal with the new shape.

Juan Ramón Lodaes, Madrid,  
Spain

*ET* is my favourite reading.

Olga Vilstrup, Viby, Denmark

I always enjoy reading *ET*. It's a classy publication.

Josette Beaulieu-McFaul,  
New Orleans, Louisiana,  
U.S.A.

I am an English teacher at pre-university level. At our school we do not only read books from Britain and the USA but try to develop an interest in the literature of other English speaking communities. *ET* has proved an invaluable source of background information. May I draw your attention to the linguistic situation of South Africa, above all English v. Afrikaans? Although this is a very interesting topic (certainly also for political reasons) it is difficult to find relevant material. May I therefore suggest an article about this? I am sure other readers would welcome it as well.

Ulrich Gerber, Bülach,  
Switzerland

We agree, and have had South Africa in mind for as long as *ET* has been in existence. You are, however, correct; it is difficult, and finding the right author for such a piece has so far eluded us. *Ed.*

## Genitives and aspirates

I have been reading *ET* since its first issue and I wish to send my congratulations on your fine, extremely interesting publication. I would be very grateful if you could comment on the use of the genitive instead of the *of*-construction with thing nouns. I have found it more than once, though I cannot find any grammar giving such a rule. Here are some quotations: '... while the room's crevices began to smoke ...' (L. Lee, *Cider with Rosie*); '... the fire's bright hooks ...' (*ibid.*); 'holding the ladder's top end' (D. H. Lawrence, *The Virgin and the Gipsy*); 'Efficient heating is essential to maintain a building's warmth'.

Another query I would like to make is why words such as 'historical', 'hereditary', and 'hotel' can be preceded either by 'a' or 'an'. What is the difference between the two uses?

Agnese Grammatica, Turin,  
Italy

The *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Longman, 1985) provides as detailed comment on the genitive as you will find anywhere (sections 5.112ff. and 17.38). The use of the genitive with inanimates is common and venerable, but foreign users of English have not traditionally been encouraged to try it. It is compact and focusses attention more on the possessing than the possessed. As regards 'a/an' with *h*-words, usage varies. Both occur internationally and are somewhat controversial; the 'a' is probably commoner, the 'an' more grandiose, especially if the 'h' is still pronounced. 'An' recalls a time when speakers of the standard language tended not to pronounce the 'h' (as is still the case with 'honour'). Among people who generally 'drop their

itches', the 'an' appears to be the spoken norm. Further comments are welcome. *Ed.*

## Pronominal problems

Much as I enjoy reading *ET*, I am often irritated by the lapses of grammar and style by apparently well qualified contributors. It has been said that war is too important a matter to be left to the generals. I am beginning to think that the battle for good grammar is too important to be left to the academics. Here is a selection of howlers from the last two editions:

● 'America has twice proved its superiority in modern times, once by forcing an end to the years of isolationism in 1853 and then by their victory in World War II' (John Dougill, *ET*12).

● 'The BBC representative will find themselves in an establishment role . . . . The person from the Queen's English Society will consider it their duty . . . . If our panel can agree on that, it would be a constructive step forward' (Paul Harvey, *ET*13).

With friends like these, who needs enemies?

John Elliott,  
UK Delegation to NATO

## Reaping the malefit

Recently on BBC Radio, a reporter said words to the effect: 'Because of a disastrous planting season, when rain made the ground almost impossible to work, we are now *reaping the benefit* in the shape of a potato famine.' In *The Listener* (14 Jan 88), writing about food, Derek Cooper wrote; 'Another salad they studied was as lethal as eating 2 cups of ice cream, and *thanks to* the meat, cheese and whipping cream, much of the fat was of the saturated artery-clogging kind.'

Benefit . . . ? Thanks . . . ? With benevolence and gratitude like that, who needs enemies already? (In addition, why did English never evolve \*malefit as an antonym to benefit?)

