# OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND FOR U.S.-RUSSIA COLLABORATION

BY BERNADETTE LONGO

Opportunities for strengthening collaboration between the Professional Communication Society and the A. S. Popov Society were the main topic of discussion when I visited our colleagues in Moscow in July. I was accompanied by Elizabeth Rice, a fellow English professor at Clemson University. We were met in Moscow by Dr. Henrich Lantsberg, who is a member of the Central Board and Chairman of the Professional Communication Section of the A. S. Popov Society for Radio, Electronics, and Communications. Dr. Lantsberg has also been active in the Russia Chapter of PCS for many years.

Dr. Lantsberg arranged for us to visit a number of his colleagues at various sites of the Russian National Academy of Sciences. Professor Rice and I were warmly welcomed and invited to enter into academic and professional exchanges with the science institutes in Moscow. At the end of our four days we had cemented our mutual intentions to work more closely together and continue to develop avenues for collaboration.

We found many possibilities for working more closely between PCS members and our Russian counterparts. What follows are the outcomes of the initial discussions we had with Dr. Lantsberg and members of the Popov Society. These ideas can serve as a starting point for considering how our societies can reach out to each other across an ocean of changing circumstances.

**Institute of Advance Learning of Communicators**

At the Institute of Advance Learning of Communicators we met with Director Yuri

Ukin, Senior Lecturer Boris M. Gerasimov, and Associate Professor Vladimir T. Grebenitchenko. This institute is state-run but is self-sufficient through profit-making activities. It offers short-term courses for engineers and other professionals who want to strengthen their communication skills or learn to teach technical communication. The focus of the institute is on information resources, finance, banking, personnel, information security, and pedagogy for training people to use information.

We also met with Ruggero Giliarevskii representing the All-Russia Institute for Scientific and Technical Information. He teaches in the journalism department at Moscow State University and at the National Academy of Sciences. Dr. Giliarevskii edits a journal for the Information Workers Association, which formerly abstracted 20 000 journals in science, technology, and social science. This publication now abstracts only five journals because they have reduced funding for subscriptions.

**Institute of Organic Chemistry**

At the Institute of Organic Chemistry of the Russian Academy of Sciences we met with Dr. Andrej Mendkovich. The Russian Academy of Sciences is purely a research institute. Dr. Mendkovich, who has many advanced degrees in chemistry, now manages the worldwide FREEnet for academic and research functions. This collaborative network is self-supporting and is currently doing extraordinary work with limited resources.
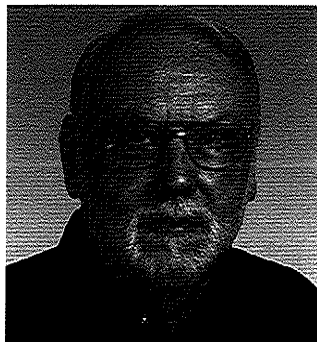
Dr. Mendkovich is interested in establishing a dedicated phone line between the

## FROM THE EDITOR

RUDY JOENK

### Letter to the Editor

I was bemused by the Professor Grammar article in the September/October *Newsletter* to the point of writing this letter.

The criticism of "and/or" use was well documented and quite justified. However, if it is never proper usage, a question arises about why it was created and why it is so often used by otherwise reasonably literate people. I believe the answer lies in a certain logic ambiguity in the word "or."

Readers may know that in logic there are two kinds of "or." Computerists have denoted OR to be the nonexclusive form (apples or oranges are commonly found in fruit salad). The exclusive form of "or" is XOR. The exclusive form is found in "give me liberty, or give me death." If one is to be precise every use of "or" should be clearly seen to be exclusive (XOR) or not exclusive (OR).

This ambiguity of the simple word "or" may very well be the impetus for the creation of "and/or." This takes an opposite approach, namely that "or" is presumably XOR unless the context forbids it. Thus, mere "or" often may not be enough when OR is intended.

Professor Grammar correctly points out that such ambiguity can always be cured by proper inclusion of terms such as "or both" XOR "one or more of." Yet I question whether "and/or" should be excommunicated rather than limiting it to the situation where it communicates "note that I mean OR and not XOR." I will then not insist that "give me liberty, XOR give me death" be the revised standard translation for this Patrick Henry quotation.

It is perhaps a higher crime when "and" is used rather than "and/or"; in precise language "A and B" means both A and B. This is clearly not the same as A OR B nor the same as A XOR B. There are many inept word choices worse than a proper use of "and/or." In defense of "and/or," it can properly be used to resolve ambiguity between OR and XOR; it is not the most elegant way to do this, but it may be the most efficient on occasion.

— *Robert R. Keegan*
*Fayetteville, Arkansas*

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### AdCom Meetings

See the report of the September Administrative Committee meeting and election on page 18. The next AdCom meeting will be January 15-16, 1999, in Houston, Texas. Members are welcome at AdCom meetings.

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"There is nothing in the world like a persuasive speech to fuddle the mental apparatus."

— *Mark Twain*

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# PSSST...YES, *YOU!* WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN PCS ACTIVITIES?

ROGER GRICE

The Professional Communication Society is always looking for people with good ideas, an interest in professional and technical communication, and an interest in professional growth. That probably sounds like *you*, doesn't it?

I know that professional societies can sometimes seem liked closed groups of people, a network of old friends who work together and try to keep the outsiders out. Well, we are a network of friends; that part is true. But we welcome new members; in fact, we *need* new members if we hope to continue operating.

The first step toward becoming involved is to become a member of the IEEE Professional Communication Society. If you're reading this column, there's a pretty good chance that you already are a member or that you know someone who is. If you're not a member and would like to become one, please contact me (*r.grice@ieee.org*) and I'll send you a membership application package. If you are already a member, let's consider some of the areas of activity where you might find opportunities for creativity:

*We have volunteer positions in all shapes and sizes.*

- **Conferences**—We're always in need of people to help organize and run conferences: program committee, local arrangements committee, proceedings committee, etc.

- **Publications**—We produce a newsletter (you're holding a copy of it right now) and a journal, the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*. We always need volunteers to write and review articles, coordinate submissions and activities, and help improve information design.

- **Membership**—We're always looking for better ways to reach and serve our members.

- **Publicity**—We can use the talents of those who can help us let the world know what the Professional Communication Society is all about.

- **Education**—We need people who can design and teach communication courses and people who can help assess the needs of the market.

And that's just part of the list. If you have another talent or interest, we can probably find an activity you will enjoy.

**What Are You Waiting For?**

Well, here are some of the things you might be worrying about:

*I don't have time to volunteer.* Time is a concern for everyone these days. Those of us in PCS know that as well as anyone. But we have volunteer positions in all shapes and sizes. If you have a large block of free time, we can certainly fill it for you. If you have only a little time, we can find interesting and worthwhile things for you, too.

*I'm not really very talented.* You probably have talents that you're not even aware of. And we can train you, help you with PCS projects, and support your efforts.

*I'm too shy to volunteer.* OK, we all have our shy times. But if you're on the shy side and would like to volunteer, send me e-mail or a letter. That's not too intimidating, is it?

I look forward to working with you in the Professional Communication Society. The activities are enjoyable (most of the time) and seeing our efforts bear fruit is rewarding (all of the time).

**Now, what are you waiting for?**

# U.S.-RUSSIA COLLABORATION

*(continued from page 1)*

U.S. and Russia for FREEnet activities. He is also interested in hosting a teleconference and would manage activities online.

## Institute of Informatics

At the Institute of Informatics of the Russian Economic Academy we met with Institute President Konstantin Kurbakov and Professor Victor Romanov, chair of an information systems department. The institute trains students to analyze the Russian economy using computer applications (informatics).

