

Bouquets

I really love the mix of styles and topics that *ET* offers. It is a very entertaining and informative journal. I especially liked the material on 'Estuary English' in recent issues.

Professor Janet Holmes,
Department of Linguistics,
Victoria University of Wellington,
New Zealand

I was very pleased to win *The Cambridge Thesaurus of American English* in your Crossword competition. I must say the puzzles are tough nuts to crack but always exciting to solve. As an avid reader of *ET* I'd like to thank you for a first-rate journal which is always of interest to me and my colleagues, Swiss grammar-school teachers.

Michael B. Rutman,
Pfäffikon,
Switzerland

Calendars

Further to Professor Algeo's article on what to call the years of the 21st century and beyond (*ET*39, Jul 94), this may be a problem for those of us who observe the Christian calendar, but as both the Chinese and Jewish calendars have long since passed this sell-by date, could we perhaps enquire how they deal/have dealt with it?

Harry Morgan,
Morden, Surrey, England

Themselves, 1862

I presume that the particular example of *themselves*, from Emily Dickinson's poetry, tracked down by Donald MacQueen and reproduced in *ET*41 (Jan 95), is not strictly singular. Rather, the form nicely captures in its plurality ('them') plus singularity ('self')

combined, the fusing of Truth and Beauty as 'One' – as the poet herself states.

Katie Wales,
Department of English,
Royal Holloway University of
London, England

Avail

I was browsing through the April 1993 issue of *English Today* and on page 2 I read your comment 'We avail everything here'.

In 1979, Oxford University Press published a book called *Indian and British English: a handbook of usage and pronunciation*. The authors are Paroo Nihalani / R. K. Tongue / Priya Hosali. This book has subsequently been reprinted and at the moment it is out of print. The OUP editor (Delhi branch) is bringing out 500 copies.

This book lists 2000 differences between Indian and British English in syntax and lexis. There is a comment on *avail* which I type for you below:

'You are invited to avail this golden opportunity.'
'Avail of this opportunity.'

Items like these occur frequently in Indian newspaper advertisements and other writing but the verb is never used in this way in BS, where one 'avails oneself of an opportunity'; both the reflexive pronoun and the preposition are mandatory. ('Take advantage of' is also frequent in such contexts in BS.) US usage seems close to IVE here, e.g. 'Community centres should be availed of.'

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.

The above is an entry in the book. BS = British standard; US = United States; IVE = Indian variant of English: (the variety of English characteristic of many Indian speakers).

Professor Priya Hosali,
Central Institute of English and
Foreign Languages,
Hyderabad,
India

● *Editor* The quotation below appeared in 1994 in a mailshot by the European Travel Network (ETN), promoting their ETN Card: 'Now there's a way to cut those costs. With an ETN Card, you and your company can avail of up to 50% discounts in over 10,000 hotels in Europe, US, Canada ...'

Vanishing articles 1

I was interested to see your entire file of examples of missing indefinite articles (*ET*41 pp. 43–4). They are certainly, most of them, very puzzling; but I think the phrase *only few* requires separate comment (you yourself talk of an 'ambiguity problem'). This construction is not of recent date, and over the years I have noted quite a few examples (despite the fact that at least one grammarian denies its existence). To most people, I imagine, the idiomatic and natural phrase is *only a few*, but to others there is apparently a clash between the negative implications of *only* and the positive value of *a few*, compared with *few*. And of course in a certain style *but few* is normal.

It may be noteworthy that my examples of *only few* are all from scholarly writings. The following quotations from well-known scholars are only a selection:

Joseph Wright, *Grammar of the Gothic Language* (1910, repr. 1937), p. 8 It occurs only in very few words [but a few lines further on: It only occurs in a few

words] / ib. p. 136 Of most verbs only very few forms occur / H. C. Wyld, *A History of Modern Colloquial English* (1920, repr. 1953) p. 80n only very few of her letters are in her own hand / Nora K. Chadwick, Preface to 2nd edn. of H. M. Chadwick's *The Study of Anglo-Saxon* (1955) p. xii I have made only very few alterations in the text / Norman Davis, *Review of English Studies* N.S. xxv no. 100 [Nov. 1974] p. 452 Transcripts of text show only few and insignificant printing slips.

