

## Spell-checker just one of life's little surprises



Barbara Gastel

### Humor me, please

Sources of such humor abound for me. Foreign travel and foreign visitors are one unending supply. For instance, in China I almost bought by mistake an enormous bag of MSG. Luckily, the price made me realize that the content wasn't sugar. Otherwise, I would have suffered quite some Chinese-restaurant headache.

I shared this story with a Chinese friend, who told me one of her own: During a visit to America, she needed some lunch to eat at a noontime seminar. So, she went to the store and bought a box showing a piece of cake. During the seminar, she opened the box — and found not the expected piece of cake, but cake mix.

Editing and paper-correcting supply ample such humor as well. One student recently wrote that AIDS could be spread by "sexual contract." Last week I read that a prominent person had been a "textile magnet." The list could well continue — but dwelling on such errors seems insensitive, and columnists who live in glass houses shouldn't even toss pebbles.

One source of unexpected humor, however, will not take offense. And rarely will it tease me back. For the source I refer to is inanimate. It's the spell-checker on my word processor. And it sometimes comes up with the strangest things.

### Spell-checker primer

For those unfamiliar with spell-checkers, let me briefly explain how mine works.

To summarize rather anthropomorphically: When I ask the spell-checker to check a document in my word processor, it reads through the document, comparing the words in the document with those in a standard dictionary. When it finds a word not in the dictionary, it flags the word as a possible misspelling.

In addition to flagging the word, the spell-checker offers possible corrections. For example, if I omit one "r" from "embarrassment," it shows me the proper spelling. Or if by mistake I type "institution," it offers as alternatives "institution" and "incitation."

If, however, a misspelling corresponds to the spelling of another word, the spell-checker does not catch the mistake. For instance, if I type "to" instead of "too," the problem is not flagged. Thus, proof-reading still is needed — lest one risk the

plight of one colleague who discovered too late that instead of "public health," he had typed "pubic health."

My spell-checker does not recognize non-standard or highly technical words. Nor does it recognize most proper names. On finding such words or names, it perceives them as possible misspellings and proposes alternatives — some of them funny or uncannily insightful.

### Hooked on phonics

So, what wit and wisdom does the spell-checker offer? Let me present some examples from documents recently checked.

I recently spell-checked a bibliography listing the book "The Elements of Style" by Strunk and White. This book urges readers to write concisely and is, accordingly, small. On failing to find "Strunk" in its dictionary, the spell-checker offered the apt alternative "shrunken."

A letter to a fellow medical writer elicited some other word play. This writer works for a company called Syntex, and I addressed the letter to her there. The spell-checker queried whether instead of "Syntex" I meant "syntax."

The list of titles and speakers for an upcoming conference session also evoked some snide humor. For "boomer" (as in "baby boomer"), the spell-checker suggested "boozier," "bemire," and "bummer." And when I listed a speaker's institution as "Baylor," the checker proposed "bawler," "bewailer," and "biller."

"TAMU" did not fare much better. Finding this abbreviation in some of my memos, the spell-checker did suggest some positive terms such as "team." However, it also offered the alternatives "tomb" and "tabu."

The spell-checker clearly dislikes such jargon as "enrollees" and "invitees." For "enrollees" it suggested substituting "unruly," and to replace "invitees" it proposed "invades." Maybe it knew something I didn't about the folks who were enrolling or being invited.

Indeed, I should have consulted the spell-checker before taking the job I held in San Francisco. The spell-checker would have warned me how stressful that job would be. For when I typed my San Francisco office's street name ("Parnassus"), the spell-checker asked whether I meant "pernicious."

The spell-checker offers some insightful variants of people's names as well. For fear of reprisal, I shall not share how it responded to the names of Batt editors Todd and Mack. But I will disclose that on seeing my initials ("BC"), it proposed the marvelous alternatives "bag" and "bug" and "bs."

Such little surprises do make my day — and tell me that it's time to end a column.

Gastel (no, dear spell-checker, not "Pastel") is an associate professor of journalism and of humanities in medicine.

## Softball just a GAME, dammit!



Stacy Feducia

(Cue the Olympic theme music.)

With the Olympic spirit in the air and the tingle of cute commercials featuring drooling babies as future Olympic hopefuls on TV, I took it upon myself to participate in the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat by partaking in my first experience with organized sports since I played kickball in K-5 through fifth grade: I played softball.

Actually, I didn't partake in this spectacle of sporting splendor voluntarily. I was ordered, not exactly invited, to play by the venerable captain of our Battalion softball team, "The Muckrakers," not because of any inherent athletic ability on my part, but because we were a day late and a girl short, and they didn't want to be stuck with a "ghost out" foot not having enough estrogen on the core team.