Dr. Romanov proposed the following types of collaboration:

1. Exchange of handbooks

    1.1 The Institute is preparing 15 handbooks in the domain of information systems. They can include in them information about U.S. software that will be promotional. They are interested in publishing these handbooks in the U.S.

    1.2 The Institute could recommend publishers for similar U.S. books in Russia.

2. Cooperation in scientific research

    2.1 The Institute could apply the results of U.S. investigations in Russia.

    2.2 The Institute is interested in elaborating information systems for U.S. firms.

## Suggestions for Collaboration

It is clear that our Popov Society colleagues welcome collaboration and exchanges with PCS members and other U.S. organizations. They have a wealth of knowledge, skills, and energy to contribute to such collaborations. Due to current circumstances in their country, however, our Russian colleagues are short of financial funding to support their professional activities. PCS members could significantly impact the lives of our Russian counterparts by including them in our professional activities and providing in-kind and financial support wherever possible.

Opportunities for collaborating with our Russian colleagues include the following:

- Director Ukin welcomes faculty and professional teaching and research exchanges between U.S. universities and companies and his institute. These exchanges can be for a few days to a few months. Dormitory lodging is available in Moscow for a fee. Faculty from the institute are interested in traveling to sites in the U.S. if funding can be made available for their travel and lodging. Director Ukin's fax number is 011-7-095-155-73-19 for initial contacts.

- Institute faculty are interested in online collaborations. The institute has current computer hardware and software for such work. They would welcome donations of software for specialized applica-

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*We cemented our mutual intentions to work more closely together.*

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*Entrance to Red Square in Moscow*

tions related to teaching technical communication. Director Ukin's e-mail address is *sveta@ipkir.msk.ru* for initial contacts.

- Institute faculty welcome English language technical writing teaching materials. Clemson University English faculty are sending 50 such texts to the institute, with the local Rotary Club funding the postage.

- The Information Workers Association would welcome funding to buy subscriptions to journals for their abstracting service. Dr. Giliarevskii's fax number is 011-7-095-943-0060 and his e-mail address is *viniti@sovam.com* for initial contacts.

- Dr. Mendkovich welcomes support for establishing a dedicated telephone line between the U.S. and Russia to enable wider distribution of and participation in international FREEnet teleconferencing activities. Dr. Mendkovich will manage these activities. His e-mail address is *asm@free.net* for initial contacts.

This list represents only initial ideas about collaboration developed from our visit this summer. The most important outcome of our visit was the intention to collaborate which we clearly established with our Russian colleagues. The door is open for PCS members to propose other ideas that may arise from their own work.

I thank PCS for funding the airfare for my trip to Russia. It was an honor to represent our society during my visit to Moscow. I also sincerely thank Henrich Lantsberg for his gracious and untiring hospitality. He spent a great deal of time and energy planning our meetings, translating, and accompanying us on our travels. It was a pleasure to meet such a fine gentleman and colleague.

*Bernadette Longo* (blongo@clemson.edu) *has taught professional communication at Clemson University since 1996. Her research includes cultural studies of the history of technical writing. She received her Ph.D. degree in communication and rhetoric from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.*

## PCS MEMBER HONORED BY REGION 8

PCS member Henrich Lantsberg was honored May 19 by Maurice Papo, chair of IEEE Region 8. During a meeting in Moscow of the Russian Popov Society Dr. Lantsberg was presented with a plaque bearing this tribute: "IEEE Region 8 recognizes Henrich Lantsberg for his valued services as vice-chair of IEEE Russia Section and his key contribution to the cooperation between the Russian Popov Society and IEEE."

Dr. Lantsberg is well known to PCS as a driving force in the interactions between PCS and the Professional Communication Section of the Popov Society which began in 1990. A high point was our joint spon-

sorship of an information symposium in Moscow in 1991 and Dr. Lantsberg's presence, along with Dr. Yuri Gornostaev, at IPCC 91 in Orlando, Florida. Both societies recently renewed a cooperation agreement begun in 1993.

Although now 76, Dr. Lantsberg continues as an indefatigable organizer and chair of international and Russian conferences, workshops, and symposia—many involving IEEE—and as host and guide to foreign visitors, recently PCS representative Prof. Bernadette Longo of Clemson University. He is chair of PCS's Russia Chapter.

"Those who agree with us may not be right, but we admire their astuteness."
— *Cullen Hightower*

# PCS PHILADELPHIA CHAPTER AWARDS PRIZES

Fifty-two student and regular members gathered at the faculty club of Drexel University on April 14 to celebrate the successes of the IEEE Philadelphia Section's six student branches. Section chair Moshe Kam, IEEE president-elect Ken Laker, and members of the Section's executive committee applauded the students and underscored the many ways that IEEE can support their professional development.

Awards and recognition were distributed to the participants and winners of the 7th Annual Student Writing Contest:

• Jonathan Francis of Swarthmore received $50 for his 3rd place paper "An Evaluation of the Utility of Fuzzy Logic in the Control of a Residential Solar-Hydrogen Power System."

• Allison Marsh of Swarthmore received $100 for her 2nd place paper "The Role of History in the Development of Science."

• Patrick Kelsey of Drexel received $150 for his 1st place paper "Fast Maze-Solving Under Computation Constraints."

The awards were presented by Edwin J. Podell, editor of the Section's *Almanack*, chair of the Professional Communication Society Chapter, and the contest's chief judge. Other judges were Barney Adler, Prawat Nagvajara, Jack Friedman, John Schanely, and Janet Rochester.

# FROM THE EDITOR
*(continued from page 2)*

### Info for Authors

One thousand words makes a nice page-and-a-half article, although longer and shorter articles may be appropriate. Proposals for periodic columns are also welcome.

If you use a wp program, keep the format simple; multiple fonts and sizes, customized paragraphing and line spacing, personalized styles, etc. have to be filtered out before being recoded in *Newsletter* style for the publishing software.

Some wp codes can be converted from one program to another but this is seldom true for the newest releases of the programs; headers, footers, and tables seem to lead the casualty list. Embed just enough highlighting—boldface, italics, bullets—to show me your formatting preferences.

Use e-mail for transmitting an article or postal mail for sending a diskette. My addresses are in the boilerplate at the bottom of page 2.

The deadline for articles is usually the first Friday of the odd-numbered month preceding publication, and we publish in the odd-numbered months. The next year's deadlines are:

| Issue | Deadline |
|---|---|
| Mar./Apr. 1999 | 9 Jan. 1999 |
| May/June 1999 | 5 Mar. 1999 |
| July/Aug. 1999 | 7 May 1999 |
| Sep./Oct. 1999 | 9 July 1999 |
| Nov./Dec. 1999 | 10 Sep. 1999 |
| Jan./Feb. 2000 | 5 Nov. 1999 |

"Some people change their minds and it still doesn't work any better."
— *Gloria Pitzer*

# HANDLING TOUGH SITUATIONS

**CHERYL REIMOLD**

*Look for the positive kernel in annoying personal qualities.*

**P**art 5: Successful Problem-Solving Discussions

Last time we saw how to prepare effectively for a difficult discussion by visualizing complete scenarios and then fine-tuning the most promising ones. Now let's see how to conduct the conversation successfully.

## Unlock the Door with Goodwill

It's important to start with lots of goodwill and respect. Why? Because expectations on all sides are so negative in these situations that positive signals will simply be drowned out unless you send them strongly at the start.

Unfortunately, you can't fake this; the fraud will be obvious. So you need to find something you can honestly appreciate or respect in the other person. If this proves impossible, look at his or her most annoying quality and consider the positive kernel of that quality. For instance, an irascible boss may be committed and intense; sarcastic people may be more honest or outspoken than average; etc. When you think about that, you may find it easier to begin the conversation in a positive way. And if you can manage a confident smile as well, that will greatly magnify your persuasive powers.

