Bouquets

It seems to me that *English Today* improves with every issue, going from strength to strength. That is a high compliment, coming from an amateur – but one with a life-long love of words! Every good wish for your continued success.

George Milne,
Boca Raton,
Florida,
USA

The British Council Library is the only place in town where I can find *ET*. Their policy is to keep journals only until they are one year old, issues older than one year are donated to I don't know whom or what institutes. Unfortunately, the back issues of ELT/English language journals still on the shelf are no longer for lending. We are free to make photocopies(!), though. So, usually when I visit the library, I read whatever copies available and make photocopies of those parts which interest me. I find *ET* not only informative but also enjoyable and I hope it will continue its being fun to devour. Wishing you a lot of success.

Nari Kurnia,
Attria Jaya Graduate School
of Applied Linguistics,
Jakarta, Indonesia
(by email)

Brickbat?

Is there a prize for identifying the *unintentional* mistakes in Adrian Room's otherwise excellent article 'Troubled *Times*' (*ET*47, Jul 96)? I found *bone* fide errors and *betwitching*, and then looked very carefully but unsuccessfully for more. An article on misprints must be the ultimate proof-reader's nightmare.

Janet Longden,
Bristol, England

Little old moi

With reference to Katie Wales' request for information about *moi* users: it has come to be quite common among my family and friends, in recent years, invariably as a way of conveying mock innocence. The context is usually the assertion 'You did/would do X', to which the answer, with high falling-rising tone, is *Moi*?, meaning "Would I ever do X!' It is only used in an informal jocular way, and has completely lost its original Miss Piggy pretentiousness. There are also *moi*-phrases - *little moi*?, for example.

Incidentally, Katie is wrong to interpret the *mwah!s* in the *Daily Telegraph* quotation as a spelling of *moi*. I direct an arts centre in Holyhead, and have therefore quite often found myself attending social occasions in the arts world where I hear *mwah* as normal behaviour – used most commonly by women (to both women and men). It refers to the noise made while pretending to kiss someone during greeting or leave-taking: the cheeks are placed adjacent to each other so that the mouths do not meet, and the noise is made during the cheeky contact. If both cheeks are used, there are two *mwahs*. The [m] is usually lengthened. It is a form of phatic communion. The intimacy it represents is apparently superficial, and personally I don't like it when it's done to me – though I hope I'm linguist enough to see that it's no more than a convention, as innocent as shaking hands or asking 'How are you?'. It has no relation to *moi*.

David Crystal,
Holyhead, Gwynedd, Wales

Mwah!

"Dodgy, moi?" is one thing.

"*Luvly* to see you, dulling, mwah, mwah," is an embrace with a non-contact kiss on each side of the head!

Sorry, Katie: you'll have to learn to turn the other cheek!

Michael Russell,
WORDSmith, Thames Ditton,
Kent, England

Zis iz Kaos

I read with interest your reprinted article 'Helo! Zis is somzing I zink yu vil lik ...' Your correspondent is correct in thinking that it has 'been making the rounds for years.'

The copy I have been using these last ten years to teach about phonetic and traditional orthography to my English Language A level students comes from the *Reader's Digest Junior Treasury* where I read it first in 1962. The edition is dated 1960 and gives Dolton Edwards as the author, adapted from 'Astounding Stories.'

The main difference in the articles seems to be that Bernard Shaw was the inspiration for the earlier version, while the EU takes the blame for the later. I prefer the original title, too: 'Kaos in ce klasrum' which, while no more accurate today than in 1960, has an impact which makes it a useful teaching resource for me.

Duncan Grey,
Cambridge, England

Y'all's balls

It has been our custom for several years now to extend our golf season by taking ten-day trips in spring and fall to Staunton, Virginia. This city of 24,000 people surrounds a magnificent property called Gypsy Hill Park whose amenities include an 18-hole golf course of daunting configuration. Both the town and the golf course consist of a series

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of steep hills and valleys, unbroken by anything save the minutest of areas that could be characterized as flat. The greens surmount steep banks of rough and consist of smooth convexities that defy retention of any but the most expertly struck ball, except those that land by accident, and it was in one of these rare instances that, after the breathless climb to the top, my wife and I were surprised to find that both balls were on the green. We were also surprised to see that we had company in the form of one of the local youths, who, leaning on his bicycle and smoking a cigarette, asked 'Are them y'all's balls?'

