

## She did do it right

John Elliott is wrong in saying (*ET*12, Oct 87) that Mrs Thatcher used bad grammar when she said: 'A long-distance runner' makes sure he finishes strong', and not 'strongly'. 'Strong' here means the state in which he finishes, not how he finishes. It is the same as, 'He painted the fence green', where 'greenly' is obviously wrong.

Eric Wyeth Gadd says (same issue) that the use of 'You can say that again' arose after World War II. However, I am certain that Oliver Hardy said this to Stan Laurel countless times in their films of the 1920s and 30s. Does anybody else support my claim?

Lastly, is it incorrect English to say something along the lines of, 'I'll tell you what I do do, and that is . . .'. Should the double 'do' be a single? If so, how can the 'do' be stressed other than by use of the voice? Does anybody know the answer?

Keep up the good work, *ET*.

Tim Parker,  
Belvedere, Kent, England

## Was it indeed so?

Firstly, please accept one more heartfelt thank-you from a grateful reader. Secondly, a nearly spontaneous response to Gianni Pilone-Colombo's letter (*ET*12, Oct 87) regarding the lack of equivalents in English to *n'est-ce pas* and *non e vero*. As a Canadian with a number of colleagues throughout the United States I learned that 'one may know a Canadian (read Southern Ontarian) by the use of the interrogative *eh*'. An example would be, 'It's a beautiful day. Eh?'

In some parts of the United States, and I believe it is Southern California, the interrogative 'okay' is used in the same fashion: 'We were late

getting here. Okay?' Somewhere in my travels I have heard the frequent use of the interrogative 'right': 'She's smashing. Right?' The Ontarian 'eh?' surely must come from *oui* or *oi* or *ay*, by way of Quebec or England. The 'okay?' well may be *och aye*, and have come earlier from the same place(s) as *oc* and *oi* in French. So some of us Anglais, as they say in Quebec, do use our version of *n'est-ce pas*. Non e vero?

May I venture to seed a discussion? The above interrogatives are traces of that which preceded formal debating rules. At the fairground, in the pub, over the back fence, intelligent discussion required that as each brick in the logic of a telling was placed, the speaker would pause and issue the challenge: Is it not so? And each other member of the discussion group would know that this was the moment to concur or challenge on that particular point. Is this the root of it? Does civilized discussion go back so long a way?

Devon Smith  
Ajax, Ontario, Canada

## Downside up

I read with interest and some amazement in *ET*12 (Oct 87) the ABC of words to which the preposition *up* can be added [in Ronald Roper's letter]. I am wondering if any readers have noticed what seems to me to be a change of usage with regard to *up* and *down*. In my speech, it would be usual to say, 'It is up to them . . .' (e.g. to make a decision). Now on television I hear, 'It is down to them . . .'. Also, 'down to' seems to be replacing 'due to' or 'because of', as in the sentence: 'The defeat of the cricket team was down to the expert bowling of the opposition.' On the other hand, where I would logically (it seems to me) say 'slowing down', I hear reporters saying 'slowing up'.

One can devise possible reasons – e.g. after all possible avenues have been explored, then the bottom line is reached, and the final decision is dependent on the people at the bottom of the list. Or, in slowing up, one's foot comes *up* off the accelerator. I wonder if this is genuinely a change of usage; or am I simply noticing variations in regional speech? Perhaps my own is non-standard in this respect. Any comments?

Joyce Killick  
Dawlish, Devon, England

## William out-Shakespeared

It's a lovely game, and you encourage us to play it, although we need no encouragement. You print letters like the pithy one from Jack Conrad (*ET*9, Jan 87), in which he objects to the 'modern fashion of turning nouns into adjectives, and adjectives into nouns, and also verbs into nouns.' You do this just so that I can reply, borrowing and adapting the words of that great, contemporary writer, William Shakespeare: 'Modern me no moderns, and also me no alsos!'

Paul Thompson,  
Shrewsbury, Shropshire, England

## An untimely usage?

On recent visits to Britain – both North and South – I have been struck by the omission of the word 'past' to designate the half hour when people tell the time. I recall particularly the sleeping car attendant at Penzance, Cornwall, who said he would wake me at Paddington, London, with a cup of tea at 'half-six', meaning half *past* six. Scandinavians and German speakers will be especially confused if this usage spreads, as 'half six' in their countries can

only mean 5.30, not 6.30. Does this development in English usage – if it is one – mean that we shall have to teach our students here in Norway that 6.30 can be rendered ‘half six’ as well as ‘half past six’?

