



Jane Bowron

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And this is how the story ends

I have a recurring nightmare, which some of you will be all too familiar with. I'm about to go on stage, but I can't seem to remember my lines. I keep asking the cast if I could borrow one of their scripts, so I can get my bearings, but they're too busy with last-minute preparations.

Someone from wardrobe is zipping me into my costume, and I'm still in the dark. If only I could get my hands on that script, I'd know what the play is about, what it is trying to say.

People are depending on me to know my cues and hit my spots. As time marches on I wonder if I should just go on and muddle through by mouthing the words along with the rest of the chorus – that is, if I am even in the chorus. Maybe I should literally go off script and speak what's on my mind.

The curtain finally rises and I step forward into the lights, waking up at the critical moment and realising it's just a dream. I feel enormous relief, but there is a nagging need to know how the story ended.

Column writing is a bit like this. You try to do all the rehearsal prep work by wading through endless newspapers and listening to radio and TV bulletins to come up with commentary and lines that are hopefully original and relevant.

When you've settled on a topic and know what your theme is, you hope like hell some other columnist doesn't beat you to the punch. Even if you have a different take – a carefully considered counter-argument, it can be dismissed as one column too many that would constitute a chorus.

I've been writing columns for decades now – thousands of television reviews, a column written while living through the Christchurch earthquakes, and this general column, which today is my last.

Over the decades, newspapers got smaller, staff numbers shrank and columns sometimes need to be filed days out from deadline. Some of us have been asked to indicate what we might be writing about nearly a week out, making the likelihood of fulfilling the objective of being current extremely challenging.

While writers develop technique and a feeling for what topics will still be in play a week ahead, no-one is a fortune-teller who can divine what might be happening days in advance.

I think as opinion writers we should be allowed to be honest about this. We owe it to the reader.

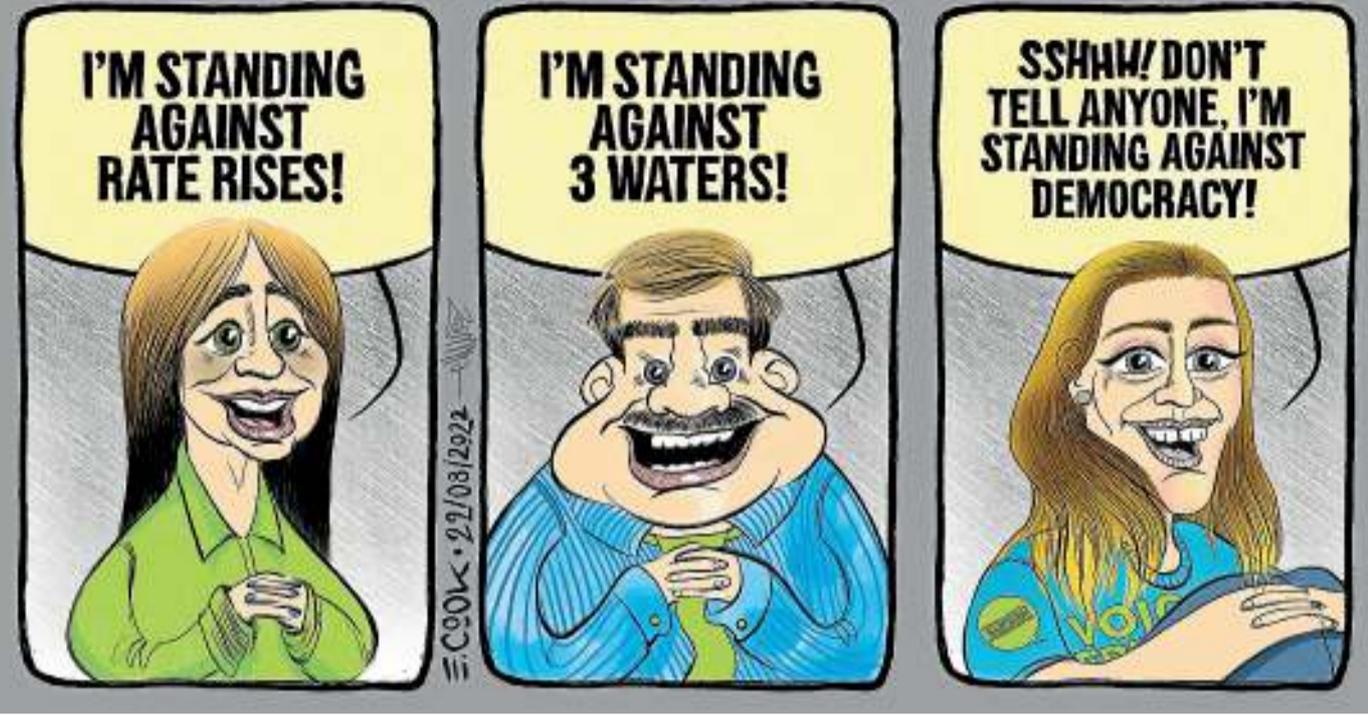
You may have noticed over the last few years the trend for intensely personal confessions and reflections by columnists. Under the pressure of invention, and to keep away from anything topical that could quickly become dated, some columnists resort to mining their own lives for material. Only there can they give full-throated freedom to writing their own truth and not have their opinions edited.