I very much enjoyed the 'We're bugged for bricks' cartoon. I have adapted it for the *Concise Partridge Dictionary of 20th Century Slang*, along the Pharaoh/Moses line: 'Why aren't you making bricks?' - 'We're bugged for straw.'

Paul Beale, Loughborough, Leicestershire, England

However, see James Rye's letter, p. 60. *Ed.*

## Benefiting or benefitting?

I'd like to draw attention to a curious feature of modern English - the doubling of consonants in unstressed positions in past tense and participle forms of verbs like *benefit*, *covet*, *buffet* and, especially, *target* - witness the enclosed photocopy of a letter to the *Financial Times*, in which the letter's *targeting* in the headline becomes *targetting*. Presumably a subeditor supplied the headline.

This spelling is probably due to analogy with monosyllabic verbs like *get-ting*, *fit-ted*, or verbs which take final stress, eg *forget-ting*, *regret-ted*, etc. And examples abound:

● '... *corsetted* herbaceous border plants' (*Observer Mag.* 3.8.88)

● '... the distraught and *buffeted* professor' (Tom Sharpe, *Ancestral Vices*, 1980)

● 'It's one I've long *covetted*' (Malcolm Bradbury, *Cuts*, 1987)

● '... one cannot help be [sic] *rivettted*' (*The Times*, 5.5.87)

● 'The Tory vote has *plummetted* . . .' (*Financial Times*, 13.6.84)

● 'Here the assumption is that Latin and Greek studies. . . *benefitted* British English until their fall . . .' (W. F. Bolton, *The Language of 1984*)

● 'Ought we to be actively *combatting* the gobbledygook syndrome?' (Jean Aitchison in *English Today*, 5/86)

● India's *cossetted* motor industry (*The Economist*, 3.8.85)

And *combat* and *cosset* are cases in point. Most English dictionaries give *combated/combating* as the only spelling, whereas the Longman dictionaries take a unique stand: the *Longman Modern English Dictionary* (1976) gives 'combating, Am also combatting' a position reversed for the two later dictionaries, the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1982) and the *Longman Dictionary of the English Language* (1984), which both give only *combatting* for BrE and, echoing *Webster's Third* (1971), give *-t-* and *-tt-* as alternative American spellings. Apparently alone among British dictionaries they also give an alternative pronunciation with final stress. The *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (1987), echoing the Longman dictionaries(?), gives *combating* for

American English, labelling *combatting* 'esp. Brit.'. Curiously the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* gives only *-tt-* for *cosset*, and initial stress only. But enough, the latest (1987) edition of the *LDOCE* still gives *-tt-* as the only spelling but the accompanying illustrative example has *-t-* ('these farmers have been *cossetted* for years').

Aage Lind, Senior Lecturer, Norges Handelshøyskole, Bergen, Norway

## Benefiting from good writing

I have been teaching English to Japanese college students for more than thirty years, and I take a great interest in British English and its usage. I wholeheartedly support Peter G. Westlake's suggestion that *ET* should publish an example of splendid writing as part of the magazine. I should think that these examples would not only give me a great deal of enjoyment but also benefit me immensely in my study of English. At the same time, I think that they will give my students a good opportunity to appreciate fine pieces of English writing. I hope that you will give serious consideration to Westlake's proposal.

Minoru Kaneko, Tokyo, Japan

This is not an easy matter to resolve. We would be glad to hear from more readers. *Ed.*

## Money GDP targetting

From Mr M. Weale

Sir, - I have followed with interest the City view on money GDP targetting (Bill Martin, January 22) and its academic criticisms which, I believe can be traced back to David Ricardo in 1809. The argument that the interpretation of monetary indicators depends on the structure

crisis exacerbated inflation in 1974-75. One could argue that £M3 was relevant during "corset-on" periods and M0 during "corset-off" periods. This certainly implies that for five years after the end of the corset in 1980 the advocates of a £M3 target were pursuing the wrong goal.

