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## EDITORIAL

After a feature on New Zealand law in our previous issue our major article here focuses by contrast on the rather less formal usage of those locked up for transgressions of the law. The prison population constitutes a readily identifiable subculture whose distinctive argot has long interested linguists and dictionary-makers.

Our intrepid reporter Diana Looser is rapidly becoming the leading expert on Kiwi 'boobslang'. Her face-to-face interviews with a wide variety of inmates in a number of different institutions are yielding valuable sociolinguistic and lexicographical data, and the project provides a fine example of the kind of research which the NZDC hopes will be undertaken in other such lexically rich environments.

Our other principal contributor in this issue is Sheila Kolstad, an experienced lexicographer who has been involved since its beginnings with the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (DARE), an ambitious and still unfinished project whose long gestation and meticulous preparation have echoes of both the *OED* and our own *DNZE*.

Sheila's article and her recent keen interest in NZE have created a link between the States and New Zealand which is likely to be of real benefit to the international profile of the NZDC.

*Tony Deverson*

Tony Deverson  
Editor, NZWords  
Associate Director,  
NZDC



## INVESTIGATING BOOBSLANG

DIANA LOOSER

**Boobslang** (from **boob** 'prison'), also known as **boob jargon**, is a type of argot used amongst prison inmates, defined by Greg Newbold in *The Big Huey* as 'the jargon of the jail'. He adds, 'Many of the terms involved in this language are specific only to prisons and criminal subcultures and will be unfamiliar to the person on the street'. A language of the underworld (initially known as 'cant') originated in England during the 16th century and has long been noted as a characteristic of criminals and criminal subcultures—the language of pirates, beggars, highwaymen, convicts and, during the 19th century with the construction of what we know as the modern prison, prison inmates.

The words and expressions which comprise boobslang have accumulated over a number of decades from a variety of sources and are constantly being added to. This provides inmates with a colourful and varied vocabulary which may be used within the jail environment: to refer succinctly to everyday objects and persons; to convey emotions, beliefs and attitudes and to indicate solidarity networks and identities; as a 'secret code'; and as a way of maintaining the complex systemic relations extant in the prison society. The usage of boobslang among inmates is dependent upon certain variables, being used slightly differently according to age, ethnic identity, crime, location and gender of the inmate.

During 1998 I carried out research into the vocabulary and functions of the 'boobslang' used by inmates at Paparua (Christchurch Men's) Prison. This was an extension of two previous studies carried out in Canterbury prisons: Rolleston Men's Prison in 1996 and Christchurch Women's Prison in 1997. So far my research has collected about 1600 terms and their usages. Space will not allow a discussion of all these terms, but this article will describe of a number of terms which fall into various subject categories. The aim is to provide an insight into the nature of the colourful language used by prisoners at Paparua.

### BOOBSLANG TOPICS

Boobslang words may be roughly grouped into seven main semantic categories which would appear to reflect main areas of interest or concern regarding inmates' well-being or goals or significant things in their lives. These are terms for: places and procedures; figures of authority; crimes and sentences; inmate types and their relationships; business activities; gang-related terms; and drug terminology.

A good example from the first category—

places and procedures—is **boob** itself, meaning prison. As has been seen in the case of **boobslang**, **boob** can prefix many words, for example, **boobgear** for prison clothing; **boob issue** for an issue of toiletries; **boob gun** for a tattoo machine; **boob glove** for a characteristic prison tattoo giving the impression that the person is wearing a fingerless glove; and **boobhead**, a chronic recidivist, or one who prefers to be in jail rather than on the **Outside**. Other terms for places and procedures include **big bird** for a transfer to another prison by aeroplane, **fish bowl** or **fish tank** for the Control Room, **work parade**, which refers to the ordered positions in which inmates line up before starting work in the morning, and **Bahamas** for the **pound** (solitary confinement cell). **Watching sky** is another interesting term for being in the **pound**; this refers humorously to the view of the sky as seen through the mesh top of the solitary confinement cell, which is contrasted with being able to watch the Sky television channels. As there is no television in the cell, 'sky' is the only thing an inmate can watch.