## Keep the Door Open with Sound Communication Skills

When fear or anger are lurking in the back of your mind, it's easy to say or do the wrong thing and it takes only one wrong word or gesture to spoil an entire interaction. It's crucial then to use your best communication skills. Here are some points to watch:

- *Get to your main message immediately* after your goodwill opening. That main message should be a firm assertion of what you want to accomplish. Leading up to that message with background information only invites objections and side discussions and by the time you get to the main point, the other person won't even hear you. The more aggressive or evasive the other person, the more important this principle becomes.

- *Present only your strongest arguments.* Many people think the more arguments, the better. The opposite is true. You need few arguments—but good ones. Anything weak is just an opening for objections and sidetracking. So keep minor arguments as backup.

- *Truly listen.* You might learn something new! Nothing impresses people more than being really listened to. Be aware that preparation can work against you here: When you try to anticipate what the other person might say, you are likely to ignore or misinterpret unexpected responses. So, no matter how well prepared you are, be ready for surprises.

- *Don't blame.* Instead focus on solvable problems.

- *Never impute motives.* Doing so is sure to spark resentment!

- *Use straightforward language.* In particular, avoid rhetorical questions ("Don't you understand that we have to get these jobs out faster to keep our clients satisfied?"), accusatory questions ("How could you do that?"), exaggerations ("constantly," "forever," "never," etc.), and loaded words ("irresponsible," "nonsense").

- *Ask for action directly* rather than in the form of a question. This lessens the chance of disagreement. For instance, "Why don't you think it over?" invites a negative answer more than the straight request "Please think it over."

- Be *firm with your language and body.* That means avoid minimizing or qualifying expressions such as "just," "maybe," or "kind of," and keep firm eye contact, proper conversational distance, and straight posture.

## Push for Agreement

What you want from the discussion is some agreement that moves you toward a solution. Even if you can't get everything you hoped for, never leave empty-handed.

Agreements don't happen accidentally. As any good salesperson will tell you, they come about only when you push for them. So, no matter how chaotic the discussion, keep aiming at the best agreement you can extract under the circumstances—even if it's just to give the problem some thought and meet again.

Many people are completely thrown off by abusive or foul language. Unfortunately, emotional reactions are common in these situations. Decide beforehand how you will handle them, and chances are you

won't lose your composure. For instance, you may just ignore the outburst and say, "Look, the issue is we're both not having a good time. There must be some way we can improve things. Let's both try to think of some solutions." If you keep coming back calmly to what you want, at some point even an aggravated person will run out of emotional steam and begin to cooperate!

*Cheryl Reimold has been teaching communication skills to engineers, scientists, and businesspeople for 15 years. Her firm, PERC Communications (6A Dickel Road, Scarsdale, New York 10583, telephone 914-725-1024, e-mail perccom@aol.com), offers customized in-house courses on writing, presentation skills, and interpersonal communication.*

# BUSYBODY HYPHENS

## BY WEN SMITH

Punctuation is a ticklish business, period. Some people just write without any commas or semicolons or periods and then sprinkle 'em over the paper later—like pepper on a hot potato.

Comedian Victor Borge tried to turn punctuation into a vocal art, making an oral *phhht!* sound for a period and a *squee!* for a comma. But I don't think he ever tried to twist his tongue around a hyphen.

Hyphens are odd little sideways marks that elbow into the language, both written and spoken, for better or for worse. It's for better when a hyphen brings things meaningfully together, for worse when it tears people apart.

One little hyphen can change your whole way of thinking about what words mean. For instance, a *pickled-herring* merchant is quite different from a pickled *herring merchant.* The hyphen tells you whether

it's the fish or the merchant that has been on the sauce.

Hyphens are eager volunteers. Teams of them stand around waiting to help people who can't make up their minds what they want to do in life. In Hollywood those people turn into *actor-writer-director-producer* types like Orson Welles and Ron Howard. They couldn't be so versatile without the hyphen, which is something of a jack-of-all-trades itself.

Hyphens like that are benign. They properly tie together the parts of thought, as pickled belongs with the *herring* and it's the food, not the server, who is fast. Not all *fast-food* servers are fast *food servers.* If I write about a *high-school* student, nobody thinks the student is high.

Other benign hyphens do useful work and make things easier to read. If I write "*belllike* tones," those three *l*'s in a row

> Non-sense *is nonsense,
> and the really good
> hyphen stays out of it.*

do to the eye what slurring does to the ear. A smart hyphen senses the problem and jumps in to help me write "*bell-like* tones," just the way a Good Samaritan runs to help a motorist in a jam.

Long ago a hyphen muscled its way into *unAmerican* and made it *un-American*. The intrusion drew a lot of applause, so now whenever a word-bit like *un* or *pro* or *anti* is followed by a capital letter, you can expect a hyphen to turn up, as in *pro-Aristotelian* or *anti-Caesarian*. Hyphens like those are just showing off, pretending they know Greek or Latin.

Some prefixes might cause a reader's tongue to slip if a hyphen didn't prevent it. *Prochoice* may start with a meaningless *proch* unless it's written *pro-choice*. And *pro-life* shouldn't begin with *prol*.

Those are smart hyphens. But some are not smart—they're just busybodies and don't know there's no such thing as a *busybody*. Some are so eager to please that they show up on hyphen holidays. Words that start with *non* seldom need a hyphen, yet you'll often see *non-fiction* when *nonfiction* is all you need. Non-sense is nonsense, and the really good hyphen nowadays (not *now-a-days*) stays out of it.

The worst of hyphens are sneaky demons. They pose as go-betweens in words like *African-American* and *Asian-American*. They mean well but they do a lot of harm. As much as they try to fuse two cultures, they just confuse the two instead and turn cultures against one another.

We need Good Samaritan, no-fault hyphens that turn up for no-nonsense duty to help clarify a boggy thought. But we can do without the busybodies. Most African-Americans and Asian-Americans have never seen anything but America, and few who have would ever trade. The hyphen just stirs up trouble. The United States of America was founded by *Americans* who came from Europe, but they never called themselves *European*-Americans. They must have known that a *hyphen*-nation is a fractured nation, not a united one—and flat-out un-American.

*Smith, Wen* n. *1. lifelong wordsmith, punster, maker of epigrams, erstwhile professor of English and journalism, current freelance writer and self-styled humorist, husband of favorite foil Nadine. 2. admirer of hyphens when they are unabused. 3. inventor of the most useful of all punctuation marks, the explanation point.*

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# FORUM 2000

Forum 2000, the next occurrence of an outstanding quinquennial technical communication conference, will take place June 12-14, 2000, at the Commonwealth Center in London, England. General topic areas will include trends, professional development, and tools and technology.

Presentation formats will include Idea Markets (which may lead to brainstorm sessions), sort-and-build sessions, information sessions (new), and debate sessions (also new). For more information about Forum 2000 send e-mail to Peter Greenfield, *istc@istc.org.uk*.

"It's fortunate that we have freedom of speech. but it's unfortunate that the supply usually exceeds the demand."

— *Rough Notes*

# WHERE HAVE ALL THE –LY'S GONE?

## BY LOERING M. JOHNSON

The Information Age features an ever increasing exchange of communication. As the capabilities of information-handling devices increase, the circulation becomes ever faster, ever more voluminous.

What of the user who must, or who desires to, extract useful data from this flood of information? Are comprehension and understanding considered? I think there is an increasing failure by senders to observe some of the principles of grammatical usage; this leads to difficulty in users' comprehension and understanding.

One of these principles is the proper use of available grammatical terms, and an important one of these terms is the adverb. Adverbs are those handy items that provide information on how, when, where, and in what manner. Looking at the trend in adverbial usage, I see an alarming picture: Adverbs seem to be members of an endangered species.

