

Jargon bastardizes the Queen's English

By WALTER SMITH
Senior Staff Writer

Jargonese. It's the mutant dialect of English that prevails in all occupations. It's also the reason that people of different fields have difficulty communicating with each other. Suppose you're a reporter assigned to the hospital beat (journalism jargon meaning that you regularly check the hospital for anything out of the ordinary). You might be told that a patient is in guarded condition. Do the hospital personnel mean that the patient is under a 24-hour surveillance by a doctor, or maybe an armed guard? No. Simply put: they refuse to divulge the patient's condition.

Now, thanks to the wonderful world of high technology, we're witnessing the birth of digital. RAMs and ROMs and DRAMs and PROMs. These terms for computer memory have a greater chance of showing up in my alphabet soup than in my vocabulary. These memory chips can store varying amounts of data, measured in bytes. These bytes are further divided into bits. Half of a bit is a nibble. You tend to wonder if the engineers who invented these chips (silicon, not potato) were eager for lunch when they were working on these devices.

The audio industry is another vocabulary villain. Equipment manufacturers often tout stereo components' specifications: THD, frequency response, dynamic range, signal-to-noise ratio, and wow and flutter. While the latter term is used to describe the reproduction accuracy of turntables, it also aptly describes the response of the average consumer. ("Wow," he said, heart fluttering, as he tried deciphering the meaningless numbers on the brochure.) Consumers need not worry about these technical terms; there's plenty of others reserved just for them.

If you own a conventional turntable, then I'm sure you own a few LPs, EPs, mini-albums or maxi-singles. Or if you're one of the listeners who converted to digital music, then you probably shop for digitally-mastered, PCM-encoded compact discs for your digital audio

laser disc player. Ironically, all this computerization of music can make its reproduction more true to life.

If you want to buy a home video system, then you must make a few decisions. What sort of VCR are you looking for? You can choose from VHS, Beta, Super-Beta, CAD and laser disc formats. Do you want one with Hi-Fi sound or MTS (multichannel television sound)? What sort of video monitor will you need? A conventional TV set will suffice, but why settle for that when you can choose from hi-res RGB models, or even DTVs (digital televisions)?

If you consider this conglomeration of catch-phrases confusing, then think about the engineers who desperately try to talk about their activities with others from outside their professions. Instead of bridging the communication chasm, their futile attempts often widen it to the point of being comical. In doing a series of stories on digital audio, I interviewed several engineering professors. One electrical engineering professor, who shall remain nameless, refused to believe that I fully understood his explanation of digital communications. His attempt to clarify himself yielded the following fatuity:

"Before you quote me ... the thing is ... what's always dangerous in something like this ... you think you understand what I'm saying on the tape and you hear those words exactly on the tape, but your reference point is different from my reference point because your background is different from my background, so I might be saying one thing and you're interpreting it differently than I mean — either I didn't say it clearly or we have different reference points because I have a lot of electrical engineering experience in this background, and most of the time when I'm describing these things, I'm describing them to (people with) some background level of electrical engineering."

Jargonese is a quick crutch for deficient communicators. If he really wanted to be understood, he should have used English.

British serious about picnicking

Associated Press

A wicker hamper, an umbrella for rain, a damask tablecloth and napkins to match. With these items as clues, any Englishman would be able to tell you that an English picnic is in the offing.

According to Tim Hansell, of Fortnum & Mason, the formal picnic is still very much a part of the scene in England, where open air activities such as a day at the races or a night at the opera in summer bring out hordes of well-dressed folk who take a meal on the grass.

With a well-deserved reputation for rainy summers, England is not a place where the weather is allowed to stop a picnic. The English go to a picnic regardless of the weather, so they try to choose a place where there is some cover. Nevertheless, notes Hansell, an umbrella is always taken along. In fact, added the manager of the corporate business division for the English department store, he went to a rainy day picnic himself in Kensington Square shortly before leaving for an American business trip.

English picnics feature cold, but elegant, foods. A typical starter might be foie gras, smoked salmon or ham with melon or fresh figs. Next comes a fish course — perhaps

half a lobster in aspic, then meat such as game pie, cold roast chicken or ham — or all three. With this course, add two or three salads like tomato, green salad and cold vegetables.

For dessert, raspberries and cream, a savory course of cheese and crackers and then chocolates would round off the meal.

With the food, three wines would probably be served — champagne, a dry white or red wine and a sweet dessert wine.

According to Hansell, it was the relative poverty of restaurant choices which led the English to develop a healthy picnicking tradition. During the 18th and 19th centuries, obtaining a good meal away from home required bringing it along oneself, he said.

