Learningguild Letter

1.2012

Dear members and friends of Learningguild,

In April 2012 we published my eight-page booklet *SSC* (*Sentences to Study and Change*), a copy of which accompanies this issue of the *Letter*. Over several years I had developed and prescribed the SSC method in helping pupils of mine here in Melbourne whose first language was not English. It has been used also at Holy Mother Public School in Bharatpur, near the eastern border of the Indian state of Rajasthan, to which school I have made several visits in the past ten years. A hundred copies of the booklet were sent in December, as a gift from Learningguild, to Mr James Anthony, the Director. In November I gave a lecture on the method, in relation to distributed copies, at the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China at Chengdu and at Southwest University at Beibei, near Chongqing. (More on the month spent by Margaret and me in China, and people met there, in the next issue.) My hope is that concerns and activities of people at these places, especially but not only in their use of *SSC* and wider study of English, will come to take quite a prominent part in the scope of *Learningguild Letter*. Of course I also hope that we shall greatly increase our membership in Melbourne, and in Australia, and that *SSC* will be widely bought and used.

"We learn by doing" – yes, but the doing requires deepening and widening acquaintance with examples, guidelines and categories, and so, usually, friendly and competent advice. That basic educational principle is normally implemented when a person is being taught (i.e. helped) to play an instrument or to play cricket, but at the present time it is seldom prominent in the theory or practice of learning and teaching English, whether native or non-native speakers are the students.

I invite the reader to study the booklet from beginning to end with particular attention to those four themes of examples, guidelines, categories and advice. (Criticisms, suggestions and other comments would of course be welcome.) Experience shows how important it is for the student to master parsing (p.7), an activity which now, ridiculously, is unknown to most secondary and tertiary students in English-speaking countries, and to ask about verbs whether they are used transitively or intransitively, or in both ways, and about nouns whether they are used of something countable or uncountable with them, or in both ways (p.8).

Here I shall respond to a series of questions that can fairly and valuably be asked. In almost every case I shall be amplifying and illustrating what is on p.2 or p.3 of the booklet. Why this method? With which dictionaries? Beginning and continuing at what stages? What volume per week? Cooperation with other students?

The answer to the first question is given in the first paragraph on p.3. The opening sentence, "In order to speak and write English (or any language) well, one must learn to form well-constructed **sentences** in it", may seem a mere platitude. Many Chinese students of English, however, have been allowed to concentrate on expanding their vocabulary without mastering basic grammatical structures. So a person wanting to write a notice to be put outside a number of toilets in the splendid Olympic stadium in Beijing, to indicate that they were to be used only on days of stadium events, wrote, as we saw, "During non-events, stop using." That writer had not learned how 'non-event' is employed in English, as in "I have to say that was a non-event." At a fundamental level, however, is ignorance of the difference between 'do not use' and 'stop using', and of the need to have an object-locution (p.7) with the verb *use* or put it into the passive.

In my lecture in China I used that example, to general merriment, but took as my main one a sentence I had copied from a notice outside our hotel in Chengdu:

> For safety's sake, drivers of non-motor vehic
> les are required please walk with your vehicles.

I explained why it was better to write, before 'are', 'For safety, riders of non-motor vehicles' (without giving such a split to 'vehicles'), and, at the end, 'their vehicles'. Then I asked which of the four words 'required', 'asked', 'invited' and 'advised' was most suitable, and said why I thought it was 'advised'. I concluded by emphasizing an error which it is very important to avoid: 'please walk' cannot follow any of those four words (past participles). How can one avoid such an error? Not by learning the words and their meanings in isolation! Learners of EFL (English as a further language) must note their **use**, and master it, e.g., by saying many times such a set of pairs as "required TO, asked TO, invited TO, advised TO", in order to be ready to use a 'to'-infinitive. SSC is a method that leads one to look for examples of how a word is used, to understand the pattern, and to reproduce it in a sentence of one's own, composed with sufficient caution (especially in adhering to the Guidelines on p.5) that it is quite likely to be correct. Of course it is a great help to have the comments and encouragement of a competent teacher.

Which dictionaries? On p.3 I specify the *Oxford Basic English Dictionary*, and also the *Oxford Essential Dictionary*, which has seemed to be identical to the first in content except for the inclusion of a set of small coloured pictures. I bought the latter book in India in 2008 for 125 rupees (about $A4). Now available in Australia is the 4th edition of *OBED* (July 2012), wonderful value at $A14.95. These are excellent dictionaries for both the elementary and the intermediate levels, and a good aim for a non-native-speaker studying in Australia or India is to learn all the **sentence-structures** used in either of them. They give for 'advise' the sentence 'The doctor **advised** him **to** lose weight': they often use bold print in that way, very valuably, to show how a word is used. The student should not try to learn all the words in the dictionary, but rather ask, concerning any word new to him or her, "Do I need this word and its accompanying construction(s) just now?" Many students would rightly pass over *sparrow* and *spear*, partly because no example-sentences are provided, but they would do well to study closely and later revise the entries for *spare* and *special*. Quite often the student will have heard such words but not be clear about their uses or the word-families to which they belong.

In Chengdu I could not find either of those dictionaries, but bought (for about 40 yuan, and so about $A6) the *Bilingual English-Chinese Dictionary*, published in 2011. I recommended it, circulating a copy, during my lectures there and at Southwest. Like *OBED* and *OED*, it gives example-sentences, but has two further merits: it translates the words and the sentences into Chinese, and it uses large print (where the others have a key) for common words. Thus, unlike *sparrow* and *spear*, *spare* and *special* are in large print and have sentences. Provided that the Chinese student attends closely to such sentences, and begins to "think in English" as well as in Chinese, what we may call *BECD* is a very good dictionary for him or her to use. The *Oxford Essential English-English-Hindi Dictionary*, which cost me only 118 rupees in 2008, does not use for common words the very helpful device of large print or a key, but it has sentences for *spare* and *special* and not for *sparrow* and *spear*. Some Hindi-speakers might find this dictionary more useful than the *OED*, and for SSC should concentrate on the English words with whole sentences in their entries.