Now, over the years we have become accustomed to being addressed as 'you all' when together in the South. I have always regarded this usage to be a manifestation of the natural grace and courtesy of the Southerners – an inborn desire to avoid any risk that a second person – especially if female – might take offence at being ignored. This could be a more refined version, perhaps, of the cruder, but nonetheless sincere, adoption by some of the Irish of 'youse', or as in the case of local waitresses transplanted form Pennsylvania, who are not quite ready to adopt the 'you all' form, the use of 'you guys' to show that they had at least entered into the spirit of Southern courtesy.

But back to the question asked by the boy with the bicycle. At the time I thought that his use of 'them' as a demonstrative pronoun betrayed a degree of illiteracy that might justifiably render suspect the term 'you all's' as a valid local second person plural possessive form. I knew I had heard him correctly, because when we got to the top he asked, 'Why did y'all leave y'all's cart at the bottom of the hill?' I looked down at the cart. We had, indeed, undertaken an unnecessarily exhausting climb, and the boy obviously wouldn't have done anything that stupid. I decided that he must be just smart enough to know the correct usage, and that I should accept 'you all's' as a valid second person plural possessive form without further question.

I made my way to the bottom, retrieved the cart, and thoughtfully drove it to the top.

Philip Thornhill,
Newmarket, Ontario, Canada

Pronunciation guidance

Helen Fraser's proposals for an easy-to-understand pronunciation system (*ET*47) are aimed at users of dictionaries, and were tested on potential users. I propose a broader approach that will benefit not only dictionary users but any English speakers who needs help with the pronunciation of unfamiliar words.

Dictionary users have time at their disposal to lean a pronunciation system, and to ponder its application to a particular word. But there is a group for whom time is at a premium, and for whom a highly understandable system is critically important. I am talking about broadcasters. Announcers are faced with unfamiliar words (usually names) as a matter of daily routine, and news readers in particular may have to read an item of late-breaking news that is handed to them while they are actually on the air. They can only hope that the item does not concern some person or place with a jaw-breaking foreign name with a tricky spelling, because there is not always time for leisurely scrutiny or the consultation of a pronunciation guide. On the page, the unfamiliar word is often followed immediately by a phoneticised version in parentheses, and this information has to be absorbed on the run. In such a situation, it is vital that a pronunciation aid be intuitively understandable.

When I was training announcers and news readers, it soon became obvious that current pronunciation guides were largely unsatisfactory, even though they avoided the use of IPA symbols. The BBC's guide used superscripted diacritical marks to show stressed syllables, to represent indeterminate vowels (schwa), and to indicate the vowel of 'high'. (The name Haydn was transcribed as hĺdŏn, giving a ratio of three diacritics to five alphabetic characters.) American guides for broadcasters were usually more friendly – they broke up words into syllables – though they often seemed excessively intent on devising ways to represent schaw: favourites were UGH and UH.

Over the course of a number of years, and after various amendments and simplifications, I found that a system emerged that was as near to foolproof as I could make it. What follows is an inventory of the points of advice that I eventually drew up for myself, and that I willingly pass on to anyone faced with a similar task.

1. The system must be usable in handwriting, otherwise you can't jot down notes for yourself or other people, or scribble suggestions in the margins of typewritten scripts. This means declining Fraser's proposal to use bold typeface for stressed syllables.
2. The system must be usable on a typewriter – not everyone has a word process. Most diacritics are not available on typewriters. In fact some of the BBC's diacritics were not even available on a word processor. Use capitals to indicate the main stressed syllable: these 'shout' at you and are intuitively understood even by people who have been given no prior knowledge of the pronunciation system: POSS-sib-l
3. Separate the syllables by hyphens. This linking device (also proposed by Fraser) is already familiar to readers, and is therefore more friendly than the use of the period: AB-domen rather than AB.do.men.