Dr C. J. P. Beatty  
Institute of English Studies  
University of Oslo, Norway

## Modden English Easage

I have recently been reading a collection of cartoons by the scurrilous, irreverent and witty Steve Bell, of *The Guardian*. He has a remarkably acute ear for accents, as for example such upper-class developments as, ‘I dain’t wish to knay abite binders withite trizers’ and ‘Sex is something bigger than begs’. However, it seems to me that there’s one upper, or perhaps not so upper, class usage that he’s missed. I’ve heard it on our local radio, as well as on BBC Radio 3, and some of our more poshly-spoken (mostly girl) students at the Art College where I am librarian use it. I think of it as the thinning of ‘u’ into ‘ee’, and it seems to be a fairly recent development in England. Thus, you get, ‘It’s asserlectly heege’, for something rather large, along with computers that are ‘easer-friendly’. Radio Leicester says things like, ‘There is congestion, and motorists are advised to ease the side roads’, when it is presumably the main road that really needs easing.

Paul Beale, Loughborough  
Leicestershire, England.

## They may never have realised

Sidney Whitaker (*ET*11) makes a courteous and careful analysis of the misuse of ‘may have’. I have twice corrected one editor of a weekly periodical for two ‘may have’ captions to disaster photo-



‘You can tell  
he’s had the benefit of a  
classical education.’

graphs this year (1987). For me this usage can never be legitimate, even where it fails to mislead. Many changes justify themselves: this, never. It is one more example of ignorance about or contempt for the exact meaning of words, an ignorance due probably to the loss of grammatical training, a contempt learnt from the climate of society. As we expect road users to observe road discipline even when the road is clear, we should demand a habit of precision even where the context is clear.

David I Masson,  
Leeds, England

## Could they have used women?

I hope I can add some belated support to the letter from Gupta, Bradshaw and Hunston in the July 1987 issue on ‘The Story of Men’s English’.

Mr McCrum’s apology for the criticism that women were woefully underrepresented in *The Story of English* is purely pathetic. I’m not competent to judge visual sequences for the camera, but I have done research in some of the areas that in the series were represented only by male speakers, and assure them that there are many females

capable of speaking quite ‘fossilized’ language while carrying out such arcane traditions as, say, cooking and knitting.

There are also a number of informed, respected and sensible expert professionals, both native and non-native speakers of the language varieties in question, who were not interviewed, and who are women.

Perhaps the series team’s concern for using women ‘wherever (they) could’ should have extended to getting someone on the top team – female or male – who would have troubled to extend the limits of their ‘could’.

Lise Winer,  
Southern Illinois University,  
Carbondale, Illinois, U.S.A.

## Whatever happened to Gaziqe?

The English language is strewn with the corpses of dead words, words that are coined but never make it into the mausoleums of dictionaries. One such coinage is *Gaziqe*. On May 26, 1916, a writer for the New York *Herald* undertook a short article on popular slang words and phrases and listed the ‘Best Sellers in City Slang’. The most popular terms from city to city were:

Indianapolis – Hot Dickety  
Dog  
Boston – I should worry  
San Francisco – Are you Jerry  
to the old Jazz?  
Denver – It’s mush to me  
St. Louis – Gaziqe  
New Orleans – Make a little  
Dodo

The anonymous writer went on to explain, ‘Now in San Francisco, the most popular word is the old “jazz”. It means anything you may want it to. There was a St. Louis man there who thought it was real cute. He was trying to kid me, and just to show him I was wise, I said, “Hot dickety dog.” “I see you’re there with the jazz,” he says. “Get it?”’

“Hot dickety dog,” I said nodding.

“Down in New Orleans they say, “I think I’ll make a little Dodo,” meaning they’re going to hunt the hay or go to sleep.”

Thus, the meaning of *Make a little Dodo* was made abundantly clear to the *Herald’s* readers, but what about *Gazipe*? Was it just a nonsense sound tossed in to throw the non-citizen of St. Louis off the scent? *Gazipe*? The word is not even listed in Eric Partridge’s *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, nor does it rear its obscure syllables in Mitford M. Mathews’ *A Dictionary of Americanisms*. Anyone out there have a clue? *Gazipe*?