At what level should students begin to use the SSC method, and to what levels can they valuably continue with it? To the first question the answer is "When they are able to make fruitful use of a basic English-English dictionary." I mentioned James Anthony in the first paragraph: he and I have agreed that at his school the use of SSC should begin at Grade 7, i.e., when most of the pupils are about 12. In that grade and even in 6, pupils should be taught parsing, beginning with many very simple sentences, but soon learning that verbs often consist of more than one word, etc. After about six years in a school using both English and Hindi, the children should be familiar with English letters and quite a lot of common English words and spelling- and sound-patterns (and exceptions!), **and** parsing and many simple constructions. A very widely used book containing and explaining such constructions, with exercises, is Raymond Murphy's *Essential Grammar in Use* (of which there is an edition with some explanation in Chinese), and a teacher could also use, mostly at a later stage, the lively book by Helen Naylor "with Raymond Murphy", *Essential Grammar in Use Supplementary Exercises*. To have mastered these

elementary constructions is **far** more important than to have a wide vocabulary. A slightly impatient teacher, or potential or actual employer of a graduate, is, not unreasonably, far more likely to think "Don't you know yet how to say **that**?" than "Don't you know yet that (rather unusual) word?" It may well be that the overuse of multiple-choice tests has taken students away from the crucial learning activity of forming their own sentences.

I note in passing the origin of my devising the SSC method. I used to recommend, respectively for both the elementary and intermediate levels for which they were written, Murphy's *Essential Grammar in Use* and his *English Grammar in Use*, and, unlike Murphy and therefore most teachers using those books, asked students to work right through the exercises in the order given (not too far from an order of difficulty). There is great value in doing that, with careful checking and eventual self-correcting, but I found that it made a difference to learning and to enthusiasm when I added "Write two sentences of your own at the foot of each unit, linking something in the grammar of it to your own life or interests." From there it is unsurprising that, still valuing Murphy's work, I moved to a method in which students can continually choose, from a dictionary that is not too big for them and has example-sentences, words that **they** are keen to use well and for each of which they will compose a whole sentence **of their own**, at first with the structure of the example or of one of the examples provided.

Guanmin Hu, a pupil of mine in Melbourne (see p.12) who is making good progress at the higher intermediate level, has made fruitful use in SSC of the immensely valuable *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (*OALD*)*. I have asked him, however, to ensure that at least half of his base sentences come from OBED, because of the necessity to master the basic constructions. In every case SSC, as its full name suggests, requires some use in one's own sentence of a construction in the original one, though one can increasingly use additional constructions too, e.g. in a further clause. Hence SSC can be a suitable method from the middle elementary to the intermediate level. After that, there is the method WS (Words and Sentences), usable with the *OALD* and set out in my book *Making up Sentences*, at Chapter Five Section 1. The only difference from SSC is that there is no strict constructional requirement for one's own sentence: in the fourth paragraph of that section I say that at 5 you "**construct** a sentence of your own, using the word **in the way it is used in the original sentence but in a different context**". I well remember a Chinese doctor who made great progress doing that.

Though for most students there is great value in accurately copying out (partly for later revision) both original sentence and meaning, and doing so greatly assists the annotator, it **might** be reasonable for some people, e.g., some busy teachers at the Indian school or in China, to do SSC in an abbreviated way. If one's sentence for 5 in the second entry for 'eat' on p.4 is "Shall we eat at seven?" one might, having made clear which dictionary one is using, write just

eat, esgg, v, 2nd m, "Shall we eat at seven?"

The abbreviation 'esgg' makes the important point, about both one's learning and the particular case, that an **e**xample-**s**entence is **g**iven in the dictionary and is being used as a **g**uide. One could of course write 'esgg' just once to cover all eight sentences on a sheet.

How much SSC should a student be asked or invited to do each week? A good aim for many is six pages (i.e. 24 sections), but some students or teachers may have good reason for doing or requiring less. It is very important to allow time for checking (see p.5, G). Continuity is important: better to do two pages every week than six in one week and nothing else for a month. Revision of previous sheets, normally with the annotator's comments, should be included too: put the sheets into a looseleaf binder.

Does SSC leave room for cooperation with other students? Certainly. A teacher can invite a class to contribute parts of a section to be written on a board. In helping students I find it valuable to choose some SSC sheets, usually with good but not faultless work, and my comments on it, and, with the permission of the writers concerned, to pass on photocopies to others who would be likely to benefit from studying them. I remove the writer's name and put at the top right 'Student A', or 'Student B', etc. Students could agree with friends that they would study one another's SSC sheets.

At about the end of January 2013 James Anthony will again be sending us students' SSC work. I should be glad to hear from anyone interested in being an annotator, as Isabella Birkin in Oxford and Mary Wright in Melbourne have been. In some cases, Learningguild funds could provide some payment where requested.

I hope that some of the students I have addressed, and others, in China will do SSC, and send some of their work, and/or questions about it, to Learningguild's base in Melbourne,. It is wonderful to have such international interaction, with all the learning and the friendship it can foster.

There are great possibilities here, and I thank all members who have helped by their SSC work and/or subscriptions and donations to create them.

Yours in Learningguild,

John Howes

ANDREA MESA *and her husband John Mantilla, who are from Colombia, are members of Learningguild who have moved from Melbourne to Mackay in Queensland. Andrea has written these comments on using the SSC method.*

I have been keen to improve my English in order to work in Australia in my profession as a psychologist. In such work I need to be skilled in communication.

At first I was unsure how I could build up my knowledge of the language by using *OBED*, because most people employ dictionaries only to find the meaning of a particular word, to translate something, or to increase their vocabulary. I found, when I began to work with the sentences in *OBED* and the SSC sheets, that it was amazing how much grammar and how many new sentence-structures you could learn in this way. SSC also increases your comprehension of the parts of speech, and you learn that many words can be used as more than one part of speech, e.g., as a noun and as a verb.

When you work with the sentences, you realize that you have often made mistakes and now understand what to say or write instead. When Dr Howes has corrected the mistakes on my SSC sheets with a red pen and asked me to do correction of my own in green, that has enabled me to attend to mistakes, write what is needed, and obtain a better understanding of my own difficulties. I have found also that my confidence in writing English and my speed have increased.