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4. Short vowels (*bag, beg, big, bog, bug*). Beware of allowing a single short vowel to 'float' as a syllable in its own right. Fraser is right to make use of a following consonant as a 'stopper' to ensure that the vowel is short: MET-al rather than ME-tal. Don't be afraid of doubling the buffer consonant for extra security: MET-tal.
5. Don't make use of the split vowel conventions a-e, i-e, o-e, u-e (as in *male, mile, mole, mule*). Someone who has learnt that your system always uses the letter e to represent the vowel of 'get' is liable to read *hare, vice, vole*, and *luke* as 'Harry'. 'Vicky', 'volley', and 'lucky'. Spell long vowels as they appear in the following words: *see, say, boat, law, car, too, fur, few, now, air, deer.* (But in final position – only – *oa* can be reduced to the unambiguous *o*, as in RAYN-bo.) In particular, don't be tempted to introduce *y* when representing a word such as 'pure' (*pyoor*). Readers are likely to pronounce the first two letters as 'pie'. Instead, make use of the digraph *ew*: PEW-er. (I don't know why Fraser feels that 'the systematic use of *ew* for /ju/ can sometimes be misleading.')

The sticking point is the vowel of 'high'. You need to face the fact that there is no unequivocal ordinary spelling for this sound. Most proposals using ordinary spelling (*ye, uy, y, ie, i*) are heading for trouble – you might get away with them at the end of a word, but in other positions they are confusing. When trying to devise a phonetic symbol for this sound, it is useful to ask how you would spell 'ice': *uys, is, ys, ies*, and *yes* are all misleading. I finally succumbed to the use of the letter *i* plus a special marker: i̲ Underlining is available on a typewriter, and it acts as a cautionary sign that the symbol needs special treatment: dri̲ is.
6. As Fraser discovered, schwa – the marker for indeterminacy – can be left to fend for itself without the need for any special representation. Thomas M. Paikeday's uh-Low (*ET*33) has no advantage over a-LOW, and can create problems when the context calls for speech that is deliberately slow and emphatic.
7. Consonants: make sure that *y* is always as in *yes*, and never used as a vowel. Always use *k* (or a final *ck*) for a hard *c*. Normal reading habits can sometimes lure readers into pronouncing a final s as /z/ rather than /s/ (as Fraser points out). Whenever there is a danger of this, doubling the s can block this response: *peess* versus *peez*.

Few consonantal digraphs are needed: *ng, ch, sh*, and *th* are used as in ordinary spelling: *ng* as in 'sing', except when split by syllabification (as in the name WIN-gayt). Cautionary underlining warns the reader that c̲h̲ is as in 'loch' rather than in 'church' and that t̲h̲ is voiced, as in 'then' rather than in 'thin'. Fraser has *j* doing extra service as the final sound in *persiflage*. You can sometimes get away with this in a final position, but it doesn't work within the body of a word such as 'measure'. For this, the commonly used *zh* serves well: I suggest linking the two letters by underlining (z̲h̲) to make sure they are not sounded separately.

Lewis Jones,
London, England

CROSSWORLD

ET 48 CrossworLd solution

1 C	A	2 M	O	3 M	I	4 L	E	■	5 T	6 H	Y	7 M	E	■
A	■	I	■	A	■	E	■	8 M	■	Y	■	E	■	9 D
10 B	A	S	I	L	■	11 G	L	A	S	S	W	A	R	E
L	■	T	■	A	■	E	■	L	■	S	■	N	■	S
12 E	R	A	S	I	O	N	■	13 T	W	O	S	T	E	P
■	■	K	■	S	■	D	■	■	■	P	■	■	■	O
14 R	E	I	T	E	R	A	N	15 C	E	■	16 S	17 P	I	T
O	■	N	■	■	■	R	■	H	■	■	■	A	■	I
18 S	A	G	E	■	19 H	Y	P	E	R	20 S	O	N	I	C
E	■	■	■	21 G	■	■	■	A	■	U	■	E	■	■
22 M	U	23 S	T	A	R	24 D	■	25 P	A	R	S	L	E	26 Y
A	■	E	■	R	■	R	■	N	■	F	■	L	■	A
27 R	E	P	U	L	S	I	V	E	■	28 A	L	I	E	N
Y	■	I	■	I	■	B	■	S	■	C	■	S	■	K
■	29 D	A	N	C	E	■	30 A	S	B	E	S	T	O	S

ET 47 CrossworLd winners

The winners of a *Dictionary of Clichés*, Betty Kirkpatrick, Bloomsbury, 1996, the prize for our July 1996 crossword, are:

Juliet Bending, St Albans, Hertfordshire, England
A. C. R. Bristow, Thwaite, Suffolk, England
J. P. Farrell, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA
Ean Taylor, Doncaster, England
Lelia Ward, Combe Down, Bath, England

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