Louis Phillips,  
New York City, U.S.A.

## A loss, in real terms

Godfrey Talbot’s article (*ET*11, Oct 87) reflected so much of what I used to teach, that I might well have written parts of it, and indeed did, in the English Syllabus I produced in the late ’60s for my last school. The grammar section was based on ‘The Sentence’. Godfrey Talbot would approve! The adoption of my syllabus was followed by an HMI’s ‘thumbs-down’ regarding the English teaching in that school, condemning the teaching of grammar, spelling, punctuation and speech, i.e. study of vowel sounds, clear consonants, audibility and pitch, brought together in Choral Speaking, and incorporating the learning by heart of excellent poetry. This, near the end of my teaching career, was the second shock administered by an HMI, the first coming at the beginning, in my probationary year, when another told me (of essays), ‘You don’t have to mark them, just tick the end.’ I took no notice of either inspector.

Those who ought to know better and who wield power over teachers – no wonder they are leaving the profession in droves –

## On the pronunciation of a word of foreign origin

How do yieu  
Pronounce Adieu?

Quite a few  
Just say Adyew.

Maybe you  
Prefer Adou.

But rhyme with Huh  
And say Adyuh.

It’s not parfait  
But anyway  
No answer’s pat  
On zings like zat!

Alma Denny,  
New York

have much to answer for, and Godfrey Talbot is right to see ‘a generation of handicapped children’ and that ‘finger on the Atom Button’. The worrying question is, who will be teaching the teachers, if Kenneth Baker [United Kingdom Minister of Education] is to achieve his aims [of creating a national curriculum, for England and Wales]? Is it already too late? Has ‘discipline’ joined the ranks of dirty words?

Separately, can anyone tell me what ‘in real terms’ means? It is a favourite and irritating expression – doublespeak? – used by those who would like to deceive us (and themselves?) as to the ‘real’ state of affairs. I have made a point of asking MPs and Ministers about it, and on one occasion a Post Office official investigating my wrongly-routed, delayed mail, and who used the expression to enhance her figures (which did not tally with mine, of course!) to define it. Nobody has. Perhaps nobody can? My polite requests meet a deafening silence. It does NOT mean ‘in reality’! It probably means, ‘how much x would have been twenty years ago’, which is small comfort when one counts

the actual (‘real’?) cash in one’s purse. How sad that any language should become a subject for derision. We will have laughed at the examples of doublespeak in *ET*12, but is it really funny? In real terms?

Sybil Sarel,  
Stromness, Orkney

## Sex-free pronouns revisited

I used to believe I was virtually alone in noticing that the English language had no pronoun which could represent any one person, and got quite worried about the damage this did to sex equality in law as well as prose style. Now, a generation later, I have found, on encountering earlier issues of *ET*, that a solution was mooted as long ago as 1860 and, as your publication makes clear, I am not alone in worrying.

Nowadays, more people are aware that there really is a problem than in 1965, when I first put my concern in black and white. A firm of manufacturers had published a series of such excellent little booklets on words and their use that I asked the group to have a go at gender words. The reply concluded: ‘... and so let’s leave it at “him” – and, who knows, perhaps this personal pronoun will soon follow in the wake of our trousers. Be patient, my dear! Humorously, of course, ...’

I had been metaphorically patted on the head, but their wording was clearly well-intentioned and, in the context of the times, gave no offence. It had been foolish of me to expect a firm who probably had no women customers to pay attention to feminine words of any kind. After all, I had in 1954 demonstrated to myself that people choose words for their profitability – by ringing all sexist terms in various newspapers. The marks demonstrated that the quality press of the time was bought by men, being

written for and about men, some of the writers being quite aggressively masculine though others might just have been writing for anyone. The tabloids, relying on female buying power as well as male, hardly had a ring on them. They showed that if the effort was worth while, prose could be made gender-free.

The difficulty then as now, as your *Kaleidoscope* item 'Oxford's New English' demonstrates (*ET*13, Jan 88), the difficulty lay less with nouns than with pronouns. In 1955, London Transport, wanting to encourage people, women as well as men, to use their buses, published an advertising pamphlet. Its nouns were impressively non-sexist – traveller, passenger, car-driver, etc. – but not so its pronouns. Feminine as well as masculine were used, and their placing made it clear that men worked; women just went shopping.