... feature of any

## Rooted usage

Top of my list for Fred Parrott's 'the rootedness of usage' in your January issue is *different/from*. This would also be my mother's choice.

Dr Anne L. Barker, Derby,  
England

I was interested in Fred Parrott's list of 'rootedness' in *ET*13. Certainly I don't re-arrange it, or subtract from it, but I enclose my own list: (1) self, as in 'a friend and myself', (2) point/moment in time, (3) up until, (4) meet up with, (5) for real, (6) for free, (7) free gift, (8) true fact, (9) consult with, (10) pricey or pricy, and (11) fulsome.

Number one is ineradicable, I am afraid. One explanation is that so many do not know the difference between the subject of a sentence and the object. Another is that the user thinks there is something vulgar and crude about the simple form, and so sprinkles the suffixes about as a mark of gentility. Or perhaps it is a relic of the old commercialese 'your good selves'. The proper use for emphasis and reflective function is quite ignored. How foreign students of English cope with it I can't imagine. I hope that the rest are obvious.

N. Hammett,  
Bolton, Lancashire, England

## All right with nouns, says she

One important grammatical point was not mentioned in your comments on David Hohnen's letter (*ET*13, Jan 88). The inverted verb/subject construction is generally accepted, particularly with verbs of verbal expression, when the subject is a noun but not a pronoun. This is borne out by the examples you quote from *Time* and *Newsweek*. I do enjoy reading *ET*!

Jeanne Lewis-Sturmhoefel,  
Karlstad, Sweden

## Saying and going

Can anyone cast light on a strange new alternative to the verb 'to say'? While in fiction characters have always shouted, whispered, cried, exclaimed or bellowed rather than over-work the usual verb of utterance, so far I have only come across the use of 'to go' as a synonym for 'to say' in fact. Example, a school-girl overheard talking to a friend:

'That big blond boy comes up to me and goes, "Do you know Tina?" - "Tina who?" I goes, knowing all the time who he meant. Well, he went a bit red and I felt sorry for him, so I goes, "Course I know her, I sit next to her." - "Give her this then," he went, and pushed a note into my hand.'

I have only heard this used by young people and more often than not conjugated in the present tense with the occasional past. Could it derive from the colloquial 'go on about' something? It doesn't sound American.

Patricia Cleveland-Peck,  
East Grinstead, Sussex, England

## How many variations?

Professor K. Su brahmanian, columnist in *The Hindu* (a daily published in Madras) has extracted the article 'How manyeth are you?' (*ET*12) in the issue of 15 Dec 87, and invited readers who 'have bright ideas on how this question can be framed in English to forward their suggestions'. The English don't seem to be interested in the order of birth, as you have stated in the article, but inquisitive Indians are different and Tamilians, with their insular patriotism for the Tamil language (in which the question is normal) take pride and use this as a stick to beat one with who is an ardent lover of the English language. Without going too far into the matter, I would like to say two things: one, that

each language has its own felicitous expressions which cannot be equally well expressed in another language, and two, that the sun will never set over the English language.

I did respond to Mr Subramanian's call for suggestions, and they are as follows: (1) What is your place in the sequence of births? (2) What is your rank in the order of births? (3) According to seniority where do you stand among your parents' children? (4) When arranged serially according to their births where do you come? (5) What is your number in the series of births? (6) When taken seriatim according to their births where do you come? (7) In the succession of their births where do you come? (8) In the order of births of your parents' children where is your place? (9) What is your number among your parents' children in their serial order? (10) What is your place in the position of births of your parents' children?

K. Viswanathan, Madras, India

## Not yet resigned about a lack of hyphens

I am continually struggling with the problem of hyphenation, my instinct being to hyphenate more frequently than seems to be the standard these days. *The Evening News* of Jeffersonville, Indiana (2 Dec 87) is a marvelous example of a failure to use a hyphen having produced ambiguity:

'Report says Mattingly may retire from Yanks: All-Star first baseman Don Mattingly is close to resigning with the New York Yankees, according to a published report. The New York Daily News reported in today's editions that Mattingly wants to remain with the Yankees and is expected to approve shortly a three-year deal worth \$6.7 million.'