Gradually I am learning to build up more complex sentences, and that enables me to express myself in better ways.

The SSC sheets provide me with a good record of my work that I can revise again and again.

My husband and I are very grateful for the help that has enabled us to improve our English. We really appreciate SSC as an excellent method.

ALEXANDRA MORALES, *also a member who comes from Colombia, is to begin a course in social work at Victoria University in 2013. She writes:*

SSC is a great method of learning English. It has allowed me to identify my weaknesses: I have discovered mistakes that I had been making over and over again. I have learned more with SSC than I did in the usual (and expensive) courses I have attended in the past four years. I can choose any word I wish to use in a sentence: that has given me a sense of freedom and confidence.

SSC isn't boring. **It looks simple but it is a complex source of learning.** I have learned the meanings of many words, their grammatical role or roles, and their common companions. The comments written for me are very clear and useful.

I was frustrated for a long time in learning English until I started individual tutorials in Learningguild. Now I am eager to go on learning.

Ideally every English-speaking person should begin to distinguish the several parts of speech at an early age, and continue to study the various aspects of the subject in a graduated manner throughout his or her time at school.

R.W.Burchfield, *The New Fowler's Modern English Usage*, at *grammar*.

Museum, cathedral and high-speed train

JIM RICHARDSON *loves travel, especially where there are high-speed trains. A member of Learningguild, he is a retired electrical engineer.*

I was in Spain in 2012 from February the 23rd until March the 8th. As winter ended and spring began, the weather was cold at night and cool to warm during the day. Tourists were comparatively few – the busy time is summer – so there was less hassle and congestion. This was my first visit and a most memorable one, with three principal highlights: the Prado Museum (*Museo del Prado*) in Madrid, the "Gaudi Cathedral" (*La Sagrada)* in Barcelona, and the High-Speed Train *(Tren de Alta Velocidad Espanola.)*

The Prado is one of the world's greatest art galleries. It holds some 7,500 paintings, although only 1,500 are on display at a given time, plus vast numbers of sketches and drawings and some sculptures. The initial impression upon entry is overwhelming: the gallery is so vast and many of the paintings are so huge. On display are some of the greatest art works of Western civilisation, including those of Velazquez, Goya and El Greco, and others from all across Europe. The gallery was opened in 1819, with only about 300 Spanish paintings, having served previously as a palace and originally conceived as a house of science! Because of its enormous size one needs to visit the Prado on several occasions. I spent about four hours there and was inundated with so many visual impressions that I had to retire and quietly contemplate. My intention is to return next year and continue my artistic journey in the Prado. Amazingly, there are two other great art galleries nearby, the *Reina Sofia* and the *Thyssen Borneisza*, where I spent further hours of utter pleasure. In the former gallery hangs the great painting of Picasso, *Guernica*.

The Gaudi Cathedral, officially known as *Templo Expiatorio de la Sagrada Familia*, is the principal work of the great Spanish architect Antonio Gaudi i Cornet (1852-1926), who devoted some forty years of his life to its design and construction. So amazing, complex and grand is this building that it is unlikely to be completed before the year 2050. Gaudi's creation expresses both his piety and his political identity. It is Spain's most visited monument. It seeks to emulate the great Gothic cathedrals of Europe with a basic cross-shaped plan but includes influences from nature, with many curves and branching columns soaring high and creating a forest-like quality. He used models made of string and weighed down to produce catenaries and other curves calculated mathematically. By now four out of an eventual ten towers have been completed, with a curious blob-like structure atop each one, combining bunches of grapes and sheaves of wheat. These represent the two communion elements of wine and bread but clearly refer to their natural origins. The cathedral is an enormous structure and the main tower, higher than all the others and as yet incomplete, will rise to 170m and represent Christ. My experience of entering the cathedral was of moving into a strange world, a kind of wonderland with unique features and of enormous size. There is no other building on earth which resembles this awesome temple. It really is a tribute to the genius of Gaudi.

There are several high-speed trains which criss-cross Spain but none so fast as the recently introduced one between Madrid and Valencia. The distance is 450 km and the journey takes 1½ hours, and so the average speed is 300 km/hr – really impressive! By contrast the distance between Sydney and Melbourne is 960 km and the train usually takes 12 hours, at the pathetic average speed of 80. On my return to Australia I wrote to the Federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and soon after received a reply from the General Manager of High Speed Rail. He stated that a report on the future of HSR would be completed toward the end of 2012, in which preferred routes and station locations would be specified. The route between Madrid and Valencia is comparatively flat, without high mountains or deep valleys. The train stayed at a steady speed, travelled smoothly all the way and gave me the impression of being in a low-flying aircraft. I was delighted!

From infancy in the 1920s to graduation

RON RYE *has been a member of Learningguild from its beginnings in the 1980s. He was a neighbour of Margaret and me in the 1960s in Oak Park, and has maintained and guided a discussion group we helped to start in 1971. He has been an electrical engineer, and also a choral singer and the maintainer of the model railway in his garden. He has enjoyed travel, and kept up wide interests. A similar version of the last part of this article appears in* The Melbourne Graduate. *JH*

I was born in Maffra, in Gippsland, on January the 13th 1924. My father was the headmaster in the Stratford State School a few kilometres away. We moved to Kyabram, 150k north of Melbourne, when I was four – a larger school and some promotion for Dad. I was looked after well, and perhaps for this reason my first two memories are of being admonished. The first time it was for filling my shoes with soil and throwing them at the same-age boy opposite, similarly armed. The second was for waving an arm at the passing horse-drawn milk cart, instead of holding up the empty billy which was in the long grass beside me, and thus returning inside crestfallen, with the empty billy. That was probably Mum's first attempt to make me useful.

My brother and sister were older by 19 and 17 years, and by that time were teaching, closer to Melbourne. Brother Hal turned up at holiday time on his motorbike, sometimes covered with mud from the unmade roads. Sister Amy brought me a hobby horse, which she had made at Teachers' College. (A hobby horse had a horse's head attached to a rod with two wheels at the bottom, sometimes with an intervening small saddle, and a child's imagination converted it to a horse.)

