

Creative miscommunication

Spelling mistakes, or typos, in more advanced stages of civilization can be very stimulating for the reader. In fact, it is not always clear how far deliberate respellings are intended as puns or shockers.

Was Mulcaster intending a political comment on the state of Elizabeth's reign, or on the form of rule in general, when he said in *The First Part of the Elementarie* (1582):

(1) *Our state is a Moanarchie* (his emphasis, text in Görlach 1991: 230).

The following thought-provoking typos all come from my editorial practice of the past few years. None of them is deliberate, but they permit interesting insights into the handwritings of authors and the mind-workings of type-persons:

In the 1980s, American morticians offered a new service; it now became possible to send your beloved deceased's ashes up into orbit (in a collective receptacle) where it is certain to circulate for a guaranteed span of 200 years. A timely new word for this procedure is provided, apparently, by the printer who gave us

(2) *ORBITUARY*

on the contents page of *English World-Wide* 5 (1984).

Seaspeak and airspeak have become, over the past few years, well-established functional varieties of English. We do seem to lack proper terms, however, to distinguish the pilots' and the air controllers' subvarieties. A typo has suggested to me a viable solution. A text on pidgins contained the combination

(3) *aerolect and basilect*,

a set of terms which beautifully captures the two complementary directions of communication involved.

The discussion of what functions the Scots language has,

and should have, in our society has been a matter of controversy for some time (see McClure 1988). However, one need not go so far as to state:

(4) *It is a striking feature of present-day Scots that translation demonates literary activity as it seems to do.*

(Is there a reminiscence of Dr Johnson, who held that "the great pest of speech is frequency of translation"?)

Little did Roger Lass think about creating a new exotic variety when he used the term 'Extraterritorial Englishes' for the New Englishes overseas. Was there a reference to varieties even further away in the phrase I discovered on a disk?

(5) *Extraterrestrial Englishes*
Colonialism and colour have long been the historical problems of Africa. It must have been illegible handwriting with creative imagination that produced the suggestive merger of the two I found in a computer printout:

(6) *neo-colourialist policies*

My imagination fails me how to interpret the typo recently detected, but *ET* readers may have a Freudian solution. The greatest revolution in the development of English sounds was triggered off by

(7) *the Great Bowel Shift.*

References:

- Görlach, Manfred. 1991. *Introduction to Early Modern English*. Cambridge: University Press.
 McClure, J. Derrick. 1988. *Why Scots Matters*. Edinburgh: Saltire Society.

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Comparative English?

A major theme which has emerged in *ET* over the years is

the need for a discipline of 'Comparative English'.

We find descriptions of Indian English, Nigerian English, etc. What does not exist is the recognition of a general English. There is little consideration of the features of General English which may be common to Indian English, Nigerian English, Russian English, Japanese English, Scandinavian English, etc., but which are not found in British, or American English. Even British and American English are seldom treated as part of the greater whole.

Shouldn't effort be put into recording the grammar of General English; as in the past it has been put into encoding national varieties of the language?

A related matter: Appearing before the House of Commons Heritage Committee (Thurs), Lord Attenborough claimed that money spent on the British film industry was a good financial investment, because the British and Irish actors employed spoke *Lingua Franca*. Of course, they do not actually speak *Lingua Franca*. However, it is clear that for Lord Attenborough, the term "English" did not convey the meaning that he was trying to express. Increasingly, people are beginning to feel that "English" is too restrictive a way of referring to the language.

Perhaps *ET* could investigate an alternative name for the language?

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-Nership

I've heard today's English likes words ending in *-person* better than *-man*, although some people might say that *-person* gives them an impression of being clumsy and artificial, English dictionaries have come to adopt a

lot of *-person* words, such as *spokesperson*, but not *sportsperson*, which is a kill-joy.

Nevertheless, nobody wants to use words ending in *-personship* instead of the conventional *-manship*. Why not? You avoid *-man*, while you take *-manship*. This is the very soul of English that a foreigner can never get to understand.

What should we do, then?

I encourage you to use *-nership*, a formative element based on “*partnership*”, whose shade of meaning is completely lost. I believe this is the simplest way to avoid *-manship*, but not necessarily the best. That depends. Some possible re-formations could be:

- brinkmanship → brinknership
- chairmanship → chairsnership
- craftsmanship → craftsnership
- marksmanship → marksnership
- one-upmanship → one-upnership
- salesmanship → salesnership
- statesmanship → statesnership
- swordsmanship → swordsnership
- yachtsmanship → yachtsnership

If you want to avoid words ending in “*-man*”, you should also avoid “*-manship*”. I’d recommend you to use “*-nership*” for “*-manship*”, which is not difficult to deal with. I hope the English Language has been getting better for foreigners.

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Her and us

Professor Honey argues convincingly (ET44, Oct 95) that certain combinations involving pronouns undergo a kind of *freezing together* that overrides normal case rules. And he produces some fascinating examples of well-known people using such phrases as *of my wife and I*, *to feed we reluctant human beings* and *to he who thinks*.