Granted, I am not an athletic person. I make no pretensions to athletic endeavor. I play football from the armchair with remote control in hand. I water-ski with the grace of a pregnant cow. And if the U.S. Olympic team relied on me to "bring home the gold" in the platform diving competition, I and my extra five of flab from Italy would bear close resemblance to a satellite re-entering the atmosphere. Put it this way, when I was in K-5 waiting to play kickball at recess, they put me in right field because most K-5ers can't kick that far.

But I think I have a good attitude

about this. I have accepted my athletic short-comings and have rechanneled my efforts into aerobic walking and synchronized swimming — and I realize above and beyond all else that softball is JUST a game.

Let's face it kids: the outcome of the "offensive onslaughts" (a new sports cliché coined by our Sports Editor/ softball captain Doug Foster) on the intramural fields will NOT bring us fame, fortune, fan clubs and multi-million dollar sporting goods endorsements.

Softball is JUST a game. It is not an Olympic event. It will never result in a gold medal round — or even in a Dream Team that features professional players with their own line of sporting goods apparel. The only way most softball players will ever see or design their own line of sporting goods apparel is if the clothes come equipped with an extra few inches at the waist to accommodate beer guts.

Softball is JUST a game. In the Olympics, broadcast journalist bozos who have limited vocabularies which encompass the words "tight" and "nailed" approach athletes after they have just won the gold medal and ask "How do you feel?" In softball, this phenomenon — fortunately for us — just does not occur. If it did, we'd probably reply with, "How do you think I feel, stupid? I just won the game! Now get that camera out of my face! I'm going to Duddley's to celebrate!"

So if intramurals aren't the Olympics, and we aren't in the majors making seven million dollars, why is it that so many people are compelled to take these games so seriously? Why put yourself into a tizzy and throw your bat on the ground and drop-kick your glove, just because you overthrew

the ball — or in my case, because you caught the ball and were too busy celebrating the catch to realize that your opponent was scoring a run and you needed to be throwing the ball home instead of doing the "acknowledgement wave." I kid you not. It really happened. Such is why our esteemed team captain moved me from first base to right field.

But that's OK. In right field, I can still do the "acknowledgement wave" on the far chance that someone hits it my way, and I actually catch it and, using my "girl-throwing arm," hurl the ball into the infield. And if I miss the catch, I can sport the "I meant to do that" grin and run like the aerobic-walking fool that I am to go pick the ball up.

And even better, I can still have fun! Because it's not how you win or lose or even how you play the game. It's how you do the "acknowledgement wave" when you catch the ball, and how you spend the money from the \$50 million dollar contract that the sporting goods company makes you sign.

Take me out to the ball game — and at least enjoy it while you're there. You heard it here first.

P.S. The preceding column was written Wednesday afternoon, pre-Muckrakers playoff game. After a valiant effort by an estrogen (and testosterone)-short team, the seven dedicated Muckrakers (Doug, Mack, Jason, Don, Nick, Carrie and myself) held the number one-seeded team to a 9-6 margin. Though we were outscored, we still played a hell of a game.

Feducia is a senior English and history major and a columnist for The Battalion, as well as a hell of a right fielder.



### NOT THE 'GOODWILL' GAMES...

## Mail Call

### Late review

I was shocked when I read the music review of Temple of the Dog's album. I quote, "Temple of the Dog's self-titled debut album has hit the record stores..." Actually, that album was released in April of 1991. Yes, 1991 — over a year ago. I can understand reviewing albums a few months after they have been released but over a year later? Come on! While Temple of the Dog is far from old news, I would think that the Battalion would like to keep its readers as up-to-date on music as it does on other news. On second thought maybe not.

As a long-time resident of the area and reader of the Battalion, I see a trend by this paper to review music that could debatably be termed "alternative." If the Battalion is attempting to educate its readers on alternative music, PLEASE, review newer releases like the Lemonheads, Juliana Hatfield (of Blake Babies fame), or the Flaming Lips. Or are those bands too

far from the mainstream and too close to the alternative for the Battalion to review?

Jennifer Forster  
Trinity University '95

Editor's note: Temple of the Dog's album first appeared in 1991, but it was re-edited and re-released this year.

### Have an opinion? Express it!

The Battalion is interested in hearing from its readers. All letters are welcome. Letters must be signed and must include classification, address and daytime phone number for verification purposes. They should be 250 words or less. Anonymous letters will not be published. The Battalion reserves the right to edit all letters for length, style and accuracy. There is no guarantee a letter will appear. Letters may be brought to The Battalion at 013 Reed McDonald, sent to Campus Mail Stop 1111 or faxed to 845-2647.

## Upper class works to divide masses

Mr. LoBaido paints a very bleak portrait of the future for white Americans. He would have you believe that the unclean, non-white races have somehow seized the reins of authority and instituted reverse discriminatory programs to grind the noble honky underfoot. Aided by feminists who refuse to carry babies to term and homosexuals who stick their you-know-whats you-know-where, these undesirable elements of our society threaten to crush the white man out of existence.