But adverbs are marvelous things! *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* defines "adverb" as a major part of speech: a word that modifies a verb (spoke quietly), an adjective (really awful), or another adverb (very quietly). Adverbs can be formed from another part of speech as in badly from bad or prettily from pretty. They may be used in an adverb phrase such as "She responded very quickly indeed."

The habitat of adverbs (language) is not disappearing; only their use is changing. There is a trend toward brevity and simplicity so that information exchanges are becoming more terse and cryptic. Yet at the same time there is an increasing need for clarity and readability. Adverbs are, like the grace notes in music, some of the grace

*Brevity and simplicity must be balanced with clarity and readability.*

terms in language. Use of these terms adds to the information conveyed, enables the reader to comprehend more easily, and makes the tone of the message more pleasing.

Adjectives are often used in place of adverbs. Perrin's *Reference Handbook of Grammar and Usage* points out that sometimes adjective and adverb pairs can be used interchangeably in informal English; often they cannot. Use of the adjective form frequently introduces uncertainty—it makes the reader pause and try to determine what is really intended. For instance, when one gets a package of "slow roasted turkey" is it "slowly roasted turkey" or is it a "slow turkey that got roasted"? Use of the adverb form "slowly" would have conveyed the meaning (of how the roasting was done) simply, directly, effectively, and understandably.

Suppose one encounters the statement that "It was not done right." What is this supposed to mean? Is it to be contrasted to "It was not done wrong"? So much could have easily been added by replacing "right" with an adverb that tells how: for example, properly, correctly, suitably, acceptably, capably, or thoughtfully.

The –ly's are available to help communicators with this task—pleasantly, quietly, easily, and effectively. Give them a chance to help your communication. Maybe there are –ly's in your future achievements and success.

*Mr. Johnson is a longtime technical writer, editor, and PCS member who accepted the editor's invitation to share some of his experience with* Newsletter *readers. He lives in Tariffville, Connecticut.*

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"The problem with the average conference is it's usually a meeting at which people talk about things they should be doing."

— *William F. Buckley*

"Accomplishing the impossible means only that the boss will add it to your regular duties"

— *Doug Larson*

# WORD PROCESSING

BY MICHAEL BRADY

"What does word processing mean?" An odd question from a professional person. But not from the colleague questioner Belinda Drabble, Dutch born, English raised and married, educated as a software engineer, and now returning to professional life after having taken off a decade to bear and raise children to school age. She was not asking what word processing *is*, she knows that, as she uses it daily. She found the term itself vague. Upon closer examination, I agree. It is.

How can a word be "processed"? Even that galleon of English dictionaries, the *OED II*, skirts the question by pointing to the superior term in German, *textverarbeitung*, text processing. Indeed, a text can be processed; editors have been doing that for centuries. Why not "text editing"? But, regrettably, in current cyberlingo, that's just a poor cousin.

What about "word crunching," a parallel to "number crunching," the buzzword synonym for statistics used by media, including *The Economist*, the bastion of succinct texts? But "crunching" words connotes destruction of them. What then? Is there historical precedence for "word processing" and the place it now occupies in our daily lives?

What if there were a book entitled *Word Processing Behavior* and subtitled *Psychology Applied to Teaching and Learning Word Processing*? What if the editor's introduction of it began by stating that "Word Processing is an essential part of basic preparation for many office positions. It is a desirable element in programs of training designed to prepare for unspecialized office work. It is rightly emphasized as a legitimate part of any full program of business education. Word Processing is a facilitating subject."

Regrettably, there is no such book. But delete "Word Processing" and insert "Typing" and there is a 521-page, hardcover classic by four authors, published by the American Book Company in 1936. Despite being more than 60 years old, *Typewriting Behavior* is informative reading, as it delineates the human-machine interactions that underlie the way writers now work. Its principal author, August Dvorak (1894-1975), is the University of Washington professor who designed the ergonomic keyboard that bears his surname. (And there's a paperback monograph on it: The *Dvorak Keyboard* by Randy C. Cassingham, Pasadena, Freelance Communications, 1986, ISBN 0-935309-10-1.)

*Typewriting Behavior* has 16 chapters divided into five parts: Typewriting in Social Situations; Typewriting Improvement, Told in Four Approaches From Psychology; Workshop Discoveries About Typing Behavior; Workshop Discoveries About Difficult Typing Behavior; and Workshop Discoveries About Typing Outcomes. All conceivable aspects of typing are covered, from how we read in word wholes to what is involved in automating reflexes in learning to touch type. Aside from the technical details of typewriters in the era when it was written—ribbon feeds, carriage returns, and mechanical forces—the information in the book can be applied to word processing. We still pound QWERTY keyboards and we admit to mechanical history in the name of the Carriage Return key on them. Humans remain little changed since 1936 and working at a keyboard still causes the fatigue documented in chapter 14 of *Typewriting Behavior*.

Despite the hype of the information age, arguably its social impact will fall short of that of typewriting. As detailed in *Typewriting Behavior*, in the U.S. by 1930, according to the United States Census, more than half a million women were employed in offices as typists. Typewriting is what brought women into workplaces and consequently forever changed the way business is conducted.

> *Although 60 years old,*
> *Typewriting Behavior*
> *delineates the human-*
> *machine interactions*
> *that underlie the way*
> *writers now work.*

# SEARCHING THE NET — PART I

Elizabeth Moeller

*Search sites are not created equal.*

Network Wizards (*http://www.nw.com*) estimates there were more than 36 million World Wide Web (WWW) domains in July 1998—an increase of 21 percent from the January survey. With the WWW growing at such a breakneck pace, finding the information you need is becoming increasingly difficult. Fortunately, we have sites like Yahoo (*http://www.yahoo.com*), Hotbot (*http://www.hotbot.com*), and Excite (*http://www.excite.com*) to help. Unfortunately, search sites are not created equal. Part I explains how search sites work. Part II will discuss ways to best use the time you spend searching.

Not all search sites are "search engines"; some are directories. The essential difference is in the way Web pages are entered in their databases. Search engines are automated whereas directories still use human intervention.

## Search Engines

A search engine such as Hotbot and Excite uses "spiders" to crawl the Web and find sites to add to its index. The search engine then often strips out the graphical elements and saves the text from the site. Some search engines remove very common words, such as "the" and "and." The user interface is a program that sifts through everything in the search engine's index to find sites that may be relevant based on the keywords you provide. These indexes tend to be very large. AltaVista (*http://altavista.digital.com*), consistently one of the largest, has more than 140 million entries. Excite, considered a medium-sized search engine, has approximately 55 million entries.

How do search engines decide which sites are relevant to your search? That depends on the search engine. Some rely on the information found in the Web-site title or in the META tags (hidden text on a site listing items such as the author, generator, keywords, and site description). Others rely more heavily on the content of the site, the length of the page, or the number of links pointing to the page. Some search engines use a combination of indexing methods. For example, Hotbot weights these variables so that if your keywords appear in META tags, the site is ranked high, but not as high as when your keywords appear in the site title. Excite, on the other hand, highly ranks pages with a number of links pointing to the page.

Some keywords can create a problem in your search. For example, Hotbot includes the word "web" as a stop word—a word not indexed by the search engine because it appears so frequently. So, searching for information on the children's book *Charlotte's Web* causes some problems. A search of Hotbot for the exact phrase *Charlotte's Web* returned 3589 possible sites with the first relevant site listed 56th. AltaVista, on the other hand, returned 6898 possible Web sites with a relevant site listed first.

To illustrate the overall differences between Hotbot, Excite, and AltaVista, a search for the words *professional communication society*, using no special search tricks, came up with the following results:

- Hotbot returned 91 910 Web pages with the first relevant site being #31

- Excite returned 3 090 791 Web pages with the first relevant site being #17

- AltaVista returned 7 023 510 Web pages with the first relevant site being #1

The difference between 92 thousand returns, 3 million returns, and 7 million returns is remarkable. However, even though Excite returned 34 times the number of pages Hotbot did, Excite provided a relevant site earlier in the listing. AltaVista, with the largest number of returns, provided a relevant site right at the top.

