

## Random Fruits of Lockdown

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It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. During lockdown there was time and quiet to go through the TV notebook, jottings not only from the woodnotes wild of the SABC but from the no longer so august BBC, Sky News, CNN, world English, in fact. What, oh what, do we find?

**I proTEST!** There we have it, stress on the second syllable. And don't forget that in the first syllable the vowel is reduced, being unstressed, to Daniel Jones's neutral vowel, low middle on the chart. No, it is not 'O' as in 'low'! It is that vague little unobtrusive grunt (rather difficult for speakers of African languages because they are not used to central vowels). Well, you could expect as much from the SABC, but Horrors! You hear it everywhere. The Oxford Dictionary still tries to maintain orthodoxy of a sort, but nobody knows any longer how to use it to ascertain correct pronunciation.

Davies, the Brexit Secretary, says, in**TEG**ral - no wonder it was such a farce; Skye News has e**QUER**ry, CNNWeather Cape Co**LUM**bine, Alisdair Waghorn ad**VER**saries, Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, her**O**ism, (surely Boris would never have done that, whatever else he might have?), so when Tim Modise talks of the In**TEG**ral African Conference, we can almost forgive him. We welter among irre**VO**cably, e**CON**omics.

In this country, widespread difficulty in placing of stress on the correct syllable could be attributed to the fact that, while English is a stress language, the African languages are not. Obviously too, many teachers may not be aware of this and may not know how to use a dictionary to get pronunciation. Training is often at fault, here. But it does seem that the bastions of educated speech are crumbling in the marble halls of usage elsewhere, too.

That **I**.

Donald Trump to President Macron : "The relationship between you and I..." He said it more than once. The French system of education is excellent and rather hot

on grammar, and one is sure President Macron recorded the clanger, but his glassy smile never wavered. Ah, diplomacy!. But Trump is not alone. Pompeo: "between he and I..." Well, he and Trump are two peas in a pod. But Aaron Hesselhurst of BBC Word: "to you and I..." Yes but he must be Australian, surely? Minister Lindiwe Sisulu (Oh dear)" I want you and I to connect..." Chriselda Lewis: "connect ourselves to you and I..." *The Sunday Times* (the end of the world must be at hand)"If our enforcement were effective, him and others who did this should have been sentenced to prison. " Not quite the same, but similar. (Wonder who they were writing about?)

It all depends whether the pronoun is the subject of the sentence or the object, or if it comes after a preposition. I—me: he—him etc., etc. But there is nothing wrong in saying "It's me" instead of "It is I" except when angry teachers jump on you and you get the notion that you always have to say I.

### **Actually**

In a serious discussion on eNCA:"One of the things I am actually saying is..." One says this kind of thing in lively conversation, but still it is worth thinking about clean statement. "What I am saying" is used far too often. There are much more effective alternatives in the English language. What about the simple, direct, "My point is..." Or, "What I should like to say is..." Or "My case is..." The case I should like to put is...' "Let me put the case that..." That word "actually" seems to imply that what was said previously was misleading. But was it only one of the things? The whole business is blurred.

"Actually" reminds me of another TV incident, a reporter asking a witness about a crime. The reporter asks, "What actually happened?" and gets the reply "What actually happened was..." It was as if there was no truth without the word "actually." It was not enough to just ask, "What happened?", it had to be what actually happened to be sensational enough. The plain truth is not enough. And language becomes trite.

### **Where the buck stops**

One of our TV announcers, who does an excellent job and is a pleasure to listen to, has one foible. When he signs off, he triumphantly announces: "This is where the buck stops." It is, of course, a well-known saying. That excellent, quietly effective President of the USA, Harry Truman, had a sign on his desk saying "The Buck Stops Here," signifying his willingness to take ultimate responsibility. This is not what our excellent announcer means, exactly. He has been betrayed by the allurements of a flashy phrase, loosely used, that sounds fine. Just now and then, he shows what he really means by saying "The bus stops here." His time, always well used, is up.

Our local purveyor of flashy entertainment keeps telling us, with a fanfare of trumpets, that: THE STAGE IS YOURS!!! Normally, if you say this to someone, they are being invited to speak. Sometimes the phrase can be humorous or a little mocking, a joke, even sarcastic, depending on the tone. What our TV seems to be saying is that we have the choice of the great riches of the programmes that they are offering us. Again, the allurements of a flashy phrase has led to sloppy English.

On a more forgivable level, lots of little distortions of English idiom can be noted. The Governor of our Bank, Mr Moyane, for whom my respect is great for the way he has helped to get us out of the quagmire of the recent past, recently stated that, "the proof is in the pudding." The proof of the pudding is indeed in the eating thereof, but he did not, on this occasion assist his argument. An interviewer dealing with a very controversial death, spoke of "a man who knows the family all too well." It is totally the wrong phrase, carrying with it all sorts of insinuations. Probably all the hapless interviewer wanted to say was that the person knew the family very well. There is constant abuse of the phrase "the likes of." It carries with it a derogatory undertone. I recently heard "the likes of the President" when the speaker, I hope, meant "such as the President". It was an eNews announcer. Awareness of the accurate form of the idiom, of what it actually means, of when it should be used, of the right nuance, prevents mess and can sometimes be a bulwark against pretentiousness.

THE PRO SHOP. GOLF'S BIGGEST SALE JUST GOT BIGGER. By now, I suppose you just can't stop it. The tide has come in and King Canute has got his feet wet. Does

one still try to insist that the Present Perfect Tense (you remember it? the one with has/have,) is required after just?

To conclude, for your silent contemplation, this gem from Rudi Giuliani: “it’s somebody’s version of the truth.”