The boobslang vocabulary also includes terms for authority figures. Although better known terms such as **pig**, **filth**, and **heat** are common, **five-o** is also used to describe a police officer; and **headlice** is also used by some to refer to the police (from 'po-LICE'). A prison psychiatrist is known as a **trick cyclist** or the **google factory**. Prison guards are generally referred to by the widely known term **screw**, but, interestingly, there are more terms for those officers who are either new to the prison or have just finished training, such as **baby screw**, **schoolboy screw**, **prospect**, **new on the floor**, **rookie** and **scobie**. The latter term is a blend of letters from two words: **screw** for prison guard, and **probie**, a white gang prospect still in training.

Boobslang also comprises a great many words and expressions to do with crimes and sentences. **Lag** is a general term used to refer to a sentence or to an inmate. Examples are **big lag** (life sentence or preventive detention), a **wicked lag** (any sentence over seven years, life, or preventive detention), and a **bed-and-breakfast lag** (a very short sentence). To **knock your lag out** is to serve your time in prison. Inmate terms include **old lag**, **old logger** (someone who has been in and out of prison for years), and **baby logger** or **first logger** (someone serving their first prison term—usually a short one). A long sentence may be called **the big Huey (Long)**, in reference to Governor Huey Long of Louisiana, notorious for his harsh sentences, and a life sentence may be referred to as doing **the lot**, **all up**, or the **bitch**. Preventive



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detention can be **black bitch** because, as one inmate explained, 'there's no light at the end of the tunnel'. Words for crimes include **armo** for an armed robbery, **tank** for a burglary involving a safe (presumably from the usage of **tank**, which refers simply to a safe), and **code R** and **sour grape** (rape). Terms for weapons are also frequent, including **iron** (firearm) and **shiv** (a stabbing weapon, especially one which can be broken off to leave the object inside the victim, for example, those made from glass or Perspex).

The makeup and structure of the inmate society are of central interest. Therefore, there are many words for types of inmate (decided either by personality, reputation, or criminal offence) and relationships between inmates. There are words for people who have respect, for example **boss** (someone who has respect but is not gang affiliated) and **king pin** (leader who has gained his position either from intimidation or from being in control, solving the problems), and for those who do not have respect, such as a **frip**, defined by one inmate as 'anyone you don't regard in the same class as you, especially someone who hasn't done a lot of jail'.

## INMATE SOLIDARITY

A very important aspect of inmate relations is solidarity. A person who breaks this by **narking** (informing to the authorities) risks serious reprisals. Once labelled a **nark** or a **finger** the person is branded and cannot escape this reputation even if he or she relocates to another prison. Another seriously regarded offence is **tealeafing** (stealing from another inmate while in prison). A **tealeaf(er)**, if caught, is dealt with harshly and may be **kangaroo courted** (subject to an unofficial judgment and punishment by other inmates). The most despised group of inmates in the prison are child molesters, known by a variety of labels, including **freaks**, **nonces**, **boofheads**, **Lesters**, **rock spiders**, **mullocks** and **K.F.s**. Much labelling is also done on the grounds of ethnic identity, so terms such as **flour bin** (a Pakeha), **Bruce** (an Asian—from Bruce Lee) and **T.H. Lowry** (a Maori) are in use.

Another booslang category is concerned with terms relating to business activities. These 'business activities' generally involve trade among inmates in the prison and the movement of contraband between the prison and Outside. There are terms for money: **bat** for a hundred-dollar note, a **brick** and **bluebird chips** for a ten-dollar note, **lettuce** for a twenty and **tomato** for a hundred-dollar note. A **cockatoo** is someone who **keeps peg** (keeps watch) for someone else, for example, in a fight, when doing drugs or tattooing. To **charge** something is to insert contraband into one's rectum to hide and transport it, as opposed to **cheeking**, where contraband is not actually inserted, yet is held between the cheeks of one's bottom.

The final two categories—gang-related terminology, and words pertaining to drugs and drug-usage—differ slightly from the

others in that they are largely 'importational models'. This means that, although many of these terms may be spawned within the prison environment, or widely used within it, they refer to actions and interests of criminal subcultures outside the prison (i.e. gangs and drug-users) and have their ultimate origin and influence from these exterior groups. These terms are also more likely to be used on the Outside within these groups.