The original Associated Press report concerned Mattingly sign-

ing a new contract (re-signing). The headline writer read only the first paragraph and understood it to mean that he was resigning (= quitting), so he substituted 'retire' in the headline. If he had read further he would have noticed that the preposition used was 'with', not 'from'.

Philip C. Stine,  
Translations Research  
Coordinator,  
United Bible Societies,  
New York City, U.S.A.

## Spoken punctuation

Following up Fraida Dubin's article (ET10) on the way face to face conversation is changing as the result of technology. A corollary to this is the way reading and writing skills are feeding back into conversation. In most languages the written word has usually followed the spoken. Playwrights, novelists, and poets have finely-tuned ears for the kind of talk that goes on around them, and reflect it. But in our time (and I think it is mostly postwar) there have emerged in conversation literary expressions such as '. . . period!', '. . . full stop!', 'quote . . . unquote' (with, in the latter case, even little gestures in mid-air). I sometimes wonder what this kind of conversation can mean to those unfortunates who have no understanding of the term used. Stainless Stephen! thou should'st be living at this hour!

Harry Morgan, Morden, Surrey,  
England

## Polysemous problems

I have hitherto used the phrase 'a nice style' to exemplify to students the tendency of purists to attack a change or accretion in meaning of one item on the grounds of etymology but completely ignore another; i.e., to use an argument when it suits them and drop it when it doesn't. My thanks to Albert Kreindler

## I have ache of head

French is a language  
abundant with idiom.  
I'd learn it fast if they'd only  
get ridiom.

Alma Denny,  
New York

(ET13, Jan 88) for providing an updated example. He seemingly wishes to restrict the polysemous nature of 'chair by refusing to allow its extension to mean its occupant, but has no trouble at all in accepting the same device to turn a part of the anatomy into a leader: 'our committee are now chaired rather than headed'. In any case, his own etymology is back-to-front: chair' as a transitive verb long predates its feminist nominal use (*Supp 1 to OED* has an appropriate citation from 1921).

M. E. Taylor,  
Doncaster, England

## Ireland and the Philippines?

I was recently in Australia and stopped in Manila on the way, as I had never been to the Philippines. But before this I had been in Ireland attending a biennial Australia Ireland conference (35% or so of the Australian population are substantially of Irish descent; 18% in New Zealand). In Manila and its surrounding countryside I was struck by the way in which English has taken over. It was most unusual for any signboard to be other than in English. There was only an occasional sign in Tagalog and this almost invariably was for some politician standing for election.

However, everyone seemed equally at home in English and Tagalog. In contrast, in Ireland, very few people are able to speak Gaelic. This is a real puzzle. I suggest that an article contrasting the rise of English in the two

countries would be of exceptional interest. It might be possible to obtain a writer for such an article through one of the Catholic religious orders.

English is now so pervasive in and around Manila and, I gather, throughout most of the rest of the Philippines, that one must be apprehensive that Tagalog and related languages could die out for all practical purposes. Perhaps the Philippines could learn from what happened in Ireland.

Leo Chapman, London,  
England

We have a relevant general feature on the Philippines in October. *Ed.*

## More than peccadillos?

I refer to the current issue of *English Today*, that of January, 1988. Now, as a former president of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and as the primary founder and first president of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), I must point out that your claim to be an "international" review is slightly weakened by the failure to indicate correctly the titles of those two organizations in the United States.

On page 41 the initialism NCTE is wrongly identified and on page 52 the acronym TESOL is likewise wrongly identified. The fact that the latter mistake appears in an article written by a Chinese professor does not make the error excusable, for you certainly can exercise an editor's prerogative to correct a contributor's article.