AltaVista's providing the most relevant results in these two examples does not mean that AltaVista is the best search engine. It just happened to provide the best results on these two examples. Part II will discuss ways to narrow searches so fewer Web sites are returned and relevant sites appear near the top of the results list more often—no matter which search engine you use.

### Directories

A directory such as Yahoo is created by humans. Web designers submit their sites and suggest categorical placements. Directory employees review the submissions, determine which categories are appropriate, and then add the sites to their listings. This human intervention often provides more accurate results while having significantly fewer entries. Yahoo has approximately 750 000 entries compared to the 50-million-plus entries of Hotbot, Excite, and AltaVista. It also takes longer for a site to be listed.

A search of Yahoo for *Charlotte's Web* returned 11 sites, none of which had relevant information. A search for *professional communication society* returned three categories and 36 Web pages. The categories were marginally relevant as were some of the sites.

*Different types of searches require different search strategies.*

This does not mean a directory is a useless search tool. It does mean that different types of searches require different search strategies. A directory is quite useful if you want to generate a list of sites discussing intellectual property issues or if you want to find a list of grant agencies and foundations. In these cases the categorical listing makes searching easier.

Searching the Net is not as easy as it used to be. Because each search site behaves differently, it is best to try your searches using a few different sites. After a little searching yourself, you will find a search site that meets your needs best. Part II of this column will discuss ways to improve your search techniques with both search engines and directories.

Search Engine Watch (*http://www.search enginewatch.com*) provided some of the technical details in this column.

*Elizabeth Weise Moeller is a PCS AdCom member. She owns Interactive Media Consulting (518-366-8765, beth@imedia consult.com), a World Wide Web and Internet training firm in Saratoga Springs, New York, which provides Web site design and Internet training for businesses in the northeast.*

## FLOCCI...PILIFICATION

The social impact of word processing remains to be seen. Might some PCS member brave a study similar to that conducted by August Dvorak and colleagues, as the topic is within our bailiwick? One part of it might include a proposal for a new term to replace "word processing." Alas, "typewriting" (coined to set it apart from handwriting) cannot be the model because one of the inconsistencies of

English precludes the most obvious choice, "screenwriting," which means "writing for the screen." Word processing involves pictures; I write this column in Word for Windows®, I see more pictures than text. Perhaps my task resembles that of a pavement artist as much as it does that of the traditional typist. If so, could I say that I am using "screen screeving"?

# INVITATION TO IPCC 99

### BY MICHAEL B. GOODMAN

It is my pleasure to invite you to participate in the International Professional Communication Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S.A., September 7-10, 1999. The Omni Royal Orleans in the French Quarter will be the site of
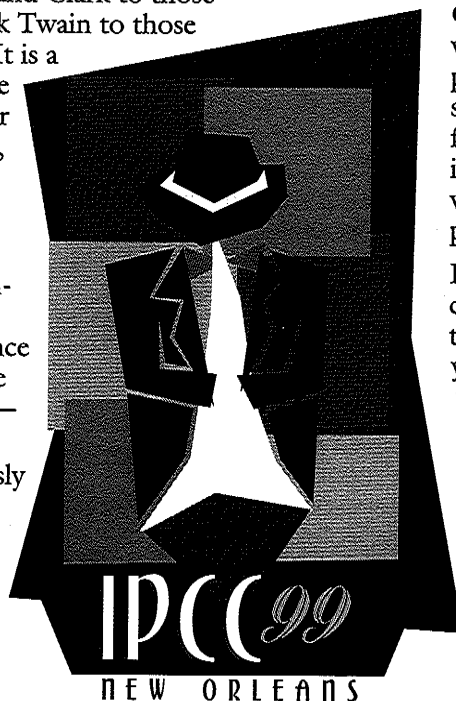
# IPCC 99 Communication Jazz

### IMPROVISING THE NEW INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION CULTURE

New Orleans has always been a meeting place for many cultures from the days of Lewis and Clark to those of the river boats of Mark Twain to those of Mardi Gras and jazz. It is a unique city filled with the excitement of the frontier and old world influences, as well as French and Southern influences.

Why "Communication Jazz" for a technical communication conference? Simple. Jazz is—well, since you asked I'll commit the sin of trying to define it—native American music

- played extemporaneously with
- strong but flexible rhythmic understructure and
- enthusiasm and
- highly sophisticated harmonic idiom

Communication Jazz— well, yes. What better place than New Orleans— surrounded by excellent food, music, and cultural influences—to grapple with the issues of our profession.

Be sure to respond to our call for papers (page 23 in this *Newsletter*). Send us your idea for a paper, workshop, panel discussion, tutorial, or Idea Market session. Proposals are due **January 15, 1999**. The e-mail address to submit a proposal is *ipcc99 proposals@ieee.org*.

**IPCC 99**
**NEW ORLEANS**

The IPCC 99 committee can't wait to welcome you to New Orleans. The members of the committee are:

**Michael B. Goodman**, *General Chair*
**Dave Hans** and **Bob Krull**, *Program Co-chairs*
**Leann Kostek**, *Publicity*
**Bill Kehoe**, *Finance and Registration*
**Rose Ann Carey**, *IEEE Conference Administration*
**Stuart Selber** and **Johndan Johnson-Eilola**, *SIGDOC Liaison*
**Alfred Mijares**, *Omni Royal Orleans Hotel*

We will also welcome anyone who would like to work with these committees. Contact us by e-mail at *ipcc99@ieee.org* or phone Michael Goodman at 973-443-8709.

In the next Newsletter we will give you some background information on our keynote speaker for IPCC 99—a highly influential professional from England who is involved in critical issues for technical communicators. Also we will preview the kinds of papers you can expect to find at IPCC 99.
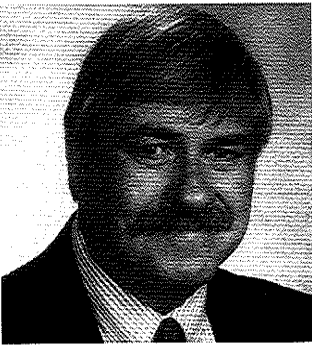
# THE QUALITIES OF A MASTER OF STYLE

RONALD J. NELSON

This, my eleventh Masters of Style column, seems an appropriate juncture (we all establish our own checkpoints) to reflect on what constitutes a master of style. I offer the following partial checklist of skills or concerns (in my favorite order: random) that I regard as integral to such a person and encourage you to add your suggestions.

## 1. Strength of Character

Resolve to learn how to write well by becoming a student of the subject. That means not only reading for content but also observing how a particular writer achieves his or her effects. It also means not being dependent on spell checkers, grammar checkers, and other palliatives. Get an excellent handbook (Diana Hacker's *Rules for Writers* and *A Writer's Reference* are recommended) and check any points about which you are uncertain. Become independent and strong.

## 2. Punctuation

Determine to master mechanics like punctuation. The sole purpose of punctuation is to clarify meaning. Compare: "A woman without her man is lost" and "A woman— without her, man is lost" (from Myatt, *Stalking the Wild Semicolon*). See also Lewis Thomas' "Notes on Punctuation" (from *The Medusa and the Snail*).

## 3. Standard Usage

Become able to distinguish between troublesome words like affect and effect, principle and principal, fewer and less.

## 4. Common Sense

Check for senseless phrases like "Needless to say." If it's needless to say, then why say it? "As I said before" is another waste— give the reader some credit for intelligence. And when a person says "To be honest with you," I start to wonder whether the rest of the person's communications are truthful.