## GANG TERMS

Gang affiliations give rise to terms such as **dog** for a member of the Mongrel Mob Gang. From this, the term **kennel** is coined for a Mongrel Mob member's cell—literally, in both cases, a **house** (cell) for a **dog**. As many gangs are set up on ethnic lines, with their ideology informed by racial prejudice, terms used for gang members tend to be racist in character or to describe racial aspects of other gangs. Usually, a gang trainee for a 'black' gang is a **prospect**, whereas a gang trainee for a 'white' gang is a **probie**. More descriptive terms such as **light bulb heads**, **cue balls**, **nude nuts**, **bumpheads**, **pin heads** and **chrome domes** derive from satiric attitudes to Skinheads; to go **ten skin bowling** is a term meaning to beat up Skinheads. The term **Oh One** for a Skinhead has an interesting derivation: it comes from their characteristic expression 'Oi Oi' used as a greeting. When written in capitals OI OI (for example, as in the case of tattoos) it looks like the numerals 'zero one', or 'oh one'. At a deeper level, a member may swear on their gang, for example, using the words, **Straight up on Oi**, or **Straight up on the Mob**. This implies an absolute word of honour, 'like swearing on your mother's grave'.

A large number of the terms gathered from the prison were to do with drugs and devices and ways of taking them. There are many examples, but some interesting ones include: **blue lady** (a glass syringe); **blue lagoon** (halcyon prepared in a solution for intravenous injection; in the syringe it is a blue liquid); **bones** (temgesics, originally called **Ts**, then **T-Bones**, then just **bones**); **elbow** (a pound of marijuana, from 'lb' (elbie) for pound); **johnny dip** (LSD—rhyming slang for 'trip'); **Mr Miggles** (heroin); **opals** (100mg morphine sulphate tablets—because they are pearly grey); **rub-a-dub** (used occasionally to refer to ascetic anhydride, an agent added to Class B drugs, for example, morphine, to turn them into Class A drugs, for example, heroin); and **skunk** (weed) (marijuana of very high quality).

## VARIED ORIGINS

As with many vocabularies, booslang does not originate from a single source. Because of the gradual accumulation of terms over several years from different people with different backgrounds, for different objects and procedures and for different reasons, these terms have an extensive variety of origins. Booslang terms may originate from variants of pre-existing words, or may come into being as a result of outside (even

international) sources and influences—hence, there is an element of intertextuality in the manufacture of prison slang terms.

Some changes include acronyms, taken either from current English or from booslang. Examples include: **B&B**, which stands for **brace and bit**, rhyming slang for **fit**, drug-users' slang for a hypodermic syringe and needle; **D.I.C.** (**Dick in Child**—a corruption of **Drunk in Charge**) for a child molestation offence: 'he's in for being caught D.I.C.'; **K.F.** for **Kid(die) Fucker**, a paedophile; **K.P.** for **King Pin**, a leader who has gained his position from violence, or from being the one in control, the one who solves any problems; and occasionally for **Kackie Pants**, a satiric derivative of **King Pin**, an inmate who thinks he is in control when he is not; **S.N.U.** from **Special Needs Unit**, for mentally unbalanced or potentially suicidal inmates, and from this **S.N.U. material**, a mad or deranged person.

## RHYMING SLANG

A significant proportion of booslang terms, especially those used by older inmates with past prison experience, has rhyming slang origins. The commonest form of this is Cockney rhyming slang, which began as a lower-class London dialect, and is also found in other institutions such as military camps. Because of its inventive language play, rhyming slang was opaque to outsiders and was consequently adopted by criminal subcultures who added their own terms, thus producing an easily expanded 'secret' language. There are many examples of rhyming slang in use at Paparua: **Al Capone**, **dog and bone**, and **eau de cologne** for the telephone, **Billy Lid** for a kid (child), **Bugs Bunny** for funny, or money, **china plate** for one's friend or mate, **currant cake** for awake (aware, informed), **Egna Brit** for shit, **frog and toad** for a road, **hairy ape** for rape, **rub-a-dub** for the pub, **pig's ear** for a beer, **T.H. Lowry** for Maori, and **turtledove** for 'in love' (turtledoves are a traditional symbol of fidelity). There are also terms specific to the prison situation such as **Noah's ark** for a **nark** (informer), **lost and found** for the **pound** (solitary confinement punishment cell) and **four-by-two** for a **screw** (prison guard, warden).

One of the greatest influences upon prison slang, however, is the influence of mainstream popular culture. The influence of film, television, radio, and the mass market has had a profound impact upon the new terms that are generated in the prison environment. Sporting stars, for example champion 100-metre sprinter Carl Lewis and baseball star Babe Ruth, are represented by such terms as (**do a**) **Carl Lewis** (to run away, make an escape) and **Babe Ruth** (the truth). Cartoon characters such as Warner Brothers' **Bugs Bunny** (see above 'funny', 'money') appear, as well as **Mutley** (aviator 'baddie' Dick Dastardly's green dog in the 1960s Hanna Barbera cartoon *Stop the Pigeon*) for a police sniffer dog which searches the prison for drugs; and **Captain Caveman** (a character

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from the cartoon *The Flintstones*) for an inmate who always remains in his cell, or **cave**.