His research had led him to conclude that the 19th century was the heyday of English picnics. In 1802, the Picnic Club was established by Regency fashionables, including the Duke of Queensberry, Lady Jersey, Lord Carlisle and Lady Buckinghamshire as well as the then Prince of Wales. The events focused on charades, theatricals and picnic suppers provided by a local tavern.

But for reasons that are not quite clear, the Picnic Club got a bad reputation as being a bit too racy, and it was dissolved in 1803.

This setback did nothing to halt the development of picnics to heights of unparalleled grandeur in the decades which followed. Hansell credits the growth of the empire with its great riches and leisure, the introduction of spices and exotic foodstuffs and the English love of pomp and circumstance with helping to stimulate the picnicking habit.

If anything, picnicking became more elegant in Edwardian times, and up to World War I it was strictly the province of the gentry.

Even in the 1920s and 1930s when large household staffs were the rule, picnics followed tradition. There were (and still are) nursery picnics, wedding picnics, birthday picnics and boating, hunt-and beach picnics.

If menus have changed little over the years, neither have the variety and number of table accessories considered essential. Fortnum's, which caters many picnics, advises that a properly packed English picnic hamper should include: fish plates, dinner plates and dessert plates; if cold soup is contemplated, add bouillon cups. Glassware that is necessary (crystal if possible) should include champagne, wine and dessert wine glasses.

Utensils required include fish, salad and dinner fork, knife and

spoon. And it is suggested that besides a tablecloth and napkins, a picnic rug and ground cloth should be taken. If you prefer, pack a folding table and chairs.

Add to the basics the salt and pepper shakers, corkscrew, butter wine cooler, coolant packs (a 20th century addition), a thermos for cold soup and a separate hamper for food and condiments, and you begin to see just how much trouble the English are willing to go to for an outdoor meal.

On the other hand, the bill of fare printed in "Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management" in 1861 makes it clear that today's elaborate picnic is rather a meek affair when compared to Victorian excess.

Mrs. Beeton's suggestions for a picnic for 40 persons includes, in part: a joint of cold roast beef, a joint of cold boiled beef, two ribs of lamb, two shoulders of lamb, four roast fowls, two roast ducks, one ham, one tongue, two veal and ham pies, two pigeon pies, six medium-size lobsters, 18 lettuces and six baskets of salad.

The menu goes on to suggest stewed fruit "well-sweetened," a variety of pastries, cakes and tarts, dinner rolls and bread and — believe or not — six pounds of butter.

Confessed chocoholic declares her life-long addiction to sweets

By WENDY JOHNSON
Reporter

My roommate likes white food. I like red food. But we both love chocolate.

She eats noodles with butter. I don't eat noodles unless they're in lasagna. She drinks diet Coke — white label. I drink Dr Pepper — red label. We both love M&Ms by the handful and Pigouts at the Cowhop.

I used to think that our food preferences reflected our personalities. I'm prone to fiery outbursts and emotional extremes. Anne cruises steadily along, letting things roll off her back like water off a duck. But chocolate was our touchstone. That

is, until Andy came along. Maybe we were just lovelorn, that may explain her transferred loyalties.

Andy Covington — the death knell to our chocolate comradeship. When Anne met Andy she abandoned me and chocolate, except for buying him a pair of molded chocolate miniatures of Raggedy Ann and Andy. Now I have to console myself in solitary indulgences. Chocolate is my comfort, my stabilizer.

My love affair with chocolate goes way back. My folks have baby pictures of me with chocolate smeared all over myself. I put Nestle's Quik in my milk. Mom asks my brother and I every year what kind of birthday cake we want. "Yellow cake with

chocolate icing," we reply in unison.

In high school pep squad we had to fill spirit boxes for the football players. I never could resist snagging a few of the chocolate pieces before closing the lid on the finished project. When my brother got on the football team, I stole the chocolate out of his spirit boxes.

Easter is my most blissful season. I have a fetish for Reese's peanut butter eggs that come out then. I buy them by the dozen, planning to save them to eat year 'round. They never make it to May. My mother still buys me a big chocolate Easter bunny. I sit down with a jar of peanut butter and attack it with wanton abandon. The week after Easter usually

calls for an exercise program, but I just wear more Mexican dresses instead. Once the eggs are gone, the excess weight disappears too.

A few years ago for my birthday my best friend gave me a box of Blass chocolates, a little Golden Book called "How God Gives Us Chocolate", and a notepad that said "Things are getting worse, please send chocolate!" Now you see why she's my best friend. This year I got Swiss chocolates and an antique cocoa powder tin, which I just filled with M&Ms.

I saw a card last week that sums up my philosophy of chocolate consumption: "When in doubt, eat chocolate. When confident, eat a lot of chocolate."

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