*Don't be dependent on spell checkers and other palliatives.*

## 5. Redundancy

Check for redundancies like "red in color," "circular in shape," "8 a.m. in the morning," and "refer back." Since red is a color, "red" will suffice. (But then what do we do with *The Color Purple?*)

## 6. Concision

If we have "precision," shouldn't we have "concision"? When we say "circular" rather than "circular in shape," we are increasing the efficiency of our wording by 200 percent. We should be concise if we can, assuming no loss of meaning. Every word in a sentence should add to the sentence; if it doesn't, it automatically subtracts from the sentence.

## 7. Vocabulary

Henry Ward Beecher said, "Every word is a peg to hang ideas on." Do you remember the pleasures of "Word Power" in *Reader's Digest?* The flash of pleasure when you recognize and know the meaning of a difficult word? It makes sense to work at vocabulary development—making it a game—even if learning only one new word each day. To do so expands the verbal resources from which you can draw.

I do *not* mean learning words to put other people down, but rather to move personally toward greater inner (where else?) sophistication. To begin, you might check the dictionary (I could have said "lexicon") for "osculation" (not "auscultation" or "oscillation") and "preprandial" (as opposed to "postprandial"), combine the two, and perhaps even practice one. And what about the joys of appreciating "amphora" and "urceolate"?

## 8. Clarity

Strive for absolute clarity. In a study of 182 executives by Fred MacIntosh some years ago (reported in Houp's and Pearsall's *Reporting Technical Information*, 3rd ed.), all 182 complained that the writing that

crossed their desks exhibited "generally foggy language" (the second most annoying trait being "inadequate general vocabulary"—173 out of 182).

### 9. Bridge Building

Erect solid yet flexible structures that bridge the gap of ignorance by anticipating readers' needs. (See Louis I. Middleman's *In Short: A Concise Guide to Good Writing.*) Use the journalist's questions — who, what, why, where, when, how, how many — to ensure that you are providing all the information the reader needs. That audience awareness connects directly to being aware of the purpose of the document (to inform, affect, or effect action).

### 10. Insides of Words

Think of the insides, the etymology, of words to get a feel for them. Only then can you say you really understand the word or phrase. For example, you might check the origins of "bonfire" and "pig in a poke" (related to "letting the cat out of the bag").

Donald Hall's *Writing Well* covers this topic nicely. Among other points he emphasizes that there are really no synonyms and that every word change, however slight, is a change in meaning. So we

*Give the reader some credit for intelligence.*

must be alert to nuances and contexts. (Beware Roget!)

### 11. Experimenting

Try shifting words around within a sentence (a matter of syntax). Avoid starting two consecutive sentences with the same word—that practice alone will ensure sentence variety. Vary the number of words in sentences. Actually count the number of words in sentences every now and then. Consecutive sentences with 12, 14, 13, 15, and 12 words in them will be boring regardless of content.

I hope these suggestions are helpful. Of course, there are many more that could be made. Please send your suggestions — which may be included in a future column—to me via e-mail (*nelsonrj@jmu.edu*) or postal mail (James Madison University, English Department, Institute of Technical and Scientific Communication, Harrisonburg, VA 22807). If you have comments about anything on my preliminary list, please send those along as well. Since we as professional communicators are a discourse community, we ought to engage in some dialog, don't you think—especially if it helps to improve our writing?

## PHRASES OF "RECOMMENDATION"

From Mike Langberg of Knight Ridder News Services some suggested phrases when writing letters of recommendation for fired employees:

- For the chronically absent: "A man like him is hard to find" or "It seemed her career was just taking off."

- For an employee with no ambition: "You would indeed be fortunate to get this person to work for you."

## ELIMINATING FEDERAL ENGLISH

A recent government award for using everyday English went to a pair (it took two?) of Bureau of Land Management employees who replaced the phrase "commencing any surface-disturbing activities" with the word "digging."

# CRACKING THE CODE: SIMILES AND ANALOGIES IN TECHNICAL INFORMATION

A student recently said to the Professor, "When I don't understand a subject, I tend to use big words."

The Professor nodded, appreciating the student's awareness and candor.

The student continued: "I assume that the experts I'm writing for will understand these words even if I don't."

Not necessarily. Everyone is a novice at least at the start of new endeavors. Besides, many people have enough to do on their jobs without having to figure out words we haven't chosen well or explained well. These words that writers hide their ignorance behind probably stand for concepts, the abstract stuff that is hard to put words around.

Actually, some hard-to-understand words and concepts come in small packages these days. Take beans. You probably thought you could get those at a grocery store or coffee shop. Not anymore. Now you can get them right at your computer, and they're not the kind that take well to water, either.

So how do we make new words and concepts easier to understand? One way is to use our awareness of how we come to understand a new term or concept. Chances are that similes and analogies help us understand. We can use them to help others make the leap to understanding, too.

In case you don't remember from your English classes, a *simile* is an explicit comparison. Unlike a metaphor, a simile is introduced by words such as "like," "as," and "as if." For example, this definition from IBM VisualAge Java uses a simile:

> The free-form surface is the large open area in the Visual Composition Editor. It is like a blank sheet of paper where you can add, manipulate, and connect the beans that you work with to create a composite bean.

Of course, there are the clarity questions of whether this term is needed at all or whether something simpler like surface would be enough or whether canvas would go better with the motif of visual composition. But if we set these concerns aside, we can appreciate the concreteness of the simile.

Note that the writer did not just say "It is like a blank sheet of paper." This statement might have left us wondering about the basis for the comparison. We probably would have guessed that what's similar is the use of the surface and the paper rather than a characteristic like color, weight, or size, but the rest of the sentence leaves us in no doubt about the basis for the comparison. When you use a simile in technical information, make clear how the two items are similar. You might also need to make clear how they are different, as in the following excerpt from a Sun description of servlets:

> Servlets are similar to applets in that they are run-time extensions of applications. Instead of working in browsers, though, servlets run within Java servers, configuring and tailoring the server.

An *analogy* is an extended comparison. Like a simile, an analogy is introduced by words such as "like," "as," and "as if, " but the basis for comparison deals with a likeness in relationships rather than in a particular characteristic that is easy to point out. For example, consider this analogy between Java bytecodes and machine instructions:

> Java bytecodes are like machine instructions. As a computer processor can directly execute machine instructions, so the Java Virtual Machine can directly process Java bytecodes.

This analogy would be too terse if it stopped at the first sentence. The similarity is a relationship that must be explained.

*In a simile make clear how two items are similar, and perhaps also how they are different.*

# HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEPTEMBER AdCom MEETING

BY MURIEL ZIMMERMAN

The Professional Communication Society's Administrative Committee (AdCom) held a one-day meeting in Québec City on September 26 following IPCC 98. Four AdCom members were among those centrally involved in the planning of IPCC 98 and our first item of business was an enthusiastic round of applause for Ron Blicq (general chair), Lisa Moretto (program chair), and Cheryl Reimold and Paul Seesing (publicity chairs). Major discussion issues were conferences, publications, chapter news, and membership and publicity. We held elections for AdCom vacancies as well as for president and vice-president. The next AdCom meeting will be in Houston, Texas, January 15-16, 1999.

## Conferences

IPCC 99 will be at the Omni Royal Orleans Hotel in New Orleans, September 7-10, 1999. The conference theme is Communication Jazz, the logo has been designed, and the call for papers is in the mail. Conference chair Michael Goodman reported that the arrangements include hurricane insurance! The promotional presentation about IPCC 99, held in Québec on September 22, was well attended. Thanks to Leann Kostek for arranging that reception.