It is also interesting to note that New Zealand prison slang has the added influence of the Maori language. Boobslang terms of Maori origin include **whare** for a cell (lit. 'house' – a cell is also referred to as one's **house**), **henake** for the **pound**, solitary confinement (lit. 'eeltrap'), **uma rapiti**, meaning to escape or run away (lit. 'run rabbit') and **hemmel** [sic], a written form of the Maori word **hemo** (dead, in a coma).

Boobslang is a fascinating form of language which perceptively reflects the tensions and complications of being in prison and the areas of interest and group goals of the prison inmates. Boobslang displays the inmates' cynical attitude towards their surroundings and situation, but is also a keen illustration of the piquant sense of humour and wry intelligence shared by many of these people. Prison language serves emotional, social, and practical purposes, helping inmates to accommodate to the prison

environment, by giving them a system with which to refer to places, procedures and people around them, and helping them to define their own place within that environment. Boobslang has a life, colour, and personality of its own and makes intriguing research.

*Diana Looser is a doctoral student and tutor in the English Department at the University of Canterbury.*

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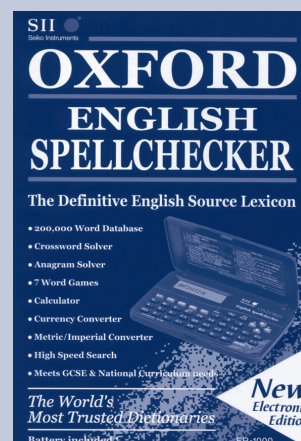
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# FROM THE CENTRE

**GRAEME KENNEDY, DIRECTOR  
NEW ZEALAND DICTIONARY CENTRE**

The **New Zealand Dictionary Centre** is jointly funded by **Oxford University Press** and **Victoria University of Wellington** to research all aspects of New Zealand English and to publish New Zealand dictionaries and other works.

## MAILBAG



The Editor of *NZWords* welcomes readers' letters and other contributions on their recent observations of New Zealand usage, both positive and negative. Please write to:

**Tony Deverson, Editor, NZWords**  
Department of English, University of  
Canterbury Private Bag 4800, Christchurch  
Fax: (03) 364 2065  
Email: [a.deverson@engl.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:a.deverson@engl.canterbury.ac.nz)

For much of the last few months the New Zealand Dictionary Centre has been engaged in establishing electronic databases of New Zealand English, and most especially of the words and phrases collected by Harry Orsman over almost half of the present century. These databases, including an electronic version of Dr Orsman's *Dictionary of New Zealand English*, can now be rapidly accessed and searched by computer. With access to impressive dictionary databases such as those at Oxford and at the Australian National Dictionary Centre in Canberra we are able to check for evidence on the origins and history of words used in New Zealand and on new forms and distinctive meanings which have emerged here. We are very grateful for the support of John Simpson, editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and Bruce Moore, Director of the Australian Dictionary Centre, and of their staff in cooperating so generously with us.

The Centre has begun to build up its database of previously unrecorded words of New Zealand English and recently advertised research fellowships to encourage full-time study for persons interested in undertaking research in New Zealand lexicography. I am delighted to be able to announce that from a strong field of applicants Dianne Bardsley of Hawera and John Macalister of Featherston have been appointed as the first research fellows at the Centre.

Ms Bardsley will be undertaking a project to identify aspects of the contribution made by rural New Zealand to the New Zealand English lexicon. She has taught English at Hawera High School since 1982 and her long-standing interest in New Zealand English has resulted in a number of publications including works on English in New Zealand during the Depression and World War 2.

John Macalister has recently completed an MA in Applied Linguistics at Victoria University of Wellington and plans to work during his tenure of the Fellowship on the ways in which Maori has contributed to the development of New Zealand English. Mr Macalister has taught English in Kiribati, Namibia, Thailand, and Cambodia, as well as New Zealand, and most recently, during his MA studies, compared the use of words of Maori origin in the School Journals of the 1960s with those of the 1990s.