These rather surprising manifestations of a certain lacuna in your awareness of the scope of the English-teaching profession, though admittedly only peccadillos, are nevertheless of some significance, since NCTE is the largest subject-matter teachers' organization in the world and TESOL is the world's largest

organization of teachers concerned with teaching English to speakers of other languages.

Harold B. Allen,  
Professor emeritus of English  
and linguistics, University of  
Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minn.,  
U.S.A.

We regret the slips, but hope that the many occasions when the items have been correctly rendered will not be overlooked. *Ed.*

## Pop grammarians

In the last two sentences of his article (*ET13*), John Boyd offers an excellent (perhaps deliberate?) example of the slovenly and confused use of language which his 'pop grammarians' rightly condemn: 'like pupils of an era past tried to learn Latin' juxtaposed with 'like Latin, English too would be dead'. (I refrain from comment on the spelling of 'damn the flowing river of our language' – again, perhaps a deliberate error to provoke us purists and pedants to more fury!)

Does he teach this kind of English to his Japanese? If so, they may be too polite to refer him to *Thompson and Martinet* (hardly 'pop grammarians' these); most European students would do so. Foreign learners need to be given clear guidelines.

Personally, I find the American – now British colloquial – use of 'like' for 'as if' ('He looks like he's trying to drive us crazy') equally unnecessary, though admittedly less confusing. If there is an alternative form to denote a distinct difference of meaning, why not use it? This applies also to 'due to' and 'owing to'.

In the 1940's, those admirable and open-minded (non-pop) grammarians Grattan and Gurry taught us that 'language is in a state of flux'. It always has been. However, I maintain that a readiness to accept new usages to invigorate our language, and to cast off illogical shibboleths like

the so-called 'split infinitive', is still compatible with a respect for precision, euphony and elegance of style. Written English may approach, but should not be superseded by, the colloquial. Let us sharpen and refine, not blunt, the tools of our trade.

Joan Anholt,  
Lyme Regis, Dorset, England

## Even Cicero nodded

Dwight Bolinger (letter, *ET13*) is right to associate the *may have/might have* issue with the modal system in general, but it is instructive for the specific issue of counterfactuals to compare a similar issue in Latin. The norm for past counterfactuals is the pluperfect subjunctive in both protasis and apodosis, but if the apodosis contains an element that is in any sense 'modal' the perfect indicative may be used. Cicero actually combines the two uses in a single passage – 'quid facere potuissem, nisi consul tum fuisset? consul autem esse qui potui, nisi eum vitae cursum tenuissem?' ('What could I have done, if I had not been consul? Could I have been consul, if I had not kept to that way of life?'). Some scholars have argued for a distinction of meaning, but it seems clear that Latin writers did not make a precise distinction (*Journal of Linguistics* 13; 8–9). The explanation is, rather, that the modal element is itself a mark of unreality, and further marking of unreality seems redundant. So in English *may* is modal and in a sense 'unreal', and it is felt that there is no need to mark the unreality with *might* as well as marking the past time with *have*.

Isn't it ironic that, when so many of the rules of correctness are based upon Latin, Latin itself is full of irregularities of the kind that a normative grammarian would deplore? Or should we argue that what's good enough for Latin is good enough for English?

I hope June Bassett (letters,

*ET13*) was not implying that 'they was' is grammatically incorrect because 'they' is a plural pronoun and 'was' is a singular verb. If so, she herself is guilty of a lack of 'impersonal reasoning and clear thought'. It is the reverse – 'they' is a plural pronoun and 'was' a singular verb because (among other things) we do not say 'they was'. If someone regularly says 'they was', then either 'they' is not plural in their (sic!) speech or 'was' is not singular, or there is no rule of concord at all. Of course, we can, and do, object to 'they was', as not being acceptable in the kind of English that we speak or like to hear our children speak, but that is a different issue, and the social judgment sanctions the grammatical judgment, not vice versa.