Like IPCCs 98 and 99, IPCC 2000 will be a joint venture with SIGDOC. The planned location is Cambridge, Massachusetts, September 25-27, 2000. The AdCom is concerned about high hotel costs in the Boston–Cambridge area, and conference chair Gene Hoffnagle will report on room-rate negotiations at the Houston AdCom meeting.

## Publications

The IEEE is giving us a second free year of electronic publishing of the *Transactions* in their OPeRA (Online Periodical and Research Area) program. This year's

*The IEEE's online retrieval system (OPeRA) will include our Transactions again in 1999.*

three published issues are on the Web at *http://opera.ieee.org* where they can be searched by any PCS member. IEEE wants to learn whether HTML or PDF format is preferred for full-text reading. Normal charge for inclusion in OPeRA is $12.5k per year; the AdCom has not yet decided whether to continue electronic publishing beyond 1999. (By then the IEEE may offer other information retrieval options.)

We agreed to sponsor a revision of Michael Lechter's *Successful Patents and Patenting for Engineers and Scientists*, published by IEEE Press.

## Chapter News

Bernadette Longo (Clemson University) traveled to Russia with support from PCS and met with technical communicators there. She returned with an idea about how PCS chapters and individual members can help technical communicators in Russia, where up-to-date technical communication textbooks are in short supply. Dr. Longo convinced Clemson faculty to donate books and her local Rotary to pay postage. She suggests that other PCS members can do the same thing in their communities, and the project can include other countries.

We renewed a PCS-Popov Society cooperation agreement first signed in 1993. PCS president Grice signed the renewal at this meeting.

## Membership and Publicity

Leann Kostek unveiled the new PCS membership brochure. Beth Moeller will assume responsibility for the PCS web site (*http://www.ieee.org/pcs/pcsindex.html*) and her plans include a new logo and expanded site content and functions.

## Elections

The AdCom held elections to fill six member-at-large seats and to select a PCS presi-

*Two veterans and four newcomers were elected to the AdCom.*

dent and vice-president. Two of the six elected to the AdCom are committee veterans (Ron Blicq and Roger Grice) and four are new (Ed Clark, Luke Maki, Terrance Malkinson, and Tom van Loon). Ron Blicq's service to PCS includes work as chair of IPCC 87 and IPCC 98 and program co-chair for IPCC 94. He represents PCS on Intecom and Forum 2000. Roger Grice served two years as PCS vice-president and is now completing his first year as president. Roger was program chair for three IPCCs and chair for IPCC 96.

Ed Clark is publications coordinator for VTEL Corporation. An engineer by training and a technical communicator by choice, he has been a PCS member for ten years. Ed presented a paper at IPCC 98. Luke Maki is senior network analyst and designer for the Boeing company. Luke is a registered professional engineer and an advocate for the potential gains in pro-

ductivity that can be achieved through improvements in the communications interface for areas involving networks.

Terrance Malkinson is a senior member of the IEEE and associate editor of *IEEE Canadian Review*. He was publications chair for IPCC 98 and presented papers at IPCCs 94, 95, and 98. Tom van Loon is president of the Netherlands Association of Scientific Editors. He has served as scientific editor of KEMA, the research institute for the Dutch electricity sector, and is a member of TextNet and the European Association of Science Editors.

Roger Grice was re-elected president of PCS and George Hayhoe was re-elected vice-president. Departing AdCom members Scott DeLoach, Rob Houser, Janet Rochester, and Paul Seesing received a warm vote of appreciation for their service to PCS.

# PROFESSOR GRAMMAR

*Use an analogy when the comparison deals with a likeness in relationships rather than in a characteristic.*

Many figures of speech do not lend themselves to technical information, where people expect literal rather than figurative meanings. For example, we would not use a phrase like "Turn on the box" when we mean "Turn on your computer," or make an allegory out of the installation process, or use an oxymoron to describe a compilation as "blindingly slow." Similes and analogies fit in, however, because they make an explicit comparison that appeals even to logical minds.

These comparisons can be helpful even when they stay in the software domain, as in a couple of the examples. In other kinds of writing we're probably used to similes and analogies that draw on what seem to be very different things. For example, "The woman prowled the racks of clothes like a ravenous lion searching for a

gazelle." Granted, similes and analogies in technical information will probably not be long flights of fantasy, but don't abandon them altogether just because they seem tame. They are still very helpful in moving users from what they know to what they don't know.

If you're struggling to explain a new concept, try explaining it in terms of something that it is like, something that your users understand. If the concept differs from the similar one in ways that might confuse your users, be sure to specify the differences.

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# LANGUAGE IN THE DUMPS

BY JOHN LEO

At my local recycling center, I always pause in wonderment at the bin marked "commingled containers." Whoever thought up that term could have taken the easy way out and just written "cans and bottles." But the goal apparently was to create a term that nobody would ever use in conversation, then slap it on every can-and-bottle bin in America to confuse as many people as possible. (The "co" is a nice raised-pinky flourish. Since "mingled" means mixed up, "commingled" means "co-mixed up.")

The gold standard in governmentspeak is still "ground-mounted confirmatory route markers" (road signs), a traffic-control term used from coast to coast. In Oxford, England, city officials decided to "examine the feasibility of creating a structure in Hinksey Park from indigenous vegetation." They were talking about planting a tree to get some shade. As Joyce Kilmer might have put it, "Versified and rhythmic nonprose verbal structures are made by fools like me, but only God can create a solar-shielding park structure from low-rise indigenous vegetative material."

In Britain the Plain English Campaign came up with these colorful examples of awful writing: "interoperable intermodal transport systems" (bus and train timetables) and a supermarket help-wanted ad for "an ambient replenishment assistant" (someone to stock shelves).

One classic award by the Plain English people went to a snack company for a letter to a customer who complained that her potato chips were purple. When a chip is discolored, the letter said, "it is difficult to say whether this is due to a process of active migration of the anthocyanin from the periderm and cortex or to the primary protection within the flesh of the tuber." Whatever.

When it comes to co-mangled prose, America need not take a back seat to Britain. Here is Mike McCurry, the wily White House mouthpiece, replying to a reporter's question on whether Bill Clinton's "coffees" were used to raise campaign funds: "Technically, [they were] not used for fund-raising, but they became an element of the financial program that we were trying to pursue in connection with the campaign."

Bill Lann Lee, rejected by the Senate but still the acting civil rights chief at the Justice Department, used similar gobbledygook in referring to forced busing. "Forced busing is a misnomer," he wrote. "School districts do not force children to ride a bus but only to arrive on time at their assigned schools."

Political correctness plays a role, too. The scholar Gertrude Himmelfarb once asked a federal agency for up-to-date illegitimacy rates and was told that the agency preferred less judgmental terms such as "non-marital childbearing" or "alternative mode of parenting." In the athletic department at the University of Minnesota, players who steal are dismissed from their teams not for theft but for "violating team rules regarding personal property."

Professor William Lutz of Rutgers University, author of *The New Doublespeak*, says that schools are a rich source of verbal nonsense. Students now "achieve a deficiency" (they flunk tests). They take part in "developmental studies" (remedial work) or "service learning" (compulsory volunteer work). And they don t learn to write anymore—they "generate text" out of "writing elements," "tagmemic invention," "paradigmatic analysis," and "heuristics."

On the modern campus, the word "integration" is so controversial that a Cornell University committee removed it from an official report. So instead of "promoting integration across racial, ethnic, college, and class-year distinctions," the report called for "promoting meaningful interaction and connection across differences." Good news: The president of Cornell had the wit to put the original wording back.

*Someone who stocks shelves is an ambient replenishment assistant.*

# TALES AS TOLD BY IDIOTS

### BY GARY FLOOD

Some people worry about the destruction of the rain forests. Others fret about overpopulation and the rise in the urbanized global underclass. Many are concerned about the dangers of nuclear and chemical warfare breaking out in the "bushfire" wars of the next few years. There are a few who stay up at night dreading an asteroid impact.