There are clearly many areas of New Zealand life in which the distinctive words used here have yet to be recorded. This was superbly illustrated in *NZWords* 2.1, where Jim Cameron's informative article showed how the practice of

the law has left its trace in the variety of English spoken in New Zealand. Almost certainly there are many words used in domestic contexts which have yet to be captured in our dictionaries (remember copper sticks, made of wood, of course), and then there are the words used first or with distinctive meanings by such diverse groups as missionaries and miners, farmers and freezing workers, soldiers, sportsmen and sportswomen, trampers and teachers, and many other professions and trades.

### INCOMINGS TO THE CENTRE

Words or meanings which are found to be specifically 'New Zealand' in origin or use are added to our 'incomings' database. Readers are invited to send us any words and phrases used in New Zealand which they think may have their origin, or distinctively different uses here, and which do not appear in current dictionaries. The Centre's 'incomings template' form on which such words and phrases are recorded before being entered into the database is provided in the brochure enclosed with this issue of *NZWords* to help interested readers gather useful data. You are warmly invited to make copies of this form to record information which you think might be relevant, and to send your contributions to the Centre. A website is being planned to show the work of the Centre and it will also include a copy of the template form.

### WHO'S CENTRIC NOW?

Both the Director and Associate Director of the NZDC will be speaking at an international conference on post-colonial Englishes titled 'Who's Centric Now?', to be held in Canberra from 27-29 October, and hosted by the **Australian National Dictionary Centre, Oxford University Press, and the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University.**

Graeme Kennedy's paper is entitled 'The Distribution of Maori Words in New Zealand English', and Tony Deverson's 'New Zealand, New Zealand English, and the Dictionaries'. For further information or enquiries please contact:

**Leena Messina**, Programs Office,  
Humanities Research Centre, ANU  
Phone: +61-2-6249 4357, Fax: 6248 0054  
Email: [Leena.Messina@anu.edu.au](mailto:Leena.Messina@anu.edu.au)  
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### Graeme Kennedy Director, New Zealand Dictionary Centre

School of Linguistics and  
Applied Language Studies,  
Victoria University of Wellington  
PO Box 600 Wellington  
Email: [nzdc@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:nzdc@vuw.ac.nz)  
Fax: (03) 463 5604

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# 'SNIB' - A NEW ZEALAND WORD

SHEILA KOLSTAD

A written directive for a stay at a bach belonging to friends instructed me to 'snib' the lock. The meaning of *snib* was clear from context; the word itself was new to me and somehow amusing. When I asked my friends about it, they looked at me wide-eyed and said, 'Of course, "snib"—what else would you say?'

The *Oxford English Dictionary* Second Edition (OED2; 1989) gives *snib* either as noun to mean 'a catch or fastening for a door, window, lock, or the like' or as verb to mean 'to fasten (a door, etc.) by means of a snib or catch'. The word has an interesting history. OED2 labels the noun 'Chiefly Sc[ots]' and says it is of doubtful origin, perhaps adopted from Low German *snibbe* (German *schnippe*), *snib* (Swedish *snibb*) a beak, beaklike point; the verb is simply labelled 'orig[inally] Sc.' Examples of usage are given from such authors as James M. Barrie and Arthur Conan Doyle, and range from 1825 through 1891 for the noun and 1808 through 1971 for the verb.

*Snib* is to be found, of course, in the *Scottish National Dictionary* (Vol. 8, 1971) and in *Webster's Third International Dictionary* (1961). It is not in the *Australian National Dictionary* (1988) nor *The Macquarie Dictionary of Australian Colloquial Language* (1988); neither is it in the *Dictionary of New Zealand English* (1997) or the earlier *Heinemann New Zealand Dictionary* (1989). Spell checkers on New Zealand computers reject *snib* as a word. All of this last is a bit surprising because *snib* seems to be still in broad usage only in New Zealand.

Once common in the Scottish language, *snib* has little current use among speakers in that country. A native Scot in his mid fifties, a student of English linguistics at the University of Wisconsin (USA), says the word is now only dialectal in Scots. In England the word seems already to have been regarded as a provincialism as early as 1917: 'They laughed at me in London when I talked about "snibbing" the windows.' (Douglas, O. [Anna Buchan], *The Setons*, page xiii). A *Pocket Oxford* dated 1924 does not list the word. From Canada there is a single tantalising 1971 quote, published in *The Islander* (21 November, page 2, Victoria, British Columbia): 'The windows were not only unbroken but snibbed shut.' Perhaps a relict Scot or errant New Zealander?

