Mind the gaffe
Trask takes writers to task

English may be the most widely used of all languages; it is also one of the most misused, says the author of a new guide to common errors in English.

Exasperated by the poor quality of written English he encounters every day, Professor Larry Trask from COGS set himself the task of listing and then analysing the most common slips perpetrated by students, teachers, journalists and other professionals whose business is - theoretically, at least - words.

In Mind the Gaffe: The Penguin Guide to Common Errors in English, which was published this week, Larry rails against sloppy thinking, poor grammar, clumsy style and a host of other language sins.

He says he was inspired to write the book while marking exam papers, when he started to collect the most common errors and misuses committed by his students in their attempts to impress the examiners.

"Even university graduates with good degrees often find themselves with a command of standard English that is at best inadequate and at worst distressing," he says. "This isn't a trivial problem since a poor command of the conventions of standard English will often make a very bad impression on those who must read our writing."

Larry also targets "Del Boys" who show off with quasi-French phrases (such as 'bon viveur' when they mean 'bon vivant' or 'nom de plume' for 'nom de guerre').

"French has curiously invented and adopted some French expressions which do not exist in French," he says.

To accompany the new book, Larry compiled a list of the 20 most pretentious words and phrases.

The main culprit is 'feedback', which he describes as "now almost devoid of meaning". "It is the number one pretentious word in the language today. No page of bureaucratic prose can be constructed without it, regardless of the content, and regardless of whether there is any content."

The linguist's list of the worst words

1. Aforementioned - Should be banned except in the legal profession.
2. Albeit - For those who prefer pompous three-syllable words when 'but' or 'through' would do.
3. At this moment in time - A puffed-up 'now'.
4. Communicate - Is often used absurdly to mean nothing more than 'say', 'talk' or 'tell'.
5. Empowerment - Might in principle be used to mean something, but never is.
6. Epicentre - Should be used only by seismologists and idiots.
7. Exponential - Mathematical term which does not mean 'fast'.
8. Feedback - The most pretentious of the list and simply used for no reason at all most of the time.
9. Fortuitous - A classic example of using a posh Latin word when 'lucky' would do just as well. A triumph of pretentiousness over knowledge.
10. Hegemonic - Most commonly incorrectly used in the most awful sort of post-modernist drivel. Never used except by pretentious people, in pretentious writing, for pretentious purposes.
11. Input - The soulmate of feedback and just as stupid for the same reason. Widely used to represent anything from 'contribution' to 'comment'.
12. Interface - Despite everyone knowing it is pretentious, still hangs around like a bad smell.
13. Ironically - The label applied to every mildly engaging coincidence.
14. Linear - Purely a mathematical or technical term and should not be used in any other sense.
15. Octopi - The plural of octopus is octopuses. Octopi was a joke that got taken seriously.
16. Paradigm - Most often used by those who don't know what it means - which is the basic test for pretentiousness.
17. Peruse - Where possible use the word 'read' instead.
18. Privileged - Used as an insult to anyone who knows what they are talking about, rather than to refer to the landed.
20. Utilise - Anyone using this instead of 'use' should wear a sandwich board declaring: I am a pretentious twit.

Boffins become bricklies for the day

Senior academics joined contractors from Walter Lilly on 24 August to celebrate the completion of the main superstructure of the new Genome Stability Centre. Professors Alasdair Smith, Anthony Moore and Alan Lehmann all took a turn at bricklaying during the traditional topping-out ceremony, as did Paul White from Walter Lilly (pictured second from right).

Some of the scientists who will move into the purpose-built Centre in February had their first opportunity to tour the three-storey structure and to view its large laboratories, which have office space between them to promote interaction between research groups.

The building will house about 100 scientists and support staff and will expand research at Sussex on the links between genome damage, genetic diseases and cancer.

Last month the project received £750,000 from the Wolfson Foundation, to add to the £5 million in Government funding that the University was awarded in April 2000.
Sussex psychologist develops test to predict success of adverts

An experimental psychologist at Sussex has devised a more reliable way to predict an advert’s success, by developing a new method that assesses consumers’ ‘unconscious’ memories for adverts.

For his doctoral research, Alastair Goode carried out two studies that measured levels of consumers’ conscious and unconscious memory of adverts and any associated changes in the liking of the products they promoted. Both studies showed that subjects preferred the products from ads they had seen before. Notably this increase in product liking was associated with their unconscious memory for the adverts.

