

Dualling dictionaries

Josephine Bastian looks at The Macquarie Dictionary and The New Oxford Dictionary of English and tells us why the well-balanced editor needs a dictionary in each hand.

The Macquarie Dictionary (*Third Edition*), *The Macquarie Library*, 1997. RRP \$69.95. 2544 pages, 243 mm x 185 mm.

The New Oxford Dictionary of English, Clarendon Press, 1998. RRP \$89.95. 2152 pages, 270 mm x 210 mm.

Sometimes it seems a vital thing to have good dictionaries; it seems that language is very close to the core of our being. We are born to talk, as much as to act; mother tongue is our motherland. The way we speak, that we speak our meaning and mean our speaking, surely is important: 'How should we speak?' becomes, at least momentarily, an issue closely akin to 'How should we live?'

But at other moments a dictionary seems a pointless exercise. As a dear friend who is a computer whiz said to me last night, 'I haven't used a dictionary since I left school. There's Spell Check; and I know enough words and what they mean'. Mostly, we come down somewhere in the middle ground. We recognise that we have need of dictionaries for a hundred and one different uses, sensible or playful, and possession of a good one is a source of real satisfaction and pleasure.

Two major dictionaries of particular importance to editors have appeared here within the last year or so. The third edition of *The Macquarie Dictionary* (Macquarie) was published in November 1997 (reprinted twice in 1998), and *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*

(New Oxford) appeared in November 1998. The Macquarie, 'Australia's National Dictionary', is entirely Australian-made, while *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, true to its inter-

national status, was designed and typeset in England and printed in Spain. These volumes are two of a kind, both very substantial bricks. New Oxford weighs more than three kilos. Macquarie
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Next meeting: Tuesday 4 May 1999

Compelling judgments: the rhetoric of language prescription

Pam Peters

The word 'correct' comes easily to prescriptive language commentators, says Pam Peters. They aim to motivate their readers to adopt one particular expression or construction and foster the belief that their selection is the only 'proper' one to use. The way they make their recommendations can be quite sophisticated, however—invoking value systems such as linguistic 'good health', social acceptability and educational credentials, and using passive constructions such as 'X is to be preferred' or 'Y is to be shunned' to imply that their recommendations have the weight of 'an indefinitely large group with impeccable judgment'.

Pam Peters is an Associate Professor in Linguistics at Macquarie University and convenor of its Graduate Diploma in Editing and Publishing. She founded the publication *Australian Style* and wrote the *Cambridge Australian English Style Guide*.

NOTE OUR NEW VENUE:

Level 5, Wynyard House, 301 George Street, Sydney (very close to Wynyard Station). See enclosed leaflet for details.

6.30 pm for 7 pm. Drinks and light refreshments provided. Non-members welcome. RSVP by Friday 2 April to (02) 9294 4999 (voicemail). Members, \$12; non-members and those who don't RSVP, \$15.

For the diary:

Tuesday 1 June: Writing and editing annual reports

Dictionaries

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more than two-and-a-half—don't drop either of them on your toe! New Oxford's slightly larger dimensions make it the easier one to handle. They also mean it can accommodate three columns per page to Macquarie's two, and thus it probably does bear out its claim of being the biggest one-volume general dictionary in the world, despite being 350 pages shorter than Macquarie.

Either one of these dictionaries would be an invaluable addition to your shelf of reference books. I have to say—though mindful of the rather lavish cost—that possessing both would be considerably better. Each has its own characteristic flavour, and so they complement each other. More important, though, each has its own set of features that are extremely good and are not duplicated in the other one.

The Macquarie

It's very pleasing to welcome the third edition of Macquarie, and to salute an

Australian publishing success story. The press kit that came with the review copy, while generally cool and restrained (particularly so, if compared with the hype introducing New Oxford), suggests that having a national dictionary of high quality should be a source of pride to Australians. One does not have to be a jingoist to see the force of this; it is certainly more useful on a day-to-day basis than having our very own flag, and may well be more conducive to forming a conscious national identity.