Other memories. Dad driving his new Model T car, singing *funiculi, funicular*, and transferring doses of petrol from the tank to the carburettor every few miles because of a blocked breathing-pin hole in the petrol tank cap. A touring nurse examining every child, and reporting to Mum that I had too many clothes on. (Such medical examination was discontinued later, and my present wife Glen had undiscovered near-sight until her teens, severely hampering her early education.) Mum dosing me with castor oil every now and then, with its ghastly taste. Mum beheading a snake in the outside toilet while Dad held it down with two spades. A pre-depression visit by a gaily painted train with the slogan "Better Farming". Protesting strongly on my first school day and being dragged there, despite my Dad's being headmaster.

In 1929 we moved to Glenroy, only 12k north of Melbourne – a promotion for Dad, who purchased a brand-new Erskine sedan, a big step-up from the model T. I have only a few memories there. A peashooter could be purchased for one penny – a tin tube about 12 inches long with which, if skilled, a boy could send rapidly repeating shots from a mouthful of peppercorns, usually at the girls in the class, or at disliked boys. If he were penniless, a peashooter could be made out of a piece of hollowed bamboo, but this was not as effective. About half the pupils came from an orphanage in Glenroy, many of them cruelly called illegitimate.

Sadly Dad soon got a brain infection starting from a gardening scratch, and with no antibiotics this left him permanently with no short-term memory. Mum also was sick at that time and Amy had to look after the three of us for a few months until Mum recovered.

We then moved to a rented house in Essendon. I attended nearby Aberfeldie school in the "bubs", where Amy managed the class of eighty pupils – an "economy" measure in the depression.

In 1931 we moved to Sunshine, 12k west, where nearly all the employment was at the Harvester works, though there were some other factories, all within walking distance, and already showing the depression's effects. Dad was given a try at returning to head-teaching at the local state school. He even tried using his shorthand ability to make on-the-spot notes, but without day-to-day memory it was hopeless. Luckily he had a modest government pension for the rest of his life. Some

kids came to school in bare feet, but I was always adequately dressed and fed.

Sunshine was a great place for kids to roam around. There was little traffic, and we had rides on a horse-drawn firewood cart. There were backyards of factories to explore, and creeks where we could catch yabbies and sail our homemade boats. The town's swimming area was an enlargement of the Kororoit creek, full of snags and with mud edges, but with water running through except in severe drought. One factory had at the back a pile of cylindrical steel pellet offcuts, about the size of peas, which made effective shanghai missiles. Unfilled sewerage trenches, freshly dug, linked backyards.

I was given an unused room in a rear outhouse as a workshop. I carved small model biplanes from soft wood: they sold for threepence at the local church fete. I also made small boats, rubber-band-driven with cut-out tin propellers (no plastic kits existed). I remember a large open packing case with side wings, linked to a joystick, ailerons and elevator, with a pedal linked to a rudder and a front propeller driven by a crank-handle and pulleys. That it never got off the ground didn't worry a ten-year-old.

I joined the Scouts, went on hikes, and after tests obtained badges in primitive bush cooking, map-making etc. Mum got me into the church choir. Town rubbish was heaped on a vacant block weeks before a Guy Fawkes bonfire, with crackers and rockets, and the occasional eye injury. No TV of course, but children's sessions on the "wireless" from 4 to 5, sometimes cribbage with resident grandma before bedtime, and Saturday "arvo" matinee at the local picture theatre as a special treat. School lessons were strict. On Fridays in (I think) Grade 4, we had to bring our own materials for a hands-on project. Failure to do so resulted in the "cuts": a leather strap was applied forcefully to your outstretched hand. The easiest equipment to bring was an empty jam jar and differently-coloured papers, which were torn up randomly and pasted on the jar to make a patchwork covering.

Secondary schools

In 1935, aged 11, I reached grade 6, and the only secondary school in Sunshine was the technical one. Mum had other ideas: I remember her saying she would like to get me into Melbourne Grammar but I don't remember sitting for a scholarship for it. Instead I obtained one for two years at Essendon Grammar.

For the next two years two friends and I rode our bikes the eight miles between Sunshine and Essendon, except in really bad weather or "not too well" days, when I had to use the train (changing at North Melbourne), which was boring. Most of the roads on the way had only a narrow centre strip of bitumen, about one car wide, but this was OK, because there was hardly any traffic – cars only for a few rich people, and industrial wagons. Most of the wagons had solid rubber tyres, and travelled at about 25 km/hr at a maximum. The aim was to grab the rear of one of these, and so obtain an easy ride until the wagon turned away from our route. Then the lucky one (or ones if there was a boy on each side) would wait until the three of us were together again. In horse-and-carriage days I believe there was a "whip behind", which the driver would do if the clinger was a nuisance, or if it was demanded by a toff in the carriage. We used the word 'ling' for what we did. It is not in the Macquarie dictionary, which includes many Australianisms, and I have not heard it used since, probably because this practice would now be suicide. (It might have come from 'cling', but we didn't think of this at the time, and never sounded a *c*).

Essendon Grammar was a small school, trying to copy the major Melbourne private schools. I had to learn French and Latin and English grammar in keeping with the school's name, plus history etc., but physics, maths and chemistry were not up to government school standards, with no chemistry lab. It was just as well that my scholarship terminated after the two years, and I transferred to Williamstown High, where, because of good reports from Essendon, the headmaster put me straight into year 10. Years later I realised I had been a year younger than most fellow students from then on.

At the beginning of 1939 we moved from Sunshine to Essendon to be near Mum's mum and dad, and one of her sisters. So I moved to Essendon High. It went only to the end of Year 11, so in 1940 I went to Melbourne High. At that time I think Melbourne, MacRobertson and Uni-versity High were the only government schools in Melbourne offering Year 12.

High school years were largely uneventful. I was a plodder at sport, but apparently had a gift for

doing well in exams, and obtained a government scholarship to the University (there was only one then) at the end of 1940.