Frank Palmer  
Wokingham, Berkshire,  
England

## A hidden language?

It was 'buggered' in big black letters (*ET13*, p.19) that first drew my attention to the hidden language of sex in this particular edition. At the time I was feeling especially virtuous as I had just left an 'A' level English language Studies class (London Examinations Board) in which I had extolled the merits of *ET* to the students (who were mostly seventeen years old and female). Imagine the growing feeling of unease as I read on and found 'penis' (p.22), 'fart' (p.34) in even bigger black letters, and 'fuck' mentioned several times (p.62).

There is, no doubt, a serious academic reason behind the inclusion of each one of the words noted above, and I shall be studying each example closely to find out what it is so that I can defend my recommendation of the journal, to any disgusted parents of King's Lynn.

I rejected the explanation offered by colleagues that the editors were having a bet to see

how many such words they could publish before the journal was banned by the government. I also accept that four words, in the context of thousands, hardly present a convincing or threatening Whorfian world-view.

I came to the conclusion that in an attempt to make the subject matter of linguistics more acceptable to the traditional worshippers of literature, you were seeking to ape one of their more earthy traditions. Chaucer would have been proud of you.

I was also surprised by George Wiley's views on the new English Language Studies course (p.30,31). My experience of teaching the course has convinced me that some students, who, in the past, may have been virtually mummified by Milton or crucified by Congreve are positively enthusiastic about surveys of local accents and dialects, and about topics such as the Language of Young Children, or the Language of the Press. In addition to appealing to Modern Linguists it is also attracting students following Social Science and Education courses. Advanced secretarial students are also attracted by

topics such as the Language of the Office, of the Law, of the Telephone.

The syllabus may appear formidable, but this is only because the Chief Examiner has helpfully taken the trouble to be precise about the metalanguage required, *much* of which is relatively easy for students to grasp. It is this metalanguage which helps students control and *comment on* the writing for different audiences that they have to undertake.

Finally, if a comprehensive index were published to your journal, I would find it even more useful.

James Rye, lecturer in English,  
Norfolk College of Arts and  
Technology, King's Lynn,  
England

### A fascinating addition to A Level

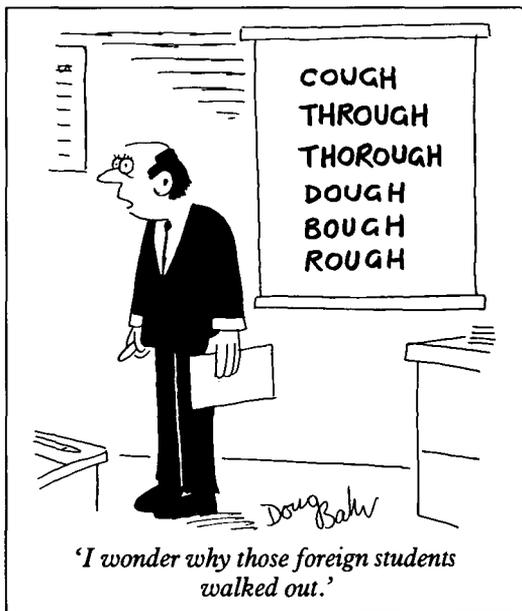
It would be a pity if George Wiley's rather dismissive references to the London Board's English Language Studies ('A New Kind of Examination', Jan 88) were to discourage English teachers who might be thinking

of introducing the syllabus at 16+.

I teach English at a Further Education College. In 1985 approximately a third of our 2-year English 'A' level students opted for English Language Studies rather than the AEB 652 Literature syllabus. Four out of five passed in 1987. This summer 50% of the corresponding 1986 intake will be sitting the examination.

Our students vary considerably in ability; very few will have studied a foreign language beyond third form secondary level and many, frankly, opt for Language Studies because they cannot relate to the 'Lit.Crit' approach of the traditional syllabus. A high proportion of our students are black; many are white working-class. They bring language experiences to the classroom which have, up to very recently, been negatively treated or ignored altogether. The English Language Studies, or 'Varieties' approach is premised on the validity of all 'Englishes', and thus ensures an English 'A' level which is accessible to all students at 16+.