The particular value of Macquarie is, and remains, its Australianness, the fact that it gives an unrivalled account of the language Australians talk and write. As David Malouf says in his Preface, 'What we find when we go to consult it is another and more orderly version of the world we are in, confirmation, of the intimate sort, of where we have come from, and where and who we are'.

Whichever ethnic strand and region of the country you belong to, I guarantee you will find words here you didn't know were ours (such as *ang pow*, *achar*, *ashes bread*), while others will be as

familiar to you as your face in the mirror (words like *correspondence school*, and *stubbies* for shorts)—yet you won't find them in another dictionary.

Comparing the third edition of the Macquarie with the second (1991), one is certainly much more aware of similarity than difference. This is scarcely surprising, and it no doubt means that if you liked the previous edition you will like this one.

There is the same excellent choice of typefaces, the same wealth of encyclopedic facts. Entries are structured in the same way (now sometimes enhanced with usage notes or extra information), and are accompanied by a generous listing of equal and secondary variants, inflected forms and phrasal verbs. These are large and small points that are all much appreciated when one is editing.

The vast majority of definitions are unchanged, since they apply to words whose sense has not changed in the intervening years. Even so, I could wish there had been a more careful revision.

For instance, my old bete noir, the definition of *hubris*, has not been corrected. And the definition of *gay* is the same, thus giving as the first and central meaning *having or showing a joyous mood*; the only change here is the addition of a usage note that already looks old-fashioned (*Some people still take objection to the meaning 'homosexual'...but there is no denying the currency of the word with this meaning, etc.*).

The more interesting class of entry, of course, is that where the definition has perforce been changed or enlarged, to keep pace with current usage. Thus in 1991 we had *political* but not *political correctness*, *millennium* but not *millennium bug*; and *his* and *man* subsisted without any attempt to caution us about their use.

However, while the foundations are the same, several prominent features distinguish the new edition. It contains hundreds of new words originating here and overseas. There is pleasure in discovering the considerable number of expressive foreign-language words that migrated here with their speakers, and have now settled into the Australian language.

Aboriginal words with broad currency have begun to find a place, along with some Aboriginal uses that differ from standard Australian. The senses of *cheeky*, for instance, reflect the usage of

Society of Editors (NSW) Inc.

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Membership

Membership of the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. is open to anyone working as an editor for publication (print or electronic documents), and anyone who supports the society's aims.

Membership runs for a calendar year. 1999 fees are \$45 for new members (\$25 if joining after 30 June) and \$40 for renewals.

For a membership application form, phone (02) 9294 4999, or write to PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007.

Blue Pencil

The society's newsletter, *Blue Pencil*, is published monthly, except for a combined January/February issue. Your comments and contributions are welcome. Mail them to Merry Pearson at 55 Collins St, North Narrabeen, NSW 2101, or fax or email them to her as per the contact details on the back page.

Deadline for the June issue is Monday 10 May.

Advertising rates:

Full page, \$90; Half page, \$50 (horizontal only); One-third page, \$35 (vertical or horizontal); Quarter page \$25 (horizontal only); Sixth page, \$20 (half of one column). Inserts: \$50 per hundred for DL-sized or A4 pre-folded to DL size. Circulation: approximately 275.

Committee meetings

All members are welcome to attend the society's committee meetings. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 11 May at 6 pm at the Graphic Arts Club, 12-26 Regent Street, Sydney. You are also welcome to join those committee members who stay on to enjoy a fine Chinese meal.

three different groups in our culture—colloquial Australian, Aboriginal, and Singaporean and Malaysian English (and one would do well to get them sorted out before mixing in a different group!). What's more, all senses differ more or less subtly from the standard English given in New Oxford.

In the previous edition, if the editors considered a word needed clarification by being used in a phrase or sentence, they made one up on the spot. In the present edition, these illustrations are much more likely to be drawn from Australian and British authors.