University

The careers adviser there, hearing about the contraptions I have described, and a model railway I had at Essendon in 1939, recommended engineering as the obvious pursuit for me – advice which I have never regretted taking.

I was advised, after an interview, to study electrical engineering. I was exempt from military training, since I was only 17 in January 1941, and by 1942 was in a "reserved occupation": I was considered of more potential worth to the nation if I learnt engineering rather than how to use bayonets and guns. For people who were not among those embarking for overseas service, the war did not make a lot of difference until the commencement of Japanese aggression following the Pearl Harbour attack in December 1941. The Japanese were then advancing down the Malay peninsula towards us, and that really was a wake-up call for Australia. Severe austerity measures were introduced, curtailing unnecessary manufacture, giving priority to that of essential goods unlikely to be obtainable from overseas sources, and introducing rationing of essential items. Slit trenches were dug in the Uni. lawns, and they filled with cold muddy water during the 1942 winter. I was issued with a tunic, trousers, hat and boots for the "University Rifles" brigade, but no rifle. Women's auxiliary units (I think) took up some of the college accommodation, and could be seen parading and drilling on the main sports oval, while we sat on the flat roof of Union House and ate our sandwiches.

I found keeping up with the details of the maths, science, and engineering generally very demanding. There was no photocopying: mostly one copied out blackboard notes. There was work at home later to avoid falling behind, which, particularly in mathematical subjects, could lead to failure in the final exams. I had to go as far as third-year mathematics – esoteric stuff and beyond anything I needed in my subsequent career.

Most Sunday evenings I escorted my girlfriend, a trainee nurse at the Children's Hospital, then in an old building near the Exhibition Gardens, in the tram to the northern end of Elizabeth Streeet, and through the blackout to her base.

Social activities centred around the North Essendon Anglican church, with club meetings and choir. Dances were held from time to time there and at Essendon High. Somewhat to my later regret, I just didn't have time for extracurricular activities at University. Through groups led by John Howes, I have been glad to become better acquainted with the humanities.

Some memories of lectures reveal the situations or customs of the times. For physics (called Natural Philosophy) we had Professor Laby, then in the last years of a distinguished career. He fined me one pound (or was it two?) for making a remark to my neighbour during a lecture. That was a lot for a financially-strapped student, and the whole class pitched in, leaving me with only a few shillings to pay.

Professor Brown, also in his last years, gave the lectures in Electrical. He would remark occasionally, after a pause in the notes he was reading, that it was caused by a silverfish meal. His technology had not appreciably changed over the previous thirty or so years. Up-to-date guidance in radio, electronics, and telephone practice was quite meagre, requiring some intensive catch-up study when I obtained my job in the Department of Civil Aviation after graduating.

A curiosity in the teaching of mathematics was a short course called Practical Mathematics, in which we had to revert to elementary arithmetic – long tots, long division, taking square roots, and calculating pi to dozens of decimal places using a classic formula, all with neat and well-formed handwriting. Pi was later spread out on a sheet along one side of the lecture-hall, with hundreds of decimal places.

A lecturer, talking about the gathering of statistics, made the remark "If the information is scanty, proceed with a spirit of adventure." This caused great hilarity: in those days any such *double entendre* was not "the done thing" for lecturers.

I gained second class honours in my last exams in 1944, and took my degree at the traditional ceremony in the old Wilson Hall in February 1945, wearing a hired gown. There was a photograph of the thirty-four of us. We had a nice reunion at Graduate House in September 2011, at which there were eleven.

Proposed improvements for some of a dictionary's entries

In my editorial letter, as in the booklet *SSC*, I draw attention to the great value for learners of English of the *Oxford Basic English Dictionary* (or its counterpart the *Oxford Essential Dictionary*). Explaining the use or uses of a word is often far from easy, and there are special difficulties when the explanation is intended to be for beginners, whether they are children or non-native speakers. It is very important (and full of interest) to consider entries critically, in relation to a wide range of defects to be avoided, both in order to go on improving a very valuable dictionary such as those mentioned and for the stimulus it gives to thought (not just about words). So I make a practice of noting any entry in *OBED* that I know or believe to need correction or improvement. This article may be regarded as a progress report, and makes no claim to be exhaustive. It will be sent, with the respect and gratitude with which it is written, to OUP, along with a list of slips of insufficient interest to be noted here. I should welcome comments from readers on any entries with which they are dissatisfied, and I intend to prepare at least one further article of the same kind as this one. For the most part I have used double inverted commas for quotations from the dictionary. At the time of writing, I have not had before me the 4th edition, nor has Dymocks in Melbourne had copies, but now I have become aware of it and ordered it. If any of the following criticisms need modifying because of changes made, I shall say so in our next issue.

Education is much more than teaching, and it is certainly not confined to schools and colleges (and universities), so it will not suffice to define ***educate*** and ***education*** by "to teach/teaching somebody at a school or college". A better account of the verb would be 'foster the development of persons, especially through teaching', and of the noun 'process of development …'.

Respect connotes a deep-seated quality the presence or absence of which greatly influences one's behaviour. **Out of** respect one treats other people politely, so the second meaning given ("being polite to somebody or something" [why add 'or something'?]) will not do. The first one is "thinking that somebody or something is very good or clever", suggests a reaction, not a disposition, and in *clever* uses a word that needs to be contrasted with *wise*. Wisdom rather than cleverness elicits our respect. So the one explanation could be given, relying on what has already been said at *regard*, and on Kant: 'special regard for somebody or something, preventing one from treating them inconsiderately or merely as a means'.

Respect underlies the best kind of liberalism, but in *OBED* ***liberal*** is wrongly contrasted with ***strict***: the word is explained by "A person who is liberal lets other people do and think what they want", and its use illustrated by "Kim's parents are very liberal, but mine are quite strict." Let us say rather, with the qualification emphasized by J.S. Mill (*Liberty*, Ch. 1), 'A person who is liberal attaches great value to freedom in thought, words and deeds, provided no harm to others is involved', and illustrate that by 'A government should be liberal in its attitude to criticisms of it in newspapers.' Such a person may consistently also hold, especially in the case of a young son or daughter, that, as another nineteenth-century English liberal puts it, "the mere removal of compulsion, the mere enabling a man to do as he likes, is in itself no contribution to true freedom", and even that "submitting to … restraint … is the first step in true freedom, because the first step towards the full exercise of the faculties with which man is endowed" (T.H.Green, *Works* Vol. III, p.371).