Such confessional writing is fine in small doses, but it is a far cry from fearlessly arguing and opining in the column spaces of newspapers in a battle of ideas and viewpoints which invite a wide range of discourse.

Opinion writers should be able to speak freely to avoid the sin of columnists sounding like an orchestrated mob, uttering strap-on fashionable virtue-signalling ideas that echo underlying agendas.

That is how we work things out and discover what is trying to be said, what the play is about and how to formulate and deliver our own lines. As I step out into the lights this last time, I know how the play has ended, and I thank you for letting me speak my mind.

LOCAL ELECTIONS: KNOW YOUR CANDIDATES



LANGUAGE MATTERS

Bienvenido to diversity

Corinne Seals

Senior lecturer in applied linguistics at Victoria University of Wellington

Last week after much hard work by the Latin America Centre of Asia-Pacific Excellence at Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington, a new language week joined the ranks of the existing weeks celebrating language diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Welcome (*Bienvenido!*) to the first Aotearoa Spanish Language Week (August 15-21).

Spanish is one of the world's most spoken languages, with more than 570 million speakers globally (7.6% of the world's population). According to the Instituto Cervantes in Spain, Spanish is also the second most used mother tongue in the world, with over 480m speakers. That puts Spanish second only to Mandarin, and English as a close third.

In New Zealand, the 2013 Census reported that Spanish was spoken by almost 27,000 people. This number has undoubtedly grown over the past nine years, and Spanish-speaking cultures have become more visible throughout the country.

During the opening celebration for Spanish Language Week at Parliament, MP Ricardo Menendez March emphasised the diversity within the Spanish-

speaking world, both culturally and linguistically, and he encouraged people to learn more about this.

This article looks at some of the linguistic diversity within and between Spanish-speaking regions. Readers may encounter any of these in Aotearoa New Zealand, as our Spanish speakers come from around the globe.

One of the biggest differences between Spanish dialects that people often point to is sound related. In particular, many people are familiar with the "lisp" of Spanish spoken in Spain (such as pronouncing the 's' sound in Spanish *hacer* with a 'th').

While this is often used as a distinguishing feature between Spanish varieties in Spanish versus those in Latin America, this is not so clearcut. This phenomenon (known as *ceceo*) has also been found in parts of Honduras, El Salvador, Venezuela, Argentina, Chile and Puerto Rico.

There are also differences between Spanish dialects in terms of grammar. In Spain, the past tense is most commonly found in the form of the present perfect tense (*He ido a la tienda esta mañana* – "I have been to the store this morning"). Comparatively, in Latin America, it is the simple past tense which is more commonly found (for example, *Fui a la tienda esta*

mañana – "I went to the store this morning").

Grammatical variation can also be found in terms of reference, such as personal pronouns. In some countries, such as Mexico, the pronoun *tú* is used to refer to "you" informally for a single person, *usted* is for "you" formally for a single person, and *ustedes* is for "you" for a group of people whether formal or informal. Meanwhile, in Spain, *vosotros* is used in place of

ustedes. Additionally, some countries such as Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay say *vos* instead of *tú* for singular informal "you".

Furthermore, vocabulary differences between Spanish-speaking regions abound. For example, the word for "car" in Mexico is *carro*, while in Spain it is *coche*, and in Argentina it is *auto*. Some differences can be quite funny as well. *Fresa* means "strawberry" across all dialects of Spanish, but in Mexico *fresa* is also used to refer to someone who is rather snobbish.

Many words used in Spanish in Mexico are also of Nahuatl origin (an Indigenous language) such as *aguacate* (avocado), *chocolate* (borrowed into English), *coyote* (likewise borrowed into English), and *ajolote* (axolotl). The list is well over 100 words long.

With such rich diversity in language, Spanish Language Week provides an opportunity to explore.



Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator movies popularised the Spanish phrase *Hasta la vista* ("See you later").

THE SCOTSMAN

Oscars comments still relevant today

Views from around the world. These opinions are not necessarily shared by Stuff newspapers

When Sacheen Littlefeather told the 1973 Oscars ceremony that Marlon Brando was refusing his best actor award for *The Godfather* because of "the treatment of American Indians today by the film industry", she was interrupted by booing.

Organisers had told her to speak for no more than 60 seconds, threatening her with arrest if she overran, and she later faced mockery, discrimination and personal attacks. But now Littlefeather, a Native American civil rights activist, has received a formal apology from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Joking about how long the apology

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had taken, she stressed: "We need to keep our sense of humour about this at all times. It's our method of survival." It was a remark in keeping with the polite words she used when she said Brando "very regretfully cannot accept this very generous award".

But despite this and the appalling stereotyping of Native Americans in many Hollywood films, there were boos, although others applauded. The young Littlefeather expressed the hope that one day "our hearts and our understandings will meet with love and generosity".

As concern grows over rising homophobia in Scotland and racism and other forms of prejudice, it is a sentiment we would all do well to embrace.