“An individual’s ability to recall an advert had no effect on product liking,” says Alastair. “In contrast, the unconscious mental processes that were affected by the advert – the processes an individual could not report – were positively associated with increases in the liking of the products. It appears that our conscious memory conveys facts and information; however, it is our unconscious memory, often referred to as gut feeling or instinct, that is associated with our liking and emotion responses.”

Until now, advertisers have relied on ad awareness and recall, using a variety of techniques – shock tactics, catchy slogans and other creative devices – to make their ads stand out from the crowd. “These techniques affect conscious memory and not the unconscious memory, where the increases in product liking appear to be based,” argues the Sussex researcher.

In developing this test, an efficient assessment of the likelihood of an advert’s success can be obtained, says Alastair. “It does not involve any lengthy, complicated evaluations of interview or focus-group scripts. Instead, it returns a straightforward value as to how much an advert has influenced the most important mental processes, hence an advert can be tuned so that it targets these important processes.”

The most dramatic example of the effects of unconscious memory is when pictures are presented subliminally to someone. “If they see the same pictures again, they will like them more than others they have not seen, despite the fact that they genuinely believe they haven’t seen any of the pictures before,” explains Alastair.

The Sussex psychologist points out that this technique also uncovers the effect an advert has even if it is not being attended to. “Many people use ad breaks on TV to make a cup of tea or don’t deliberately make a point of reading billboards,” he says. “Unconscious memory is also at work when we might be concentrating on something else. As a result, although the experience of the advert may be peripheral, it will still be stored in unconscious memory. This newly developed test allows this experience to be accessed and understood.”

Assessing unconscious memory may also have wider benefits, according to Alastair. “The test provides an effective way to assess a product’s market position, by showing consumers’ gut feelings about a product.” Because of the visual nature of the research, it also has potential implications for Internet advertising.
Letters

Dear Editor,

In his 17 August Bulletin column, our Vice-Chancellor kindly acknowledges his slip in forgetting COGS when he wrote that Sussex has few active links between the "two cultures" of arts and science. Meanwhile, in the next-door column a retired Finance Officer is quoted as saying that Sussex never started a new School of "Cognitive Studies" - that is pretty much what COGS is. I realize that Ray Howard's original piece was written some years before the creation of COGS, but a hasty Bulletin reader might suppose that COGS must be the invisible School at Sussex! Seen from outside, we believe COGS is one of the more salient parts of the Sussex profile.

Geoffrey Sampson
COGS

Since I chose the University of Sussex for my year abroad as a visiting student because of its multidisciplinary approach - which is excellently facilitated by the Schools - I am deeply concerned about the attempts to restructure the University. It is my impression that this would have an effect on what Sussex is known and highly regarded for.

During my internship at GTZ (German Agency for Technical Cooperation) in the Dominican Republic I quickly learnt to appreciate the broad-based understanding of developmental processes that AFRAS has provided me with. I found it much easier to adjust to working life and conceptional project work than I would have ever expected.

I strongly believe that the organization and design of the courses at AFRAS, which enabled me to learn a lot about a topic from multiple perspectives in a relatively short period, has helped me to reach this desired outcome.

Moreover, the encouraging feedback from my colleagues and their high opinion of the University of Sussex (one of them was an AFRAS student himself) has again convinced me that the multidisciplinary method is especially important in development studies as it avoids an insular perspective.

Consequently, organisations working in development studies are looking eagerly for young professionals with a multidisciplinary background and capable of dealing with complex programmes and projects.

Sanna Stockstrom
Visiting student, AFRAS

International Summer School

North American students taking part in the third annual International Summer School at Sussex said their farewells last week.

Studying here for either four or eight weeks, the 150 undergraduate students chose from 28 courses, ranging from British Popular Culture to Introduction to Physics. Each intensive four-week session was the equivalent of a ten-week term course, and earned the students credits towards their degree.

"This year we had some new course offerings, and started an exciting new venture with the University of Toronto," says director Dr Penny Chaloner. "We also have a special new relationship with the University of California."

"The campus is very beautiful," said Kristen Suyama, a student from the University of California at Irvine. "The UK is definitely much greener and colder than California."