This is entirely in line with current practice, yet it leaves me feeling puzzled. Are these fragmentary sentences intended to throw light on the language, or the literature, or what?

For instance, the entry for *minatory* has been 'enriched' by a citation from AA Phillips: *at the back of the Australian mind there sits a minatory Englishman*. The editors (Introduction, p.xii) tell us that this is Phillips' 'summary explanation of the cultural cringe'. Thus annotated, his words appear witty and perceptive; but torn out of context do they add anything to the entry, or even make much sense? Some of the citations—I shan't quote examples—simply make me wonder if the author had the benefit of an editor.

The New Oxford

Publication of *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* fittingly marks the status of English as the dominant world language. A pity it arrived with such a blast of self-advertisement that I for one reached for my copy with gritted teeth.

Was it in truth 'the most important new English dictionary for 100 years'? Could it in fact 'show how words are really used and what they really mean'? So it cost more than three million quid, did it, and six of the best years of the lives of 30 editors and 60 'world-wide consultants'?

How come, then, that Judy Pearsall's name was up there on the title page as sole editor? Was she some kind of a wizard who had sub- or consumed the work of all the rest?

Only opening the volume, with its beautifully laid out pages printed on smooth acid-free paper, could begin to mollify me. Gradually but completely I was won over, and in the end I could even acknowledge distinct traces of some transforming wizardry.

For an unexpected grace of this dictionary is that it has unity of style. One voice speaks to us from beginning to end, and the tone is direct, almost informal, yet clear and elegant. We encounter it first in the Preface, where some account is given of the new principles on which New Oxford is written. Some key sentences:

'[T]he focus has been on a different approach to an understanding of "meaning" and how this relates to the structure, organization, and selection of material for the dictionary . . . [We have] taken full advantage of new techniques for analysing usage and meaning . . .

'Foremost among them is an emphasis on identifying what is "central and typical", as distinct from the time-honoured search for "necessary conditions" of meaning (i.e. a statement of the conditions that would enable someone to pick out all and only the cases of the term being defined).

'Past attempts to cover the meaning of all possible uses of a word have tended to lead to a blurred and unfocused result, in which the core of the meaning is obscured by many minor uses. In *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, meanings are linked to central norms of usage as observed in the language. The result is fewer meanings with sharper, crisper definitions.'

Meanings and definitions

Can fewer meanings comprehend all the richness of English? There is, I suppose, some risk that a nuance may go unremarked, or that over-simplification will leave us uninformed, that the meaning will simply not be elucidated after all. At times it may even come down to personal preference, which *kind* of definition you prefer. Here to sample are the entries for *millennium bug*.

New Oxford: *a problem with some computers arising from an inability of the software to deal correctly with dates of 1 January 2000 or later*.

Macquarie: *the inability of computer systems to recognise the abbreviation of the year 2000 as the final two digits '00', in accordance with the convention that the year is reduced to the last two numbers adopted in the 1960s because of the small amount of data storage space available at that time*.

It will be an interesting exercise, sometime when one has a quiet hour and

a clear head, to compare the performance of New Oxford and *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* on some of the more difficult words, perhaps the notorious *set*. (Macquarie lists 88 meanings for *set*, all flowing together in one long river of grey type.)

Should your dictionary also serve as style guide?

Macquarie and New Oxford both address the issue of changing word usage, and of what constitutes correct usage, good grammar or even good taste. To what extent, if at all, should a dictionary try to lead its readers through the maze of style? This is a step into unknown territory and, once entered, where will a poor lexicographer ever emerge? In any case, as Macquarie points out, normal dictionary structure does not cope well with discussions of the type generally found in style guides.

Macquarie does provide some brief usage notes. The tone is rather formal ('*attract opprobrium*'), but the words get to the point. See, for instance, the note attached to the entry for *boong*: *This is one of the small group of words which when used within a community have no derogatory overtones, but when used by outsiders often have such connotations*.

