COMMENT

TAKING THE AUSPICES

The Budapest Daily News printed the report of the Associated Press of New York, entitling it ‘New magazine about the usage of English’ – then sent off directly to Cambridge asking for ET on a regular basis. Under the heading ‘Anybody here speak Japlish?’ the London Evening Standard described ET as ‘a slightly erudite glossy’ that ‘looks like justifying the backing of Cambridge University Press’. In a prime-time broadcast BBC Radio Four built a miscellany on the language around news of ET’s official launch, while the ABC’s London interview broadcast in Australia was reported by one correspondent as making her want ‘to rush out and get a copy straight away’.

The worldwide media interest has been matched by a steadily increasing and widening editorial post-bag. Responses have been coming in from all over the UK and US, from Western Europe and Eastern Asia, from Qatar to Cameroon and Guadeloupe to Morocco.

What kind of responses? Comments on contributors and content, on styles and ideas, on biographies and photographs, on usage and abuse, misprints and misconceptions, ideology and philosophy, sexual bias and spelling reform, subscription rates and availability in bookshops and bookstores. And along with it all an abundance of complimentary encouragement. The interest and enthusiasm of individuals and groups, newspapers and other magazines, publishers sending in material for review, writers offering typescripts and ideas all suggest that, as one American correspondent put it, ‘you’re on a winner’.

Post & Mail across the way seeks to reflect the variety and quality of your response (especially to Jenny Cheshire in ET1!), and I would like to add here some further answers to a range of general queries and comments:

• Yes, ET is not ‘a plain man’s [or even a plain person’s] guide to correct English’, if that means we want to be an Académie Anglaise, but we shall/will publish material that can help people decide for themselves about usage and trends in the language – a service that we believe many will welcome.

• Yes, circulation is rising steadily, and the mechanisms are going into place to make ET available at a reasonable price wherever in the world anybody wants it – but it all takes a little time and a lot of negotiation.

Time, in fact, is the essence of this issue: time and trends as the language moves towards the 21st century. Michael Swan is at the cutting edge of language teaching in Britain, while Laurence Urdang pioneered the use of computers in lexicography in the United States; Valerie Illingworth edits the Oxford Dictionary of Computing, and Tim Furniss reports on space exploration. We asked all four, therefore, to write about today’s English as it shades into tomorrow’s, and the results are on pages 6 to 15.

Other features range from Canada’s two literatures to Scotland’s three languages by way of the geopolitics of England and Ireland. Maggie Cook writes about nonsense verse, Crossworld offers prizes, ET interviews the director-general of the British Council, Lexicon looks at the diabolical dictionary-making of Ambrose Bierce, and we have a round-up of Ruppies, Euro-Yumpies and even hochmagandy among the drongos. Enjoy, as they say in Manhattan Yinglish.

Tom McArthur

The editorial policy of English Today is to provide a focus or forum for all sorts of news and opinion from around the world. The points of view of individual writers are as a consequence their own, and do not reflect the opinion of the editorial board. In addition, wherever feasible, ET leaves unchanged the orthography (normally British or American) and the usage of individual contributors, although the editorial style of the magazine itself is that of Cambridge University Press.

TOM McARTHUR was born in Glasgow in 1938. A graduate of both Glasgow and Edinburgh universities, he has been in turn an officer-instructor in the British Army, a school-teacher in the Midlands of England, Head of English at the Cathedral School, Bombay, organizer of courses for overseas students at the University of Edinburgh, and associate professor of English at the Université du Québec. He has written for many periodicals, including The Birmingham Mail, The Times of India, and The Scotsman. His publications in linguistics, lexicography and language teaching include the Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English, A Foundation Course for Language Teachers, The Written Word, and the co-editing of Languages of Scotland. He is married with three children.

Letters to the editor should be addressed either to a branch of Cambridge University Press (for forwarding), or directly to:

Dr Tom McArthur
Editor, English Today
Cherry Hinton Road
CAMBRIDGE CB1 4HD
England

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