

## **Style in Context, Australian and international**

Report by Rosemary Noble

Following the highly successful editors conference, Style Council 2005 once again lived up to its promise with a selection of inspiring and thought-provoking presentations delving into the intricacies of English language in its many and varied forms.

In her keynote address on Taboo, censoring and the human brain, Kate Burridge introduced her audience to *orthophemisms* (an expression in the middle of a scale that has euphemisms at one end and dysphemisms at the other – an example of all three would be *pass away*, *die* and *snuff it* respectively). Kate talked about how 'inappropriate anatomical significance' was found in taboo words, resulting in a kind of default evaluation she calls 'middle class politeness criterion'. She concluded with a summary of some fascinating studies about human reactions to different types of taboo language.

Tony Wheeler, after a brief history of the amazing publishing success that is Lonely Planet, discussed the pitfalls of translating guidebooks. The title of his presentation, *Gricers, twitchers and 'doing doughnuts'*, refers to the sections on birdwatchers (twitchers) that must be in some guidebooks but not others, the British obsession with gricing (trainspotting) and the perils of translating into French such Aussie male behaviour at 'doing doughnuts'.

There followed a series of interesting papers on the joys and perils of publishing in English in other parts of the world. A short version of Kim Lockwood's, on training journalists in Fiji, can be found on p.3. Sue Butler, the publisher of the *Macquarie Dictionary*, not content to rest on her laurels after the mammoth effort to launch the fourth edition, is working on a dictionary of Indian English. She discussed the inclusion of words from Hindi and Urdu in common usage, as well as the editorial decisions concerning spelling, meaning, pronunciation and usage that vary from Australian English.

Eleanor Curtain Publishing has a large number of colourful beginning readers in the overseas markets of the US, UK, New Zealand, Canada, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Apart from the obvious adaptations of spelling in words such as *organize/organise*, and *color/colour*, US partners have very rigorous adaptation guidelines that must be adhered to. Strict balances of gender, ethnic and racial types, physical disability and use of animals, in the text and illustrations, are all prescribed.

Very specific language and style decisions for other situations were discussed by other presenters. Stefanie Pearce, as Communications Manager for the Australian Synchrotron Project, a major new science facility in Melbourne, described the challenges involved in explaining this complex and unfamiliar concept to multiple local and national audiences, and the strategic decisions involved in media releases and publicity documents.

Jennifer Blunden, from her experience of Sydney's Powerhouse Museum, discussed the framework in which she decides on the style of text used in exhibition notices. She examined the relationship between the language, content and the physical space, as well as the other layers of information provided via guided tours, print catalogues and interactive components.

The other speakers – Nick Renton, Valerie Yule and Nick Walker – provided fresh insights into style guides, dictionary pronunciation guides, and publishing in Nigeria in the 1970s respectively.

Overall, Style Council 2005 was a delightful change of pace from the editors conference and for a word nerd like me, well worth the extra time and effort to get myself to the venue for the fourth day in a row.