However, the editors draw back from getting too much involved in the area of style: 'We do not . . . see the dictionary as competing with a style manual. There is still a lot that would be found worthy of comment in a style guide that the dictionary leaves to be conveyed within the limitations of the entry. The usage notes are provided when the resources of the entry have been exhausted but there is something more to be said' (Introduction, p.xiv).

It sounds like a disclaimer of any true utility. Or at least I *think* it does. As all too often, the clumsy sentence construction obscures the meaning; this Macquarie is no model of good clear style.

New Oxford takes a more positive approach. It comments that 'Interest in questions of good usage is widespread among English speakers everywhere, and many issues are hotly debated. In *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, traditional issues have been reappraised, and guidance is given on various points, old and new.

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Editing other Englishes

I have occasionally had to write or edit for British or American audiences in addition to Australian ones. There are confusing differences between the three languages, so when I read the review that follows I got carried away and actually ordered the style guide. You can purchase it via the Web; delivery takes about two weeks and the total cost is about A\$55.

The review describes the book fairly accurately, although I feel it is more enthusiastic than the book deserves. My initial surprise was that the book was so short. Of the three sections mentioned in the review, Part 1, a typical style guide, is about 70 pages and Part 2, American and British English, is just 14 pages. Part 3, Fact Checker and Glossary, is 55 pages of a somewhat random collection of information, and seems there to make up the weight.

Part 2 is quite useful for its size, and points out differences between American and British English that I hadn't appreciated, particularly in regard to punctuation. It also covers differences in spelling and meaning, and includes a long list of word pairs (like *nappy* and *diaper*, *ex-serviceman* and *veteran*) that are best avoided in writing meant for both audiences.

There is also an introduction, which discusses the role of editors. It says the usual things, but says them well.

I am not sorry I purchased the book, although I feel it's not as important as the American reviewer seemed to think. I have also learned to look at *The Economist* with more respect.

The review is reprinted with permission from the *IEEE Professional Communication Society Newsletter*, which is published bimonthly by the Professional Communication Society (PCS) of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

Bruce Howarth

Economist style

The Economist Style Guide, 1998, London: *The Economist*, 160 pages hardcover, ISBN 1-86197-111-7.

Turn back the clock. Recall the questions in quizzes in your 10th grade English class in high school. (If you are a PCS member outside the United States, imagine what they could have been like.) The archetype question asks you to assess the grammar of a few sentences and correct any errors you find. Consider, for instance: 'I met Dr. Jones near his office in St. James's Street. He said: "I am on my way to hospital"'.

Would you change the order of the quotes, change 'in' to 'on,' remove the final 's' in 'St. James,' insert a 'the' before 'hospital' and move the final period before the last set of quotation marks? Would your corrected version read: "I met Dr. Jones near his office on St. James' Street. He said: 'I am on my way to the hospital.'" If so, you would have done well. But if you had been in an equivalent class in a British school, you would have done less well, as the sentences are correct in British English.

It's nuances such as these that distinguish the two major varieties of English from each other. In a manuscript they comprise the stamp of its original syntax. No alteration of *-ize* endings to *-ise*, no word-processing spell checker or find-and-replace tool can transmute American English to its British cousin, or vice versa. The differences are deeper. That may be why denigration of the overseas version of English runs strong on both sides of the Atlantic. Woe betide the British youngster, however well schooled, who attends an American school, as the above example connotes. And woe betide the American author who submits a manuscript to a British editor who may contemptuously strike out its 'Americanisms'.

Volumes have been written on the subject, most of them ponderous and few of them readable. Fortunately, there is a no-nonsense succinct guide, American and British English, which is one of three parts in *The Economist Style Guide*. The other two parts, The Essence of Style and

Fact Checker and Glossary, are longer but equally as straightforward and useful. *The Economist Style Guide* is my choice for the best of its genre for writers working internationally.