Despite the numbers of Scots immigrants who settled in the United States, *snib* never became established in American usage. The three examples I was able to find all came from such immigrants or their children. The first, a quote slip in the files of the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (DARE), came from an unidentified informant of Scots background in an area of Scots settlement. Dated 1973, it recalls usage from the early 1920s in Monongahela, Pennsylvania: 'To set the snib on a door lock to lock it ... So you

either "snibbed" or "unsuibbed" the lock ...'. The second example, found in *Prairie Winds*, a publication of the Thomas County [Kansas] Historical Society, is from a reminiscence written in 1993 by a woman whose parents had moved there from Scotland about 1900. She noted that 'the screen door would be snibbed on the inside to keep the flies out and mother would be working in the kitchen.' An American friend of mine recognized *snib* immediately. Although she does not and did not use the term herself, she said it was a commonplace word to her Scots parents, who immigrated to New Jersey in the 1920s.

Although also used in the wider senses as defined above by OED2, in New Zealand *snib* has had reference especially to Yale-type locks. This sort of lock is set into the door separately from the door handle and latch. The key goes in on the outside of the lock only; on the inside there is a small handle or lever and a button. To allow normal passage through the door, the small handle on the lock is turned so that the latch is no longer engaged. Then the button is pushed up to hold the spring-loaded latch in. The door is now 'on the snib'. To 'snib' the lock, the button is pushed the other way. This releases the latch, so that entry from outside can be only by key. The door is then 'snibbed'. Because newer houses in New Zealand have a lock built into the door handle, all this snibbing may soon be a thing of the past.

## DIALECT SURVIVAL

Thus *snib* exists both as noun and as verb. The little lever on the lock is described as the 'snib', and 'snibbed' is used to describe the state of the lock. To 'snib the door' means to set the lever to lock it; to 'snib it open' means to set the lever to make it unlocked. In the wider usage, if a door or window is 'snibbed', it implies that it is fixed either in the locked or unlocked position.

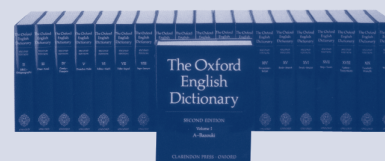
According to Elizabeth Gordon of the Origins of New Zealand English project at the University of Canterbury (ONZE), dialectal words have not tended to persist in New Zealand English beyond the first generation of speakers in the new country. *Snib* is essentially a dialect word which has continued in general use. All those New Zealanders aged 45 or older whom I asked about *snib* know and use the word. It is also familiar to younger New Zealanders, but less commonly used by them. Most said as well that they felt the word was on its way out of the Kiwi vocabulary.

But perhaps the word will not be lost completely. *Snib* does still seem to have a bit of occasional use outside New Zealand. Several months ago an episode of 'Blue Heelers', set in a small New South Wales outback town and produced in Australia, had one of the characters making sure the lock was snibbed. This suggests some continued familiarity with

the word in the West Island. And there is a website which offers for purchase a security screen door lock with 'inside snib' and a key which 'overrides the snib operation'. The lock can be got from a company called 'EPCO Architecture Hardware (Australia) Pty. Ltd.' located, however, in Taipei, Taiwan!

Sheila Kolstad is the Senior Science Editor of the *Dictionary of American Regional English* at the University of Madison, Wisconsin, and a frequent visitor to New Zealand.

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# YOUR LANGUAGE NEEDS YOU!

## THE OED GOES ONLINE

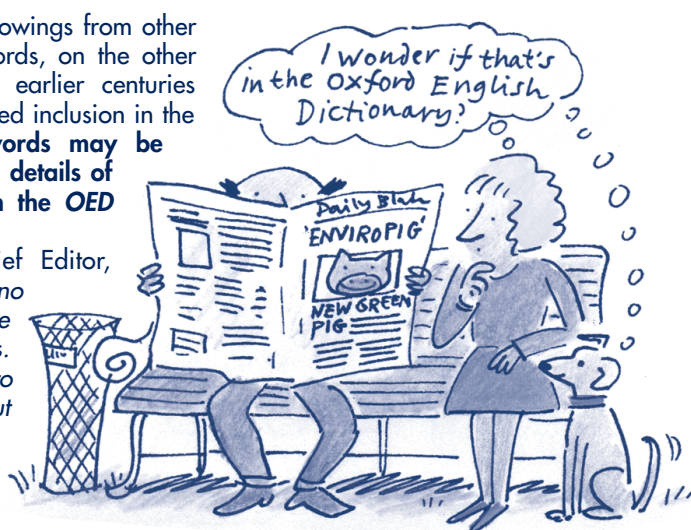
*The Oxford English Dictionary* is entering a completely new and exciting stage in its history, which is as ground-breaking as when James Murray, the first OED editor, started compiling the first edition some 120 years ago. In July Oxford University Press made an appeal for words, 'Your Language Needs You', to all English-speakers worldwide for a completely revised edition of the OED which will start to appear online in March 2000.