The course is essentially a



practical one: a Spoken English Project accounts for a third of the final marks, and students choose their subject material from an almost limitless range of spoken varieties. They do not need, as Dr. Wiley suggests, a comprehensive knowledge of Linguistic theory. Students' own experience of language forms the basis of the course content, and instead of the 'formidable and forbidding syllabus' that Dr. Wiley describes, students and staff have found an English 'A' level which is stimulating, practical and relevant.

As yet only one of our Language students has applied to study Linguistics at degree level. All, however, have found the course contents entirely compatible with their other 'A' level subjects.

Though I do not have the national exam entry figures for the syllabus, I can assure Dr. Wiley that teachers' meetings have been well-attended and enthusiastic. More and more English teachers are recognising in English Language Studies a logical extension of the 'Varieties' approach favoured in the lower forms of many secondary schools. (See ILEA's Languages Book, for instance.) It is new for 'A' level teachers, and, of course, the newer the syllabus the heavier the demands on teacher-time – a scarce commodity these days. I think it is worth it, to be able to offer a fascinating addition to the 'A' level curriculum and, hopefully, a guaranteed readership of *ET* for many years to come!

Pamela Upton, Loughborough,  
Leicestershire, England

## A Level English language studies

George Wiley describes the new ULSEB A level syllabus in *English Language Studies* as 'formidable, comprehensive and forbidding' (*ET*13, Jan 88). This will no doubt come as a surprise

to the 550 or more students taking the examination in its second year in June 1988 and to the similar numbers taking one of the 'language' papers, 'Varieties of English', with two literature papers in an alternative *English* syllabus. Few of them intend to study linguistics at a higher level; but their teachers tell us they are enthusiastic for an alternative in English at A level, to the hitherto almost exclusive pre-occupation with literature, seen as far more related to their other studies and their future concerns: a study of the variety of other forms and uses of the language.

This is not comprehensive; no survey of the varieties of English could ever be exhaustive in any case. What the syllabus does is to introduce the students to the social, contextual and historical factors which underlie variation in the forms in written and spoken English and in standard and socio/regional varieties of the language. It is an empirical study asking them to observe language in use and to make their observations explicit, and their enthusiasm stems in no small part from discovering what as language users they intuitively already 'know' about the language.

They need some systematic ways of describing what they find, but this is no more forbidding than the descriptive terminology of any other subject. It is not a body of abstract linguistic theory; the concepts are derived from observing the functions of the forms of language in use. That the syllabus is more explicit about this than many English teachers are accustomed to is no cause for alarm. (It may be a criticism of *English Literature* at A level that it has no apparent methodology or theory beyond the catch-all criterion of 'response'.) The teachers, few of whom have done any formal linguistics, have also been delighted to find that they know more than they knew.

Perhaps the Kingman Committee will find this too.

If Mr Wiley is looking for a more informal study of contemporary uses of the language for all students at this level as well as the development of their abilities to write in different ways for different purposes he is familiar with the ULSEB syllabus in *English* at Advanced Supplementary level. It is misleading not to have considered this in his article.

K. Davidson.  
English Subject Officer,  
University of London School  
Examinations Board,  
Stewart House, 32 Russell  
Square, London WC1B 5DN

## Accents and class warfare

Is 'fascist' becoming a general term of abuse for people who are thought to be on the political right? David Atkinson (*ET*13) feels that 'some of the ideas' in my plea for greater uniformity of accent by consent (*ET*11) are 'potentially fascist'.