Paul Christophersen,
Cambridge, England

Vanishing articles 2

Due to the activities of the British Council we can read *English Today* here in Ukraine though it comes to Kyiv somewhat late or perhaps I haven't enough time to frequent the British Council library in Kyiv. Nevertheless I managed to read the issue of *English Today*, of October 1994 and was pleased to find your editorial comment on the development of articles in Modern English because I have been doing some research on the problem of articles for several years.

I think we shouldn't jump at conclusions and claim that articles are vanishing from English. The examples supplied in your comment just point to a new trend in the development of English articles. As one can notice all your examples except one concern the absence of the indefinite article with predicative nouns / I'm important artist/. It seems that in this very position the use of the indefinite article is determined by the syntactical structure of the sentence. It means that in this case the noun has two determiners – the syntactical position which is a primary determiner and the indefinite article which is a secondary determiner. So it's quite possible that your examples demonstrate the loss of a secondary determiner, that is the indefinite article. Besides, quite known are the cases of the

absence of articles with predicative nouns denoting ranks / He is dean here / and the absence of the indefinite article with some nouns in this position in German. So it seems to be a universal trend in the development of the indefinite article in this position.

On the other hand, one should be cautious dealing with examples from newspapers because sometimes the absence of an article can be nothing more than a misprint. I have got some dubious examples from *The Daily Mail* (March 3, 1993) in which the name of a hospital is used with the definite article in one case and without any article in the other case in one text. Just compare these two sentences on page 5:

- 'When I was waiting for my tests at *Alexandra Hospital* I talked to other women who felt very much the same as me'
- 'But at *the Alexandra Hospital* manager Nicky Bateman said employees were obliged to report an injection'.

How will a native speaker of English interpret these two different uses of one name?

Besides, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that some authors render certain meanings using the indefinite article or the unmarked form / without any article / of some words. Reading the book *Language and Power* by N. Fairclough / London 1989 / I noticed that the name 'part' had both the indefinite article and the unmarked form. A thorough analysis of the examples from the book shows that the unmarked form of the noun 'part' is used in the cases when some fixed part of the whole is meant:

e.g. The following is *part* of a recommended strategy for the conduct of a 'personnel interview' /P.214/.

The unmarked form is also found when the author wants to present his opinion as objective:

e.g. I have been arguing that discourse is *part* of some practice and contributes to the reproduc-

tion of social structures /P.74/.

In contrast the indefinite articles appears with the noun 'part' in the cases when some personal or subjective view is expressed which is often reflected in the structure of the whole utterance or the fragment of the text. In the following example the modal verb 'might' shows that some subjective view is expressed:

e.g. Indeed one might regard the ability to talk or write critically about language as itself *an important part* of the child's potential language capabilities /P.241/.

Sometimes the use of the indefinite article with the noun 'part' can be explained by the author's intention to assess a notion like in the next example:

e.g. The spread of this variety into all important public domains and its high status among most of the population are achievements of standardization as *a part* of the economic, political, cultural unification of modern Britain /P.21/.

The examples with the noun 'part' reveal another tendency in the development of articles in modern English: some unmarked forms of English nouns / both common and proper nouns / acquire a new function – a function of orientation. Nouns in their orientating function / orientating nouns for short / express a fixed meaning for all situations and speakers while the meaning of nouns with the definite and indefinite articles is situational, i.e. they denote notions connected with some particular situation. Just let's take names denoting the address written on envelopes. Its components have the same fixed meaning for all people who deal with letters before they reach their addressees. Really owing to the fixed meaning of these names letters reach their addressees. That's why the central group of orientating names are nouns denoting the permanent address of a person, i.e. names of persons, and place-names / names of castles, palaces, streets, squares, settlements, countries and continents /. Names of hotels are used

with the definite article because they don't denote the permanent address of a person. There are also orientating names in other spheres of human activity. It's important to note that besides the proper names a number of common nouns develop the orientating function. Besides the noun 'part' which I have already mentioned we can explain the unmarked nouns in the so-called adverbial structures like 'to be in / go to / bed, church, hospital, class' by their use in an orientating function because they have a fixed meaning for different situations and speakers.