Nah. None of these threats to humanity's future can hold a candle to the biggest danger of them all. Management psychology jargon is going to destroy all intelligent life on the planet as we know it.

Language is de-evolving. Communication is becoming more and more difficult. The obvious is stated in terms more convoluted than medieval scholasticism. In other words: you thought our jargon was bad in IT [information technology]—you have no idea what they're doing to the managers. *Dilbert* is right and will one day be hailed as the Winston Churchill of the Nonsense Wars, a lone prophet crying out in the wilderness, warning of the terrible danger creeping upon the world unawares.

Language is constantly evolving, we are often told; English, being the world's common business language, only increases in usefulness as it rapidly assimilates new and appropriate metaphors. Based on three of the most frustrating days I have ever spent, I can tell you this view is pure baloney.

Like many of you I am roped into going off on training courses now and again to hone my management skills. (Moreover, since they mainly consist in trying to be nice to people, doing my job properly, and laughing at the boss' jokes, they obviously need some firming up.) Pleased as I am that my company sees me this way, I cannot thank it for the experience it just put me through. Or should I say that the intervention, to which I listened as generously as I could, failed to bring into existence a choiceful or thrivable learning for me?

Maybe it was because I was insufficiently acculturated to people saying "a 'and also'" as if it meant something. No, it was my paradigm, that's right, but had it shifted yet? Should it shift? Was that good or bad? Am I in the vicious circle or have I started thinking out of the box yet? What about vision? This seemed terribly important, and I'm sure it is, but what about my paradigm?

You know what I say? B******s to the paradigm. And put my vision in the reality gap.

Let's take a concept—call it "try not to automatically close off your mind when someone speaks to you and see if they have something useful or new to say to you." Seems quite a powerful idea, that one. After all, you'll never learn anything new if you don't try to expand your horizons. And it's all too easy to assume you know what someone is going to say to you, based on previous experience with them.

We have two choices with this shiny new way of interacting. We could call it "being open minded." Or we could call it "generated or creative listening." We could bolster that concept with a further subdivision into a number of things to listen for: possibility, commitment, creativity, or generosity. We could—if we wanted to waste a lot of time with long-winded ways of stating what anyone who hasn't been in a Trappist monastery since the age of two knows instinctively.

Getting the picture? We're talking getting paid to construct elaborate three-day courses explaining basic common sense. I cannot help but be reminded of Jonathon Swift's satire on pretentiousness, *Gulliver's Travels* part three, where Gulliver meets the wonderfully dotty scientists of the Academy of Lagado. I looked up his description of one particularly apt daft project, that of the "book loom." Swift wrote: "Everyone knew how laborious the usual

> *Dilbert is right...a lone prophet crying out in the wilderness.*

method is of attaining to arts and sciences; whereas by his contrivance the most ignorant person at a reasonable charge, and with a little bodily labor, may write books in philosophy, poetry, politics, law, mathematics, and theology, without the least assistance from genius or study."

How? By mechanical random jumbling of words, which had resulted in "several volumes in large folio already collected, of broken sentences, which he intended to piece together, and out of those rich materials to give the world a complete body

of all arts and sciences." What makes this parallel with management psychobabble even more delicious is that the academician saw his work being much improved "if the public would raise a fund for making and employing five hundred such frames."

Nice work if you can get it, say I. Fancy a spare paradigm, nearly new?

# LANGUAGE IN THE DUMPS

The Dialectic Society gave its 1996 award for buzzword of the year to "urban camper," a new term for "the homeless" or people who live on the street. Similar euphemisms have crept into the language: extramarital sex (adultery), "aggressive coalitionary behavior" (war games), "hypervigilance" (paranoia), and "wall artist" (tagger, graffiti sprayer).

*The social expression industry makes greeting cards.*

Gyms are now upscale, known as "wellness activities centers." In medicine, patients who die "fail to achieve their wellness potential" and have to be chalked up as "negative patient outcomes." For the U.S. government, political killings conducted by governments we detest are still known as political killings. If they happen in China, however, they are referred to as "the arbitrary deprivation of life."

Business is pumping a lot of gas into the language, too. We have "the social expres-

sion industry" (the greeting card business), "meal replacement" (junk food), "a new-car alternative" and "an experienced car" (a used car), "creative response conceptions" (damage control by public relations people), and "access controllers" (doormen).

The federal government gave us "grain-consuming animal units" (the Agriculture Department's term for cows), "single-purpose agricultural facilities" (pigpens and chicken coops), and "post-consumer waste materials" (garbage). Better yet, let's make that commingled post-consumer processed units. The kind of stuff you find at a single-purpose non-recycling center, formerly a dump.

Maxims for the Internet Age
1. Home is where you hang your @.
2. The e-mail of the species is more deadly than the mail.
3. A journey of a thousand sites begins with a single click.
4. You can't teach a new mouse old clicks.
5. Great groups from little icons grow.
6. Speak softly and carry a cellular phone.

— *Modem Times*

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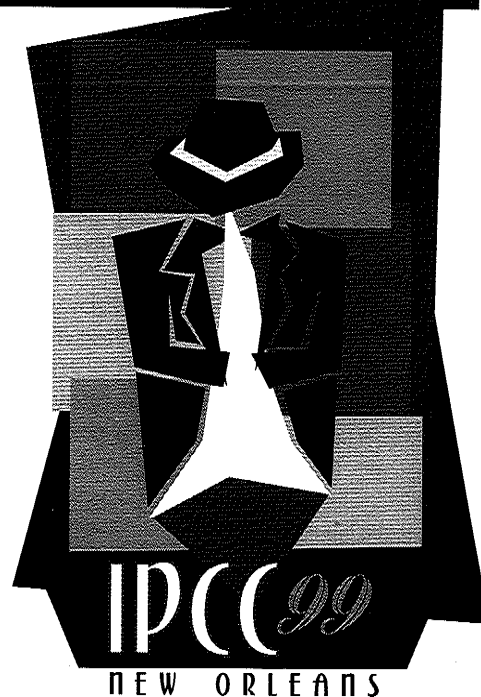
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# YEAR 2000

*Harm from century-digit ambiguity will continue long past the January 1, 2000, rollover.*

**D**ue to the widespread existence of ambiguous date representations in information systems and databases, a significant percentage of the world's digital systems, computers and information infrastructure are at risk of operating unpredictably or failing completely on, before, or after January 1, 2000.

Projects to address potential and actual harm from century-digit ambiguity will continue long past the January 1, 2000, rollover. Current projects focus largely on pre-rollover prevention. Future projects will need to (1) rapidly address year 2000 events that were not prevented, (2) mitigate impact through work-arounds and contingency plans, (3) protect against post-rollover events, (4) restore the technological infrastructure, and (5) regain full functionality. The vast majority of these projects have little to do with the rollover but rather involve the representation, processing, and sharing of data.

The year 2000 problem is far more about maintaining the installed base of infrastructure, including data, than it is about purchasing new technology. Installation of new hardware and software does not assure protection against year 2000 problems. Not only can hardware and software created in the last few years exhibit year 2000 problems, but also at this late stage the effort required to integrate new technology with existing technology, data, and practices can be a more harmful distraction than a potential solution.

The year 2000 problem is symptomatic of a number of problems occurring through the use of new technology. For example, the use of "99" as a flag can cause problems at the outset of the coming year; the Global Positioning System (GPS) will have an end-of-week problem in August 1999 in addition to a potential problem at the century rollover; and September 9, 1999, may be a problem date for numerous systems. Beyond these date-related issues, the year 2000 problem points toward general systemic vulnerabilities of our complex information infrastructure, as well as to the need for improved methods for managing the co-evolution of human organizations and complex technological systems.

*—Mark Haselkorn*

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