Most of the courses had no prerequisites, in order to encourage students to take arts courses and vice versa. Teaching was by seminar and tutorial, with some courses having one tutor to just two students.

"This has been a very rewarding experience not only for the education I've received in my classes, but also because I've learned a lot through exposure to a different culture," said Katie Fertell from the University of California at Berkeley. "Brighton is a great location that reminds me a lot of San Francisco."

Studying Shakespeare proved very popular and tutor Rafe Hallatt took his students to London's Globe Theatre as part of the course.

Dr Clare Birchall, who taught the British Popular Culture course, is clearly impressed with the students: "American students are supremely confident and seem to know how to communicate information in an interesting and clear way. The quality of presentations was much higher than British students."

Tanya Horeck, who taught the course on Twentieth Century American Fictions of Fact, agrees: "It was a great experience teaching the American students. There were only four in my class so we were able to have excellent, in-depth discussions and work very closely on the texts."

The summer school also provided English-language courses for students from non-English-speaking countries, including advanced English language for academic and professional purposes.

Widening participation at Sussex

Sarah Mckernan Widening Participation Officer

At the end of my first year in post, I have found a few moments during the holiday lull to reflect on the past 12 months.

The Sussex Coastal Highway Project, a three-year project that works with local teenagers who have no family history of higher education, has been a great success. The first cohort have really enjoyed their visits to the campus, status sessions, trips to colleges, and cultural excursions. Many say that they now feel they have had their eyes opened to the possibilities for their futures (if they work hard) and feel more confident in their own ability. Their parents, too, have appreciated the unusual opportunities offered by the project, as well as the Higher Education Evening held in June.

I now look forward to selecting a second cohort in September, as well as offering the campus experience to other local schools with poor records of progression into higher education.

I would like to thank all the staff who have been invaluable in giving up their time for the project this year, in particular: Dr Des Watson and all in COGS, Dave Randall and his BIOLS team, Dr Jonathan Hare from the Creative Science Centre, Bly Whitby in Psychology, USSU sabbaticals CJ Lee, Toby Rumford and Jessica Tudor-Williams, Claire Soper from the Gardner Arts Centre and - last but not least - the Sussex students who each added their own special touch of inspiration and encouragement.

For the future, it would be wonderful to offer activities based in other curriculum areas to give a more balanced impression of the University. If you feel motivated and able to devise a short activity or workshop for a small group of academically able young people, please contact me on ext. 7909 or S.V.McKernan@sussex.ac.uk.
Peak performance for charity

A team of hill walkers from Sussex have raised over £900 for Macmillan Cancer Relief by scaling consecutively the three highest mountains in Scotland, England and Wales.

The party of 12 staff and students successfully completed the Three Peaks Challenge at the end of July, taking 26.5 hours to climb and drive between all three mountains.

Conditions were perfect on Ben Nevis, allowing the group splendid views to the Hebridean Isles. Scafell Pike in the Lake District, however, was shrouded in mist and provided the greatest challenge in terms of sheer gradient. "We had to regroup continuously and give each other much psychological support," said Iain Dykes from BIOLS.

Rain, strong winds and a wind-chill factor of 2 made Snowden a particularly tough ending. "Overall it was a fantastic challenge," said Jocelyn Retter from CPES, "and it required me to push myself to my absolute physical limit. It was team camaraderie that made it all possible!"

Small ads

HouseShare: 3rd person wanted from 8 Sept. Spacious Victorian house in Shoreham. All mod cons, 2 recep. rooms. Suit professional. £220pw incl. Focus consultation. Email J.F.Major@sussex.ac.uk.

Accommodation Wanted: Comfortable, quiet, 1/2 bed flat/house/country cottage for 2 mature, responsible PhD students. Any time from Sept/Oct, for at least 1yr. More details. Contact Vicky on 719825 or email hvbp@sussex.ac.uk.

The Great Outdoors: Interested in climbing, walking, cycling or canoeing? Join Brighton Explorers, a friendly, multi-activity outdoors club. Check out www.brightonexplorers.org or contact Adam on ext. 8480 or email a.c.eyer-walker@sussex.ac.uk.

For Sale: Gas cooker, 3 yrs old, £60 ono. Tel. Sam on 478336 at 6pm.

Good Quality Furniture: Suite – 3-seater settee, 2 armchairs and footstool, removable linen-mix covers, warm pink/brown pattern, leather-filled cushions, meets fire regs. With set of three curtains in matching fabric, 254cm drop x 400cm.