Another fresh example concerns the noun 'time' in the BBC guide 'London Calling' of December 1994. They write:

'If Christmas is traditionally a time of peace and good will it should not be forgotten that it is also time for good cheer'

I think that the unmarked form of the noun 'time' expresses universal view while the form with the indefinite article seems to express a subjective view which interacts with the meaning of the syntactical structure of the conditional clause.

So in my view we shouldn't speak about the vanishing of articles in English but about certain tendencies in the development of articles, though you may be right that in the final run (perhaps in four or five hundred years) they will vanish from English. But we won't be there to see it.

S. Potapenko,
Assistant Professor,
English Philology Department,
Nizhyn Teachers' Training
Institute, Nizhyn,
Chernigov Region,
Ukraine

Slavish shifts?

(1) You have identified the decreasing use of the indefinite article, and the spread of what I think of as the Conservative Party 'ay', as in "ay answer" for "an answer". The definite article is also decreasing. Could Russian

(and other Slavic languages) be the main cause? There even seems to be a shift in pronunciation among broadcasters who regularly interview people from eastern Europe. Asians in the media are influencing the language in much the same direction as the slavs.

(2) We are aware of varieties of English such as Hiberno-English, Singlish, Japlish, etc. Now, apparently, there is Banglish. This mixes English and all kinds of Indian languages and languages encountered by the Indian diaspora, e.g. Swahili. It is in use among followers of Indian influenced pop music (Bhangra, etc.) and fans of groups such as Apache Indian.

How significant is it that this new language is becoming established in Britain's cities, particularly London?

Perhaps *ET* could investigate semi-Englishes and their place in the continuum that makes up modern English: Pidgins – Creoles – Semi-Englishes – Recognised Englishes.

Robert Craig,
Weston-Super-Mare,
Avon, England

A reply on Singlish

I am again, albeit belatedly, delighted to see the further response that my article on Singlish (*ET*34, Apr 93) has aroused both in Singapore itself and in China. I think I may have the right to reply to Anthea Fraser Gupta's article 'The truth about Singapore English' (*ET*38, Apr 94) since the title implies that I was not telling the truth. I can only apologise for my tardiness in doing so.

Whether one likes to call it Singapore Colloquial English or Singlish or the Singapore patois (Arthur Higbee), it is clear that the dialect does exist to the extent that it can be described and analysed as such, though since the Prime Minister declared some years ago that he was dissatisfied with the standard of

English heard in Singapore there have been attempts, as it were, to sweep it under the carpet. I certainly never intended to demean Singlish any more than I would wish to demean my own variety of Scottish English.

To take the points where my name is taken (if not taken in vain!) in turn:

(1) 'Contrary to Forbes' observations /r/ and /l/ are distinguished by virtually all speakers.' I can only suggest that Gupta and I have been speaking to different people. Many of my English-teacher diploma students have made that specific point in their examination papers.

(2) 'It would be impossible to make Forbes' mistake and hear /i:/ as *hit* – there is no *h*-dropping in Singapore English.' I suggest that there is *h*-dropping in Singapore as there is in England. It is quite normal to drop /h/ in rapid speech in such a sentence as 'I hit my foot'. In dropping the /h/ in my example I was not suggesting that this was a particular feature of Singlish in contrast with other Englishes.

(3) 'Forbes' example of the pronunciation of /bɒtə/ for *bothered* is impossible.' Yet Gupta goes on to say that speakers of many varieties of English do use a plosive in place of a dental fricative. How impossible? I have often heard it.