The circle is closing fast, and the honkies must revolt now against the tyranny of diversity lest their seed be lost in a contaminated gene pool. Yeah, right.

Let me paint a different picture — no, I'll show you a photograph, a photograph of the country I live in. First of all, the government is an institutionalized monopoly of power by the upper classes designed primarily to protect the property and livelihood of the upper class and secondarily to keep the lower classes in their place.

Yes, we have elections and our candidates reflect the absurdity of the situation. If, by some miracle, my black, brown and red brothers get registered and can afford the time and potential lost wages to vote, they get to choose which wealthy white man is going to keep them in poverty for

the next four years — God Bless America!

Mr. LoBaido, you need not break out your camouflage outfit and survivalist gear yet. I think the white man can survive a little bit longer just by continuing to cling tightly to neophobic, conservative policies. You can even get some of the brothers on your side, provided you brainwash them enough. Clarence Uncle Thomas is a fine example of how you can turn a black man into a woman-subjugating, law-and-order, traditional-American-family-value-man who acts just as white as the real thing. All you need to do to ward off the unclean hordes different from you is to continue to give them substandard housing, lousy education and occasional government handouts to keep them dependent and subservient.

Keep the masses splintered and turn them against each other and they will never pose a threat to you. With homosexuals threatening masculinity and feminists threatening the family structure (whatever that is), rich honkies have all the tools they need to keep the diverse ones tearing at each other in sheer paranoia. The political system is happily geared in such a way as to allow only those above a certain economic level to seek political office with any chance of success. As you said, "It is not race or gender that matters most — it's ideology." More specifically, it is economics that matters most. As long as our rigged system keeps most minorities living in poverty and corrupts any who manage to climb up through business, the alpha

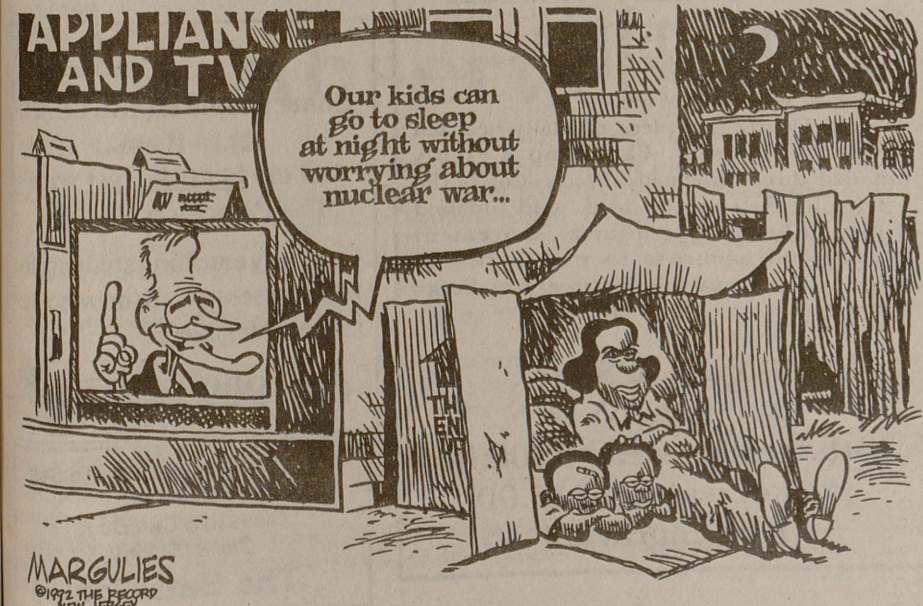
male honky need never worry about hyphenated Americans and moral degenerates threatening his settled way of life.

You may breathe a sigh of relief, Mr. LoBaido, for the moment. It seems that you and your like will reign supreme for a while longer if you play your cards right. Using the tools of economics, hysteria and deception, honkies are going to do all right for themselves so long as the unclean, inferior races remain in the dark.

The feminist problem is trickier, but not insurmountable. As long as our male-dominated society continues to view women as objects of beauty who are to be impregnated and slapped around if they get out of line, they won't be able to threaten your rule either. Homosexuals are easier to take care of. Simply attack them with religious traditionalism and beat them silly now and then and people will go on seeing them as less than human. In short, the "Master Race" will prevail through a return to strong family values and the expansionist policies that made this country great.

But let's face reality for a moment, shall we? How long is it going to be before word gets around to the masses that they are being exploited by corrupt white men who don't give a shit about them? How will they react to this information? As much as I hate to succumb to mean-spiritedness, I hope they blow your smug honky asses straight to hell.

Eltwell is a junior philosophy major.



MARGULIES  
OF THE BATTERY  
NEW JERSEY