The Economist newspaper, as it calls itself despite being in magazine format, is also a linguistic benchmark. Its articles are well written, well edited, and almost always unsigned. 'This newspaper' (as it refers to itself in texts) also guards the language, not haughtily but humorously, in the sporadic Johnson columns, named after the famed lexicographer Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) and located in the Moreover cultural section in the back of each issue. The weaknesses of English recur as themes: 'The case against capitalism' (3 October 1998, p. 113) ridicules the rules for capitalization, as most languages get along without them. Punctuation is often punched, as in 'Apostrophically your's' (11 May 1996, p. 97). And the 'standard English' of academics is frequently put in its place, most recently under the written Cockney title 'Watch ah', 'ere comes Professor 'Oney' (27 September 1997, p. 102). And where else, outside of arcane journals, could one learn what France's greatest lexicographer, Emile Littré (1801-1881), said when found by his wife *in flagrante* with their housemaid (24 April 1993, p. 94)? [The exchange, which makes sense in English as in French, reflects classic precision: 'Emile, I am surprised!' she cried. 'No, my dear. You are astonished. It is we who are surprised,' he calmly replied.]

The explanations are as thorough as the leads are amusing. Mrs Littré, had she spoken English, could have traced her usage back to Daniel Defoe. Through the centuries words slide up and down the scales of denotation and connotation. And those who defend the language for academic reasons are, it seems, defending little more than their reputations.

The title of the magazine (er, newspaper) is *The Economist*. But for a professional writer, it might as well be *The Entertainer*.

Michael Brady

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

The 1999 committee met for the second time on Tuesday 13 April 1999.

Standards and accreditation issues

(working group: Rhana Pike, Cathy Gray, Jo Healy-North, Bruce Howarth, Margaret Olds)

The NSW group has produced a revised draft of the Standards on Substantive Editing for distribution to the other members of the national working group on standards.

Drafts of all sections have been received from the other societies: Copy editing (Canberra), Proofreading (WA), Knowledge of the Publishing Process (Queensland) and Management and Communication (SA). Each group will now comment on the whole and a revised draft will then be compiled for discussion in each state in July/August.

A meeting of the full national working group is planned for September and will probably be held in Sydney. The NSW society will contribute \$498 to another society's travel costs, in accordance with the CASE proposal (confirmed at our recent AGM) for helping the smaller societies to attend national meetings.

Cathy Gray spoke to students of Macquarie University's Graduate Diploma in Editing and Publishing in March about the development of the standards.

Ethics

The draft code produced by the Ethics working group last year has now been submitted to the full committee. It may be appropriate to consider the code of ethics in the context of the national editing standards and this possibility will be examined by the NSW standards group.

Register of Editorial Services

The 1999 edition is now complete, but still needs to be formatted for printing. A searchable electronic version will be placed on the society's Web site immediately.

Council of Australian Societies of Editors (CASE)

(NSW representative: Cathy Gray)

The main national activity has been on

developing the editing standards. The national journal has been unfortunately delayed because John Bangsund, the editor, had to be whisked off to hospital last month. Good reason to miss a deadline, eh? We wish him all the best for a speedy recovery.

Other matters

• Jo Healy-North is investigating the possibility of producing a publication

based on the Successful Freelancing seminars held in 1995 and 1998.

• A 'corporate memory' folder is being compiled, containing procedures and useful information for future committees.

If you'd like to contribute in any of these or other areas, contact one of the committee members involved (see list page 6).

Dictionaries

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'The aim is to help people use the language more accurately, more clearly, and more elegantly, and to give information and offer reassurance in the face of some of the more baffling assertions about "correctness" that are sometimes made' (Introduction, p.xiv).

The outcome is that New Oxford provides a great many and sometimes quite lengthy usage notes. They are not only informative but in a number of cases, by giving us the history of a word, e.g. *man*, or *dis/uninterested*, they take all the sting out of the controversy.

As well as these notes on usage, the entries in New Oxford include a wealth of additional material, 'information which is relevant and interesting' (Introduction, p.x)—word histories, folk etymologies, grammatical notes, citations showing typical use, technical or encyclopedic information. Yet the layout is uncluttered and so well organised that it is easy to find the core meaning of any word and to navigate the entry as a whole.