(4) I did not blame anybody for anything in my article, nor did I specify 'Brits' amongst the billion or so native speakers of English. But I would not go so far as to write with one of my Singapore student-teachers that 'If Singlish is taught as a second language only Singaporeans can understand it.'

(5) It was my intention to make an analysis not to paint a 'negative' picture. That has been done by Singaporeans themselves. However politically correct one may be, one must admit that the policy of Government to minimise Singlish in favour of 'standard' English shows both that Singlish is still alive and well and that its reduction in currency is sought.

Finally, a word about Adam

Brown's vocal system of Singapore English quoted by Gupta – 'uə/ as in *poor*.' This is so rarely heard in England today, except amongst the diehard ladies of Kensington, that at least one author has dropped it from his inventory of English phonemes, a move with which I, as a Scotsman, disagree. I believe my Singlish speaker would say /pʊ/.

Alas, in spite of my six years'

residence in Singapore and the same number of extended visits since, I am unlikely to return. Otherwise it would be my pleasure to meet the distinguished author and discuss our points at issue on the ground in a spirit of friendly scholarship.

Reading the articles 'Chinglish and China English' and 'Chinese English' (both *ET*41, Jan 95), which were sparked off by my

article, the significance for Singlish, as far as contrastive analysis is concerned, seems to be that although Putonghua (Mandarin) is now the taught Chinese languages in Singapore, the majority of the ethnic Chinese population came from Cantonese and Hakka-speaking backgrounds.

Duncan Forbes,
Hythe, Kent, England

CROSSWORD

ET 41 CrossworLd answer

1	M	E	D	I	C	A	L	5	B	L	E	S	S	E	D		
	A		E		R		E		L		X		T		E		
9	L	U	B	R	I	C	A	T	E	10	C	O	R	A	L		
	D		U		E		N		E		U		A		U		
11	E	N	G	A	R	D	E	12	P	A	R	A	D	O	X		
	M						S		E		S		D		E		
13	E	N	F	A	N	T	T	E	R	R	I	B	L	E			
	R		O		E						V		E		S		
		17	D	O	U	B	L	E	E	19	T	E	N	D	R	E	
20		D		T		U		N		E						A	
21	E	S	C	O	L	A	R	22	E	N	23	M	A	24	S	S	E
	J		L		I		O		D		A		T		A		
25	A	T	O	C	S	26	U	N	L	I	N	K	I	N	G		
	V		T		E		T		E		O		N		L		
27	U	N	H	O	R	S	E	28	D	E	R	E	G	L	E		

ET 41 CrossworLd winners

The winners of the *Chambers Encyclopedic English Dictionary*, ed. Robert Allen, the prize for our January 1995 crossword, are:

Michael Ferguson, Berlin, Germany
Kelley Hayden, Iowa City, U.S.A.
David Hopkinson, Kinlough, Co. Leitrim, Ireland
Fiona Rae, Thwaite, Eye, Suffolk, England
Leila Ward, Combe Down, Bath, England

CrossworLd confusion

We wish to apologise to our many CrossworLd enthusiasts for a serious faux-pas in *ET*42, Apr 95. Through a slip-up in the production, instead of providing the solution for CrossworLd 41 (following normal practice), we printed the solution to CrossworLd 42 itself, making it impossible for anyone to submit completed copies for the prize draw. Our apologies to Frank Palmer and his worldwide band of aficionados, and our rueful thanks for the phone calls and letters arising from this snafu. Preventive measures are in hand. The following two *cris de coeur* are representative of the reactions we received:

- Received *ET* at the weekend – HORRIFIED to see you've printed the answers to the *current* Crossword instead of the last one!! No point in doing the crossword, as I've seen the answers – oh, what a disappointment. Three months to wait for the next opportunity! My weekend was ruined!!

Val High,
Ware, England

- I notice with both amusement and dismay that the *ET*41 CrossworLd answer listed on page 64 of the *ET*42 issue (Apr 95), is actually the answer to the *ET*42 CrossworLd, thus spoiling my fun! However I still enjoyed what was left!

Theodor Teichmann,
Upton, New York, USA