Like David Atkinson I believe in equality of opportunity, and I welcome the disappearance of much hereditary privilege. For that reason I was anxious in my article to nail the common fallacy that a person's accent is fixed once and for all in the first few years of his life, but it seems that my mention of public schools has acted like a red rag to a bull. These schools, I said, demonstrate that, given the will, a person may modify his accent even after the age of thirteen – but obviously only if there are suitable models around for him to imitate.

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

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I deplore the sneering attitude that was once not uncommon among RP speakers in relation to those 'not to the manner born'; but fortunately that kind of attitude is encountered less often nowadays, and perhaps Mrs Thatcher by her example may claim some credit for that. But I deplore equally the defiant, militant attitude that exists in some quarters: 'I'm darned if I'm going to try and talk posh like a b—y —.' We need to get away from dissension and class war. Is there not a touch of defiance even in the group of accents that David Atkinson labels as 'demotic' RP, the common man's RP?

I should perhaps be less than honest if I were to conceal the fact that, born a Dane, I remain a Dane and so do not formally belong to British society. But I have lived in Britain for many years and have also been in British service overseas, teaching English. It is possible (I put it no higher than that) that my origin has enabled me to take a slightly more detached, though committed, view of this matter.

Paul Christophersen,  
Cambridge, England

## On hypostatizing language

The recurrent theme of despair about the 'diseased' and 'degenerate' state of the English language in articles and other sections of *ET* (see especially the issues 5–7 and 11–13) reflects a deep-seated misconception of language. The amateurish and professional preoccupation with the 'decline' of the English language seems to be a peculiar trauma of the shamans, pop grammarians, and word watchers whose labours are well documented on the cover picture of *ET* 13.

Having read quite a few of these books, I have come to the conclusion that the criticism voiced by these doom (best) sellers suffers from two basic fallacies. One of them is the interpretation of linguistic signs as direct indicators of the extralinguistic reality. Thus the state of the things in the world is put on a par with the state of the art of English. This erroneous analogy between language and reality is often accompanied by a second false reasoning, namely the concept of language as a

living organism that is good or bad, ill or dying, deceitful or dominating. Among other causes, the so-called 'language decline' is attributed to thoughtlessness and illiteracy. But many items criticized as careless or sloppy are simply part of a changing language and language change is not an organic process of degeneration. The English language is not like an endangered human being although words like 'abuse', 'debasement' or 'perversion' imply such a view. Seen from a linguistic point of view, language is neither a photographic copy of reality nor a living organism with human attributes. The transference of disorder in society and disorder in language is linguistically unfounded. There may be elitist thinking and correctionist fervour involved in the pronouncements on the fate of English, but the deeper roots of the erroneous views about the plight or death of English are the false analogy between language and reality and the hypostatization of language.

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## CROSSWORD

### ET14 Crossworld solution

1	S	T	2	E	E	3	P	4	P	5	E	R	6	P	7	I	8	L	9	E			
	T		N		R								9	M		V				N			
10	R	I	G	M	A	R	O	L	E				11	I	D	I	O	T					
	A		I		I		T		C					G		E				R			
12	I	N	N	E	R	M	O	S	T				13	H	Y	D	R	A					
	N		E		I		N							T						N			
		14	R	E	S	E	T			15	I	D	Y	L	L	I	C						
17	F		R					18	E									O		E			
19	L	U	S	T	F	U	L						21	A	22	F	I	R	E				
					A					23	N				I			G		24	T		
25	U	N	A	P	T			27	C	H	A	L	L	E	N	G	E						
			L		T																N		
28	D	R	O	N	E			29	I	N	I	T	I	A	T	E	D						
			F		D													P		T	E		
30	R	A	T	E				31	M	E	A	N						32	S	T	E	E	R

### ET13 Crossworld winners

The winners of the *Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus*, the prize for our January 1988 crossword, are:

- W. S. Coates, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, England
- Sean Devine, Blacknock, County Dublin, Ireland
- R. A. Havery, Neasden, London, England
- Jeanne Lewis-Sturmhoefel, Karlstad, Sweden
- T. Pound, Torino, Italy