Nowadays, it is almost universally agreed that there is a problem and mostly there is a knee-jerk reaction. Women ought either to swallow their pride and be content to be referred to as 'he', or they should accept an oblique pronoun like 'one' or 'they'. But swallowing their pride is no help if it results in injustice and inaccuracy; and though 'one' and 'they' work in some contexts, in others they do not. How, for example, should an accurate speaker complete the instruction, 'Find any employee and give this to—'? With 'him'? The employee might be wearing a miniskirt. With 'her'? But what about the beard? With 'one'? Impossible. With 'them'? The successful change from singular to plural in the second person ('thou/thee' to 'you') is in no way paralleled by the third-person shift. No. If existing words could do the job, they would have been doing it long since.

The solution is clearly to invent a new word, much as 'it' emerged in the Middle Ages as the pronoun for non-living things. Such a new pronoun, I

## Sadness

Sadness is looking into the mirror and seeing lines on my face.

Sadness is having no idea of how to grow old with grace.

Sadness is wanting to wear mod-mod clothes and not having the figure.

Sadness is longing to try a short short longyi and knowing I'll invite a snigger.

Sadness is imitating the youngsters' expressions; And sadness is listening to them and getting depressions.

Sadness is counting strand by strand the hair that's turning grey.

Sadness is feeling bone weary, dead tired day after day.

Sadness is assuring myself that age is only a number.

Sadness is starting a diet, going through the days in hunger.

Sadness is pretending I don't need glasses; And Sadness is the time when men no longer make – ugh! – passes.

Daw Khin Thant Han,  
Mandalay, Burma

think readers would agree, should be monosyllabic, not already in use, similar enough to the existing personal pronouns to fit comfortably with them, but not so similar as to cause confusion – and capable of terminal sibilance to show possession. In terms of Britain and much of the Commonwealth, it would also be practical if such a word began with 'h', so as to be in harmony with such entrenched initials as HM, HRH, HMS, HMI, HE, and HMSO. Fortunately, there is one monosyllable which fulfils all these

criteria; han, with the possessive hans.

The next problem is to get it used. The promotion of justice being a main reason for the demand for a gender-free pronoun, where better to start than with the law? The original Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 in Britain aimed specifically at ending discrimination against women and at redressing their grievances, applying only incidentally to men. It was introduced '... with a view to helping a person who considers that he may have been discriminated against ... to formulate and present his case ...'. How much more logical if it could have been worded '... with a view to helping a person who considers han has been discriminated against ... to formulate and present hans case ...'. Does *ET*'s readership include an MP who, fortunate in the ballot, would be willing to devote hans precious Private Member's Bill to this cause? Does it include any of the compilers of the Civil Service Code and Guide? The sooner the matter is opened for discussion again, the better, if the readership is working toward improvements in the language. Forward, *ET*.

A. M. Stratford,  
King's Lynn, Norfolk, England

## Subjunctive doublespeak

The only trouble with 'a few further subjunctive thoughts' (as added by David Crystal to my article in *ET*12, Oct 87) is that they are not subjunctive. In stating that the subjunctive 'expresses resolutions, demands and other mandatory attitudes', David Crystal joins the writers on grammar, including the two most recent, Quirk and Burchfield, whose ideas and vocabulary have been passed on unchallenged for centuries. But what is 'mandatory' about its most common use? –

I suggest he come tomorrow.

Or what is 'legalistic in style' about? –

There is the possibility that we try something else. (ET12, p. 29).

Or about? –

We are recommending that the Minister of Education introduce . . . (ET11, p. 21)

Also stated is that the subjunctive tends to be replaced by the indicative or by a construction with 'should':

I demand that he leave at once.

- a) I demand that he leaves at once.
- b) I demand that he should leave at once.

The indicative expresses facts. What fact does (a) express? How meaningless the ungrammatical substitution makes the sentence is even more evident when we use the progressive:

I demand that he is leaving.

Compare:

If he were informed he would resign.

in which the 'were' states a condition, with:

If he was informed he would resign.

This 'was' is not an ungrammatical substitute for 'were'. It is indicative because it states a fact. The thoughts expressed are utterly distinct, and when grammarians condone ungrammatical use they are wiping out the means to make the distinction.