An innovation here is the use of separate boxed notes. Where a note on usage or other extra information is included with an entry, this is printed in darker type on a grey ground. These separate blocks of shady grey may sound like a daft idea, but in fact they work wonderfully well. At any page opening, they attract the eye and often mean that one can go straight to a wanted detail without wading through a long entry.

Among its printing credits New Oxford lists a designer—Andrew Boag, of 'Typographic problem solving,

London'. There is no way of knowing just how and where to apportion praise—and no need to know. One can simply say that, between them, this team of editor and editorial staff and designer has produced an exceptional dictionary.

To sum up

The Macquarie Dictionary is an essential reference for a working editor, because it is current and exactly relevant to where we are. But if you would like brilliant design and the clarity and precision of streamlined definitions in a dictionary that gives aesthetic pleasure as well as comprehensive and up-to-date information, why not treat yourself to *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*?

Lastly, a timely word from Terry Karlbom, Swedish-born Secretary of International PEN: 'Languages are awfully important to human beings, and may there never be just one language in this world'.

Josephine Bastian

New members

A warm welcome to the following, who have joined the society since the beginning of the year:

Carolyn Cannon
Ken Method
Desiree Segal
Cheryl Williams
Jill Wilson

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Member discounts

Don't forget to show your society membership card if you're shopping at the following retail outlets:

Bookshops

Abbey's Bookshops

131 York St, Sydney

(02) 9264 3111

10 per cent discount

Pentimento Bookshop

275 Darling St, Balmain

(02) 9810 0707

10 per cent discount

Computer equipment

OmniSystems Network Solutions

Unit 2, Burwood Rd, Burwood

(02) 9744 7638

Up to 25 per cent on computer hardware, software and training

NOTICE BOARD

Structural editing workshop

By the time you read this, all places may be filled in the society's structural editing workshop with Jacquie Kent (15 and 22 May). If you're still interested, send in your registration form immediately or, better still, contact the convenor, Cathy Gray (phone/fax (02) 9130 8331, email <cgray@mpx.com.au>) directly.

IMPORTANT:

Membership survey enclosed

Our 1999 membership survey is enclosed with this issue (the last one was in 1997). Please take a few moments to fill it out and send it back in the reply paid envelope. It helps the committee monitor your satisfaction and give you the kind of services you want.

Galley Club meetings

Upcoming Galley Club meetings include:

19 May: Panel discussion on the future of book printing.

16 June: Changing jobs (with Alison Aprhys, Bookstaff)

23 July: Galley Club Awards ball

18 August: AGM

Fax Hari on (02) 9878 8122 for details.

BP goes international

We've received a request from the editor of *CopyRight*, the newsletter of the Society of Freelance Editors and Proofreaders (SFEP), in the UK for permission to reprint the transcript of Heather Cam's talk at our November meeting (published in the January/February 1999 issue of *Blue Pencil*). Of course, both Heather and the society have given permission, and the article is expected to appear in the June or July issue of *CopyRight*.

In passing, *CopyRight* editor Simon de Pinna mentioned at the end of his request that he'd published Phil Bradley's article on email hoaxes and viruses (it appeared in our January/February issue) in their April issue. He said he'd found it in the online newsletter *Free Pint*, which he thinks is very useful to editors/writers working on the Net. I'd not heard of Free Print (I'm pretty sure I found the article in Edline), and checked out the URL he sent me.

According to the blurb on the *Free Pint* home page, it is 'a free email newsletter giving you tips, tricks and articles on how and where to find reliable Web sites and search more effectively. It is written by information professionals in the UK and is sent to more than 20,000 subscribers around the world every two weeks.' I managed to subscribe during my visit there, but Ozemail kicked me offline before I was able to look at any issues of the newsletter (topics of the current issue include metatags, chemistry sources and a book review). Perhaps you'll have better luck. It's at <www.freepint.co.uk>.

Merry Pearson