Before continuing, I offer one principle and four abbreviations. The principle is that any word used in an explanation must itself be (or be a form of) a word given in the dictionary. I shall use here the common dictionary abbreviations (surprisingly not used in the two under consideration) 'sb' and 'sth' for 'somebody' and 'something', and also 'ES' and 'ESes' for 'example-sentence(s)'.

A dictionary intended for use by children and further-language learners urgently needs change if it fails to give accounts of ***argument***, ***conclude*** and ***conclusion*** that provide for the central rational activity of presenting one or more statements (usually to another or others, but perhaps only to

oneself) both as true and as justifying the making of a further statement. *OBED* recognizes the use of **argue** to mean "to say why you think that something is right or wrong", but for ***argument*** has only "an angry discussion between people who do not agree with each other". Much better would be 'a discussion between people who put conflicting views'. A second meaning should also be given: 'a set of statements of which at least one is presented as required or justified by another or others'. An example: 'The Minister's argument is that, since breast-feeding benefits infants, it should be promoted.'

The first meaning given for ***conclude*** is "to decide something after you have studied or thought about it". (The second ES for that, "May I conclude by thanking our guest speaker", should be transferred to the second meaning, "to end or make something end".) The crucial component of the meaning is that of justification, not of temporal priority. Say 'to decide or say that something is true for a reason or reasons you accept or give'. An example: 'The evidence led her to conclude that the hospital should have more beds.' Conclusions can be rashly drawn, so that it is a mistake to explain ***conclusion*** by "what you believe or decide after thinking carefully about something". Say rather 'what you accept or present as true for a reason or reasons'.

At ***authority***, there is a good account of its meaning as a noun with no plural (what I call an NU, a noun for something uncountable with that noun): "the power to tell people what they must do". But ***authority*** as an NC (C for 'countable': the noun is usable in the plural) needs to be defined by 'a person or group that has such power', and not by 'a group of people that tell [*sic*] other people what they must do'!

It is crude to write at ***Christ*** "= JESUS". Say rather 'a name given to Jesus to indicate a special status'. Also crude is the explanation of ***funeral*** as "the time when a dead person is buried or burned". Whatever one's relevant belief or unbelief, 'the occasion of burial or burning of the body of a person who has died' is a preferable wording, whether for a child or for an adult. Plato's Socrates makes that point at *Phaedo* 115c-e.

Turning to less serious matters, consider the entries for ***fiddle*** and for ***fidget***, and for ***lie***. For the first, we have "to touch something a lot with your fingers, because you are bored or nervous". 'To move something about a lot …' would be better. At ***fidget***, that *because*-clause is expanded: "to keep moving your body, hands, or feet because you are nervous, excited, or bored". The *Shorter Oxford*'s "Make spasmodic movements indicative of restlessness, uneasiness, or impatience" rightly omits the word *excitement*. Lying, e.g., on a bed or the sand, is not an action, whereas lying down on it is, so the second explanation of ***lie*** as "to have your body flat on something" is correct, whereas the first, "to put your body flat on something so that you are not sitting or standing" (with its redundant last eight words!) is not.

If is a fascinating word, much used to present a hypothetical case (an indispensable use to which many logicians have failed to do justice). Pre-tertiary education should include the grasping of the ideas both of a hypothetical case and of a hypothesis (see my booklet *Reasoning*), but in a basic dictionary we might be content to say of 'If': 'a word used to introduce a situation not as actual but as possible or imaginable'. Attention is wrongly directed away from the if-clause by *OBED*, which, giving first the ES "If you press this button, the machine starts", offers the explanation of ***if*** as "a word that you use to say what is possible or true when another thing happens or is true". Consider these ESes: 'If you press this button, what happens?' or 'If you press this button, cover your ears.'

Now for some grammatical terms. ***Infinitive*** is explained as "the simple form of a verb", and the ES is "'Eat', 'go' and 'play' are all infinitives." Put any of *I*, *you*, *we*, or *they* in front of those verb-forms, and you have given what have traditionally been called **finite** verbs, and by me in *Making up Sentences* **personed** verbs, i.e., verbs used in such a way that they are tied to one of three "persons", first, second and third (*it* is admitted alongside *he* and *she*), so that if there is a subject-locution (as there is not in the case of imperatives) it and the verb must form a matching pair, each of the same person and number (singular or plural). So the given explanation and ES could hardly be worse for the beginner in English grammar. For **infinitive**, it is best to combine example and explanation, as in "A verb used in either of the ways shown at the ends of these sentences: 'He hopes to play' and 'He can play.'"

A related error is the inclusion at the end of the list of the uses of the preposition ***to*** of the use of ***to*** in a *to*-infinitive. List it separately, as in the *Oxford Advanced …*, calling it, as there, an infinitive marker, or a particle. Non-native speakers have to become clear that **no** preposition can be put before an infinitive: we can say 'She is eager to study philosophy' but not 'She is devoted to study philosophy,' where we need the gerund or the words 'the study of'. ***Gerund*** should itself be in the dictionary, as **participle** is: it can be defined as a noun ending in *–ing* and derived from a verb. ***Cycling*** is a gerund in 'Cycling keeps me fit', but *OBED*, at *cycling*, wrongly calls it a noun in 'We go cycling most weekends', where it is a participle.

Can is rightly called a modal verb, but that term is inadequately explained. It is true that a modal verb is "a verb, for example 'might', 'can' or 'must', that you use with another verb", but it would be better to say, after 'use', 'before an infinitive but without *to*, in order to express possibility, necessity or obligation'. It is a mistake to include *will* and *shall* as modal verbs: they are better called auxiliaries, but *auxiliary* is a basic term of grammar that *OBED* omits. It is needed because, e.g., *will* and *be* and *performed* in the passive verb-form that combines them are certainly not three separate verbs but three parts of the one verb, in which *performed* is the main part and *will* and *be* are auxiliaries ("helpers").