Construction (b) lingers on in Britain, though decreasingly as Crystal points out, thereby confirming the trend noted by Fowler in *Modern English Usage* (1965). But grammatically, to insert the 'should' changes 'leave' from subjunctive to infinitive following elided 'let' or 'may'; thoughtwise, 'should' impedes the flow of emotion from main to subordinate subject thereby



*'I looked up the absolute participial phrase and you'll be pleased to know you were right, after all, dear.'*

weakening a demand for action into an assertion that he ought to act.

In spite of having no subjunctive characteristic, *Suffice it to say*, *Heaven forbid*, and *Come what may* are classified by Crystal as 'formulaic subjunctive where the regular third person singular form is disallowed'. But where is the third person? Because infinitives don't have persons, it makes no sense to say *Comes what may*.

Because 'formulaic' is in quotation marks it may be after Quirk, who is an artist in the use of the doublespeak so appropriately defined by William Lutz in ET12: 'language that pretends to communicate, but really doesn't'. The prize example is Webster's *Third's* definition of subjunctive – a sixty word sentence including ' . . . relating to a verb form or forms that represent an attitude toward or concern with a denoted act or state not as a fact but as something entertained in thought as contingent or possible or viewed emotionally . . .' Believe it or not the example given is *God bless you*.

Compare this with the OED's succinct and accurate: 'The subjunctive is proper to subordinate clauses.' Would not one think that British grammarians would

prefer their own? But no, they, including its editor, ignore it.

That doublespeak has been a major factor in hiding the nature of the subjunctive signifies that there must have been an overwhelming cause that mesmerized the thinking of grammarians. We find the clue in Fowler's *Modern English Usage*. What is disconcerting about his disquisition on the subjunctive is that, though he understood it, most of his examples are not subjunctive:

Come what may	<i>infinitive</i>
Go away	<i>imperative</i>
I wish it were over	<i>optative</i>
If it were so	<i>conditional</i>

There we have the original cause of our trouble. Our earliest grammarians were first Latin scholars, so what more natural than to transfer its fourteen or so varieties into English. But they just would not fit the genius of the English language. It has its own modes (style) of expressing our thoughts. The four most commonly confused with the subjunctive are the imperative, optative, conditional, and indicative. Because our subjunctive is limited to use in subordinate clauses it is ineluctable that what is called subjunctive in Latin will often belong to a different mode as shown above. Trying to explain an expression as subjunctive when it is something else results in the doublespeak that makes the word meaningless. Worse, it covers up the presence of the proper mode. Most stubbornly ensconced of the resultant misconceptions is the 'conditional subjunctive' usually called 'contrary to fact': *If I were you . . .*

I say this with feeling because for twenty years I taught my classes that the 'were' was past subjunctive. Indeed, it was not till I was working on *Our Language* that it finally dawned on me that it could be only conditional – wasn't that what the 'if' had been trying to tell us all these years? Till we under-



stand that the conditional is not some kind of subjunctive we can't very well distinguish between our two conditionals – 'were' and 'would', as in:

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.

If I were you I would take a chance.

With the discovery that neither 'if' nor 'were' belong in the construction of the subjunctive my understanding of its nature took a quantum leap. So did my appreciation of the functions of 'were'. It has at least a dozen distinct uses. Doublespeak has had a field day as grammarians have tried to explain one use in terms of another. Most of the grammars I have examined give

as examples of the subjunctive some version of *If I were you . . . , I wish it were.*

Had their composers paused to ask by what reasons those 'weres' are subjunctive they would have realized there are none. Simply and clearly the first 'were' is conditional because it expresses a condition; the second 'were' is optative because it expresses a wish.

John W. Peters,  
Springfield, Ohio, U.S.A.

## The English languages

In the cover feature for *ET*11, July 87, Tom McArthur asked: 'If there are now English literatures, can the English languages be far behind?' Michael Baber's *GCSE English* also appeared in July 87, published by Stanley Thornes, £4.95. It is a friendly and practical book for British secondary schools that incorporates the approach to language awareness of Paul Harvey and Peter Strevens in *ET*13 (Jan 88). We reproduce in the headings for the first chapter, in Baber's table of contents:

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How many English languages are there?  
Is this your problem?  
Regional accents and dialects  
Slang, catch phrases and colloquial expressions  
Idioms  
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