£500 the lot but could sell separately. Circular solid pine table, four chairs, cushions, £100. Art Deco wooden standard lamp, £25. 1950s drinks trolley, £20. Email P.M.Owen@sussex.ac.uk, ext. 7047.

To Let: Partly furnished modern detached family house in Kingston, nr Lewes. Available Oct. £950 pcm. 3/4 beds, 3 recep, study, south-facing garden. Couples or families only. Tel. Kim Nixon on 692005 (office) or 483993 (home) or John Nixon on 8536.

To Let: Spacious room in quiet Preston flat. Suit non-smoking professional. £350 pcm incl. (except telephone). Email jsherwood@pavilion.co.uk or tel. 07879 940 811.

Normandy Cottage: 4 miles Dieppe, walking distance to shops. Sleeps 6, big open fire. Week or w/e let. Tel. 471571.

For Sale: Peugeot 205 GR, E-reg, 1.4, 71k miles, MOT Jan., 6 mths tax, £225 ono. Tel. 01903 751064 or 07761 930170.

House Share: In furnished 3-bed house, Dig-screen cable TV, washer, dryer, garden. No smokers or DSS. £70 pw incl. Email amir@sussex.ac.uk.

Contact Dr M. Linton on 202609 from 3 Sep.

For Sale: 2-bed purpose-built flat, 8'ton station 300m. OIRO £120K. Email alfie1@sussex.ac.uk.

To Let: Single room in shared house on Highdown/Dyke Road corner. All cons. £230pcm + deposit + bills. PG or staff welcome. Tel. 302627 after 4pm.

Smokers Wanted: To complete an established scopolamine drug study, which pays £20 for 2-3 hours of your time. Drug administered via (tiny) injection under the skin. Must be native English speakers. Contact Trudi Edginton, EP, ext. 8916 or email trudie@biols.sussex.ac.uk.

Staff Vacancies

Apply by 3 September

School Administrative Officer, EIT (ref 219)

Secretary, USIE (ref 231)

Apply by 4 September

Accounting Clerk, Genome Damage & Stability Centre (ref 030a)

Secretary, Genome Damage & Stability Centre (ref 030b)

Apply by 5 September

Research Officer, BIOLS (ref 028b)

Payroll Office Supervisor (ref 229)

Apply by 7 September

Security Patrol Person (ref 228)

Library Assistant (ref 033b)

Apply by 10 September

Database Support Officer (ref 230)

Apply by 13 September

Senior Laboratory Technicians, Genome Damage & Stability Centre (ref 031b)

Cell Culture Technician, Genome Damage & Stability Centre (ref 032b)

Apply by 14 September

Career Development Adviser, CDEC (ref 232)

Apply by 17 September

Clerical Assistant, CCE (ref 179)

Lectureship in Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence, COGS (ref 233)

Apply by 21 September

Research Fellow, BIOLS (ref 034b)

Apply by 23 September

Research Fellow, Genome Damage & Stability Centre (ref 030a)

Apply by 24 September

Research Fellow, BIOLS (ref 037b)

Apply by 29 September

Research Fellow, CGGS (ref 036b)

Apply by 30 September

Research Fellow, CPES (ref 029b)

Apply by 28 September

Research Fellow, BIOLS (ref 025b)

For further details, see www.sussex.ac.uk/hints/staffing/personnel/vacs or contact Staffing Services on (01273) 678706, fax (01273) 677401, email recruitment@sussex.ac.uk.

Sports Service Registration and Guest Fee Policy

Registration Cards

To qualify for subsidised rates, a current registration card must be presented to reception at all times. Users of the Fairer Sports Complex are also asked where possible to bring their library card. Failure to show a card will result in the public rate being charged.

Guest Fees

Members can bring one guest per session for a £1 fee. If the number of guests exceeds the number of members, the public rate will be charged.

Bulletin

The fortnightly Bulletin is written and produced by Alison Field and Peter Simmons, with regular contributions from Jacqui Bealing. We welcome any news, story ideas, letters or small ads from staff and students of the University. The next issue will be out on 14 September, with a copy deadline of 1pm on 7 September. Please contact the Press and Communications Office in Sussex House on ext. 8888 or email Bulletin@sussex.ac.uk.