Only one of Professor Honey’s quotes shows an inappropriate object pronoun (*taking what us journalists are doing*), but this is

not an isolated instance, although I would agree that overuse of subject pronouns by ‘educated’ persons is probably the prevailing trend. Here are a few more ‘frozen’ objects in appositive phrases:

1. The beautiful stallions were kept to one side of the route and us spectators were kept to the other. (Anita Leslie in her book about Randolph Churchill, *Cousin Randolph* 1985)

2. Us chaps do a little better than we did in 1938 but there are still 70 per cent who don’t do any housework at all. (columnist in *The Daily Telegraph*, 15.4.88)

3. Certainly the Treasury will be a duller place [without Nigel Lawson] and us scribblers will long bewail the removal of a marvellous source of copy. (Jock Bruce-Gardyne, writing in *The Spectator* 11.11.89)

4. That’s as near to Christ as us poor creatures can ever get. (artist Tom Keating speaking on the BBC – regret no date)

‘Wrong’ use of object pronouns also occurs in coordinated phrases:

5. We are awaiting anxiously to hear how serious Patti’s injuries are. Both her and Charles went out to join the Royal skiing party. (Mrs Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York’s stepmother, commenting on a serious skiing accident involving Charles and Patti Palmer-Tomkinson: report in *The Times* 11.3.88)

6. Louis, Tony Fitzpatrick and me did a world first. (An English teacher, now a university professor, speaking at a British Council English teaching conference in Vienna in 1989)

So, if both subject and object pronouns can be frozen, what influences are at work? Professor Honey mentions – and rejects – *genteelism*, but seems to favour hypercorrection, a better word for much the same thing, as an explanation for the overuse of subject pronouns. This seems likely. Many people are not

interested in analysing grammar, but if as children they were corrected for saying *me* and *her* when they should have said *she* and *I* they may well assume that subject forms are better.

Contributory factors with some phrases may be ‘notional’, underlying meaning and also the ‘rules’ of ‘subject and object territory’. A *new European Parliament elected by you and I* is one that you and I have elected; *Lest we forget he who couldn’t* clearly implies that he couldn’t forget. If something *made Genia and I realize* then meaning is reinforced by *Genia and I* being in subject territory immediately before the verb.

A further influence on choice of pronouns could be ‘register’ and levels of formality. Establishment figures, politicians, media personalities are mostly self-confident people who see themselves as people whose actions and opinions affect and influence others – they do not see themselves as powerless objects to whom things are done. It may not be entirely fanciful therefore to suggest that such people perceive *I* and *we* as more accurately projecting the right public image. (*Me* is altogether more private, even vulnerable.) On the other hand, if public figures want to sound more friendly, more ordinary and like the rest of us, then they can become *us scribblers* or *us chaps*. They may even say *Her and Charles went*.

Incidentally, a mixture of hypercorrection and ‘object territory’ may account for some well-attested incorrect uses of *whom*:

7. A big, almost green moon had been pasted, by whomever is responsible for providing such detail, over the dark roofs of Slaka. (Malcolm Bradbury *Rates of Exchange* 1983)

8. His parents, whom he thought were still alive ... were tailors. (Richard Cobb, *A Sense of Place* 1975)

9. Someone is fibbing, but whom? (Robert Robinson, on the BBC: regret no date).

That at any rate one of these usages is seriously regarded as acceptable is shown by part of a parliamentary sketch that appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* on 16.6.88:

10. This led, though, to a shrewish intervention from Mrs Audrey Wise (Lab, Preston). "Common courtesy should be extended to whoever (sic) is on her feet at the time!" she screamed.

The sic is Mr Simon Heffer's, not mine.

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At the Czech factories of Asea Brown Boveri, English operates pretty much that way, though turbines replace the cheese. ABB has 200,000 workers; 20,000 speak English. It has 7,000 workers here; nearly 1,400 need English, and 800 of them are studying it. Otherwise, no one could stand up for ABB Prague when ABB Paris faxes:

"We are very stonished of you new scheduled deliveries for casing and we cannot accept such a slippage!"

Says Erik Fougner, the country manager, "One of the things we all have in common at ABB is we all speak poor English. We get by with what we have." Mr. Fougner, who is 35, comes from Norway. He speaks German, and

his English isn't poor at all. He has a satellite dish and likes watching MTV. But Mr. Fougner has a problem with CNN.

"This Bettina Luscher," he says. "She has like a potato in her mouth. I suppose this is some very highbrow American English. Where does she come from? East Coast?"

Not exactly. She comes from Germany.

"German! I would never have thought that she is a German. She doesn't have a German accent. She must have a very good ear for the language. She's German? Oh, God. That is amazing."

Mr. Fougner pulls a face. He doesn't know what to make of it. He can't take it in. His goat has been gotten. He's flummoxed. **ET**

CROSSWORD

ET 45 Crossword solution

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3	A	M	I	D	S	U	M	M	E	R	10	D	O	O	M						
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ET 44 Crossword winners

The winners of *William Shakespeare: The Extraordinary Life of the Most Successful Writer of all Time*, by Andrew Gurr (HarperCollins, 1995), the prize for our January 1996 crossword, are:

H. E. Bell, Reading, Berkshire, England
Roma Hutchinson, Escrick, York, England
Mrs Sybil Sarel, Birsay, Orkney, Scotland
Dr Theodor Teichmann, Vienna, Austria
Mr Gill Webber, Anderson, Indiana, USA