Children used to be told not to explain the noun X by writing 'X is when ….' *OBED* explains *ballot*, *blast*, *spite* and *vote* with *when*-clauses, and there are other examples. How much better to accompany the good ES "She broke my watch **out of spite**" with the explanation 'a desire to do sb harm' than with "when somebody deliberately says or does unkind things".

Grammarians and so dictionary-makers are frequently guilty of confusion between an item of language and that to which it refers. Consider the quadruple confusion in the explanation of the third meaning given for *subject*: "(*grammar*) the word in a sentence that does the action of the verb"! First, the **word** 'Sue' in the given sentence "Sue ate the cake" is said to be the subject, but it did not eat the cake: the girl did. So persistent, natural and useful is it to use the word *subject* to refer to that of which something is said that I believe it is best to make a big change to traditional grammatical terminology by using for the corresponding item of **language** not *subject* but *subject-locution* (*Sub-L*).

The word 'locution' (usable also in *object-locution*: *Ob-L*) can valuably cover the immense range that includes any individual word, numeral, abbreviation, symbol, phrase, or clause, and any **unified** set of these up to a sentence. On that basis we can say that a Sub-L is a locution used to refer to that of which something is said, or asked about, in a sentence (or a part of it) with a verb that matches that Sub-L in person and number. ('Jim swims' or 'Does Jim swim?': in each case a matching pair, both 3S, third person singular.) Thus we can avoid a second error in OBED's explanation: even if we use the word *subject* in the traditional way, we must recognize that what is called the subject may consist of more than one word, e.g. 'the girl', 'the boy next door', and 'what you said'. Thirdly, the words "does the action of a verb" suggest that verbs are all "doing-words", as so many teachers have falsely and misleadingly said. At *verb* there is a wider view, but not wide enough: "a word that tells you what somebody does or what happens". We need rather "a word or set of words that in its primary use, in statements or questions, links with some subject an action, activity, event, process or state, as in 'Sue **ate** the cake', 'The snow **has melted**', and '**Is** he sick?', and has a tense." Fourthly, a sentence may have more than one subject and more than one Sub-L, as in 'Jim swims but Mary plays tennis.'

One reason to change the traditional use of the word 'subject' is the need to distinguish clearly between the active and the passive use of transitive verbs. Often a dictionary or grammar book will, in the attempt to do that, use 'subject' not for a word or group of words but as I have recommended. So, in dealing with the grammatical senses, *OBED* explains ***active*** with "when the person or thing doing the action is the subject of a sentence or verb". *P**assive*** is explained by "the form of a verb that shows that the action is done by a person or thing to another person or thing" – but that applies as much to the active use! Say rather "An active verb-form is one that shows that the action, etc., expressed by the verb originates from the subject" and "A passive verb-form shows that the action, etc., expressed by the verb originates outside the subject." One of *OBED*'s examples is "The car was stolen"; the other could be "He stole the car."

I end this first article with a word whose definition rightly contains a collective noun. It is 'definition' itself. What is wrong with "a group of words that tell you what another word means"?

John Howes

Recommended Book

GUANMIN HU, *a member of Learningguild who comes from Guangzhou in south-eastern China, took a Master of Agricultural Science degree at La Trobe in 2011 and is particularly interested in viticulture. Here he and John Howes review a book that concentrates on two parts of the IELTS test. (See the final article in this* Letter *for a new book that covers the fourfold range.)*

Focusing on IELTS: Listening and speaking skills was first published in 2002, from Macquarie University, Sydney, but Macmillan has produced a second edition (2011). The authors are Steven Thurlow and Kerry O'Sullivan. Within the back cover are four CDs, and full transcripts occupy about forty pages, a fifth of the book. There are about twenty pages of answers, mostly to questions asked in the speaking tests, with comments on some of what students are recorded as uttering. The CDs should be fully utilized in relation to a close study of the text.

There is an exceptionally wide range of valuable guidance in this book. We give just four examples, with page-references. The section headed "Recognising meaning through pronunciation" (pp. 28-33) recommends close attention to intonation: "content words", by contrast with those that join them together into phrases, clauses and sentences, tend to be stressed and uttered at a higher pitch ("I'm studying **chem**istry"). Learners of English should themselves develop skill in using appropriate intonation (123-5). In a speaking test, one should not be afraid of including some contractions, e.g., *we'd* for *we had*: "Contractions can make you sound friendlier" (119f). "Grammatical accuracy and range" are very important not only in writing but in a speaking test too (99-111 & 132): many examples are given of the use of good patterns, for example ones with dependent clauses (the word 'subordinate' is also used). However, some of the analysis is quite incorrect (for example, at 107, calling 'there' a subject in 'there is a large population of commuters' – it's an adverb given a special use – and 'being' in 'Public transport, besides being incredibly important …' a verb: it's a gerund.

The first CD illustrates many principles for handling the listening test. The second has in full an imagined listening test: the instructions and questions are on pp. 55-60, and the transcript is on pp. 161-6.

The third of the CDs includes some useful recordings of conversations between examiners and candidates. Most candidates appear to have accents typical of Asian or Latin American or African backgrounds. Listeners can learn to do better than before by noticing strengths and weaknesses, reorganizing some answers and using better intonation. The fourth CD gives three full speaking-test conversations. The three candidates mostly speak better than those previously heard, and much can be learned from close and critical listening to them and attention to the evaluations and comments of the authors (pp. 201-6).

A copy of this book is available in the Learningguild Library for loan: it was bought from Dymocks in 2011 for $49.99.

John Howes's booklet-and-CD *Sounds, Words, Sentences* is available from Learningguild at $22 ($17.60 for members). It goes through the consonants and then the vowels of English: for each consonant and each vowel, four words in which it occurs are spoken three times, and there are explanatory sentences. The latter provide practice in grouping of words and in emphasis and intonation.

WHAT'S A GOOD INTRODUCTION TO …

PREPARING FOR IELTS?