This appeal is the biggest in the history of *The Oxford English Dictionary*. People from all over the world are being asked to provide OUP with brand new words and 'new old words' which are supported by published evidence.

Brand new words can be slang or regional, and will come from anywhere in the world where English is spoken. They

can even be recent borrowings from other languages. New old words, on the other hand, are words from earlier centuries which have so far escaped inclusion in the Dictionary. **All new words may be submitted using a form, details of which are available on the OED website: [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com).**

John Simpson, Chief Editor, OED, said: 'There is no longer one English—there are many Englishes. Words are flooding into the language throughout its history, and the developments in world English. When the online edition was launched, I would be delighted to have a host of new people helping us map the past, present, and future of English.'



**Readers worldwide are being asked to look out for new words.**

Cartoon: courtesy of Recorder, OUP's Staff Newsletter, Vol IV Issue 4, August 1999.

## NZWORDS COMPETITIONS

### NZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 1: RESULTS

In our inaugural competition competitors were asked to supply a TV guide-style promo piece of 30 words or fewer for a New Zealand literary work (fiction or non-fiction).

The small number of contributors should be congratulated on their witty reductionism, brought to bear on authors as widely dispersed in time as Samuel Butler and Elizabeth Knox.

Mary Cresswell argued for *The Edmonds Cookbook* as a literary work (pot-boiler?), and needed only seven words to suggest its recipe for success:

Guaranteed levitation, comprehended within a lie-flat format.

The meaning of Denis Glover's best-known poem was laid out in black and white by Eric Beardsley:

Over-committed Canterbury small farmers reduced to poverty, nudity, insanity and death by big business, their story punctuated by ironic refrain (see 'Chorus, Greek') from Australian immigrants.

Honourable mentions to these and others, however the editor's nod (and the prize of \$100) goes to Ray Copland of Christchurch, who used the exact word-limit to capture Mander's *The Story of a New Zealand River* in delightful parody of *Listener/Skywatch* style:

Pioneer Tom is clearfelling the North Island. All-purpose wife Alice, up the wop-wops and the duff, secretly adores violin-playing David. They finally make music when Tom falls under a truck.

### NZWORDS COMPETITION NO. 2

Lexicography is mostly serious business, and especially in today's politically correct times dictionary-makers make great efforts to suppress personality and prejudice in order to provide scientifically objective accounts of a language's vocabulary.

At the same time a more idiosyncratic and attitudinal strand has always been part of the history of English dictionary writing, from Samuel Johnson's notorious definitions of words such as *oats* and *Whig* (and *lexicographer* 'harmless drudge') to our own Harry Orsman's *wanker* 'a person given to unproductive activity'. In America Ambrose Bierce made a name for himself as an 'alternative' lexicographer. His quirky, sardonic contributions were collected in 1911 in *The Devil's Dictionary* (*diplomacy* 'the patriotic art of lying for one's country'; *dictionary* 'a malevolent literary device for cramping the growth of a language ...').

For this competition readers are invited to come up with concise definitions in this more opinionated, subversive style for two or three of the omnipresent trials and trappings of life at millennium's end: computers, television, road rage, fast food, politicians, political correctness, the millennium itself—or whatever bugs you!

First prize \$100 worth and second prize \$50 worth of books from the OUP catalogue.

### ENTRIES CLOSE 30 DECEMBER 1999.

**Entries sent by email should also contain a snail mail address.**

## ADDRESS FOR ARTICLES AND LETTERS

**Tony Deverson**

Editor, NZWords  
Department of English  
University of Canterbury  
Private Bag 4800, Christchurch  
Fax: (03) 364 2065  
Email: [a.deverson@engl.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:a.deverson@engl.canterbury.ac.nz)

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**Director of the New Zealand Dictionary Centre:**  
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