RENATA GIZZATULLINA, *who has come to Melbourne from southern Russia, is a member of Learningguild and has made rapid progress in speaking and writing English. She has been much concerned with the promotion of pharmaceutical goods and is seeking employment in that field.*

It is important to choose your materials well if you are intending to take IELTS, and to have access to recent ones. The test is not only about your ability to speak and write in English: it also requires special techniques which you can develop by doing practice tests regularly and getting advice on your responses.

Kogan Page has published, in 2012, a book by Chris Tyreman, a man of plentiful experience in tutoring and in writing such guides, with the title ***How to master the IELTS*** and the long subtitle ***over 400 practice questions for all parts of the International English Language Testing System***. The book is an excellent guide to the current pattern of tests. It contains four complete practice tests (each comprising all the tests called Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking) for the Academic module and additional tests for the General Training module.

The introduction begins with the assertion that there are over 1.5 million people taking IELTS each year. Then there are answers to ten FAQs, ample guidance for the four practice tests, and "Ten top tips for IELTS". These last are very helpful, especially for people planning to take it for the first time. Among them is a favourite of mine, for the Listening Test, "Pay special attention to the first question, so that you know when to begin." For Reading: "Read the first question and then search for the sentence that contains the answer; it is often near the beginning of the passage."

The book has the advantage that the answers section for the Listening Test is prefaced by full scripts. That makes it possible for readers to check the aptness of those answers. (If you have a CD player or computer that can play MP3 files, you can, says the author, download such files free and so listen to the readings of the passages as a candidate would.)

The Reading Test, says the author,"is a test of word recognition rather than a test of understanding." It is a common mistake of candidates to try to read fully the three passages, on which there are in total forty questions. These passages are likely to contain some technical vocabulary and include scientific topics and other matters of current interest, such as the environment, internet security, and home-schooling. My recommendation would be to pay very close and repeated attention to this section, because you need to have the ability to scan texts carefully but rapidly, and not just a wide range of vocabulary, in order to write your answers quickly and accurately.

There are expanded versions of answers, which help the reader to locate the paragraph in which the answer is to be found and give hints or clear explanations of why it is the answer, and not another which might seem to be right. An appendix gives a useful vocabulary for the reading tests, with words of mostly medium difficulty, such as 'tolerance' and 'compliance'. I found the texts very interesting.

Responses to tasks in the Writing Test have been written by the author. He explains his method in each case, so that we can learn different styles of academic writing. Many candidates sorely need such guidance.

In introducing the Speaking Test, he says "Remember that you are not being assessed on your knowledge of the topic, only on your speech." Many examples are given of questions likely to be asked, and valuable tips are offered. Using the right tense, and being ready to correct yourself when you realize you have made a mistake, are rightly given prominence.

This book is a very good guide to IELTS, not least because it is up to date. It is borrowable from the Learningguild Library, and was bought for $29.95 at Dymocks. However, one should not regard it as all one needs, but look around for others to give more materials for the regular practice that is required for success.

Philosophy seminar

Here is the text on our website under that heading and dated December 2012. It will be updated in most months during 2013, and there is a warm invitation to participate.

The Learningguild philosophy seminar has run since 1995. It has not met in 2012, but will resume in a new form in 2013. Instead of weekly meetings, there will be an initial one at 8 pm on Tuesday February 5th, and others on days and at times to be arranged, perhaps at intervals of about a month. Dr John Howes will again lead the seminar. He will invite participants to undertake reading in relation to certain questions, to suggest further reading and other questions (and, when they wish, answers), and to write to him and perhaps to one or more fellow-members. Thus an agenda for a following meeting can be developed, and the participants can prepare well for it.

Any Learningguild member is of course welcome to let John know that she or he would like to be a participant in this seminar. So is anyone else, even if, at least initially, she or he prefers not to become a member. One's participation may be recognized and welcomed without any expectation that one will attend a meeting, for example if one does not live in Melbourne. There will be no fee, since there is a standing invitation to those Learningguild members who are able to do so to donate as well as subscribe.

The proposed theme for 2013 is "**Reason and Religion**". Opening discussion will include the question "Why that theme, and in that order?" (Other themes or wordings might be suggested and compared.) The first area of reading proposed consists of John's short booklet *Reasoning* (copies available from Learningguild) and the eighth paragraph of Chapter 3 of Mill's *Liberty* (the paragraph beginning "In some such insidious form": read as much of the context as you wish). Here are some further questions. (1) How are we to explain the meaning of and the relationship between the two adjectives 'self-contradictory' and 'consistent'? (They are used, respectively, on p.3 of *Reasoning* and in Mill's paragraph.) (2) Is it apt to define reason as the faculty in us that seeks consistency? (3) What is the relationship between reason and reasons? (4) How are we to respond to the following view? "We must not attach too much importance to reason and reasons in human life. Love and devotion are far more important: that is just about common ground in the religions."

Learningguild has often conducted, once in a year, a day conference in philosophy of religion. It is intended that another be held this August, related to the seminar's theme. Two papers are likely to be discussed in the morning session, and some material from the Swiss theologian Dietrich Ritschl in the afternoon, because of his special interest in the implications of the Enlightenment for Christian theology. John Howes is preparing to give a paper, at the annual conference in July of the Australasian Association of Philosophy, entitled "On Religion: Kant and Mill, or Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein?". In it his main concerns will be to describe fairly the approach(es) taken by the latter pair, and consider whether the essentially crititical approach of the former pair is to be preferred. That paper is likely to be one of the two morning papers discussed at the day conference, and John would certainly welcome the thoughts of others on those writers and that question.

> Not that it is solely, or chiefly, to form great thinkers, that freedom of thinking is required. On the contrary, it is as much and even more indispensable, to enable average human beings to attain the mental stature which they are capable of.
>
> J.S.Mill, *Liberty*, Chapter 2, paragraph 20.

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Enquiries are welcome: ask for or write to Dr John Howes, the President, or Mrs Margaret Howes, the Subscriptions Secretary. In Australia the subscription for the calendar year is $11 ($16.50 for a couple). No subscription is normally payable by those outside Australia who are enrolled as members: they may have provided or offered to provide hospitality to other members, or simply undertaken to send news, views or questions to *Learningguild Letter*.