

## THE SHINING WORD

When I first settled in the Netherlands, I had to keep in mind whether what I was writing should be in UK English or American English. Nowadays we have a third English to take into account: Euro English, the language of how UK English has evolved in Continental Europe.

Although the first language of many cross-border institutions and companies, English is, of course, a second language for many EU citizens. It makes sense, therefore, that word usage is simplified to enable everyone to follow what is said or written. But slowly a language adapts over time. Take the example of how the British adapted the French language since 1066. Well except a few cliché's, such as, well, cliché. Or perhaps wishing each other an enjoyable meal – Which has always made me wonder if the English didn't enjoy their meals before the French colonised them and taught them to say bon appetit.

The discussion over whether to use 'current' (UK English) or 'actual' (Euro English), or whether to 'enter' (UK English) or 'introduce' (Euro English), seem to have moved into official usage. But there is still a lot that could change. Whilst the UK was a member of the EU it had a strong influence on Euro English. But now that Brexit has removed a chunk of native English speakers from the EU, the gap between UK English and Euro English could widen even more.

Those of us involved in international meetings have regularly heard native French speakers 'demanding' things of people rather than 'requesting' them. As they understandably muddle 'demand' with 'demande', they simultaneously offend anyone who doesn't like to be told what to do. Unless they speak French of course.

Similarly, Dutch will speak to Brits about eating cookies, even though we English, unlike the Americans or Dutch, actually eat biscuits. Will these 'mistakes' in current English become part of Euro English over time?

Most British and American's living in the Netherlands use words such as 'gezellig' when speaking English to each other. This is simply because there just isn't a word that feels quite the same in English. Perhaps one day 'gezellig' will become a common Euro English word? Not a bad thing to feel cosy, social and nice when social distancing is required.

As a child, one of the things that puzzled me was: if American's came from the UK, why do they speak with a funny accent? Of course, it was to be some years before I realised that my island upbringing was a just a touch self-centric, but it's not a totally stupid question.

The same can be said for African English. The first time I was in Kenya I only understood two-thirds of what people were saying. This was not because of the Swahili thrown in, but because of the sing-song way of speaking English. It took me a day or two to adjust and tune in to the different frequency.

It amused me to hear that apparently a recent study done by the World Linguistic Society names Uganda Best English-Speaking Country in Africa. I didn't bother looking up their criteria. But I did wonder if, 400 years after his death, Shakespeare were to hear a recording of different people around the world speaking English, how much he would recognise.

English was only around 100 years old when Shakespeare was writing his plays anyway and look at how it has evolved since. If he was allowed to contribute 1,700 words to the English language, I guess a few Europeans adding words in today should be allowed?

How far Euro English, or perhaps African English or Asian English, will evolve into their own separate languages over the coming years remains to be seen. Will a native English speaker of today actually recognise it in 400 years?

As a writer, I love this challenge. So much meaning can be conveyed with one word, but that word might mean different things to different people. Letting the right word find its way into your writing is like hammering the round peg through the round hole. It just feels ~~w~~rite, sorry, right.

Emily Dickinson once said: *"I know nothing in the world that has as much power as a word. Sometimes I write one, and I look at it until it begins to shine."* At this time of lockdown, it seemed fitting to quote one of America's most famous poets who chose to self-seclude herself – or could we say put herself in voluntary lockdown - from the rest of the world and her community long before the term became part of our daily language.

As I writer I know exactly that feeling of a word shinning. Sometimes in the searching, I wait to feel the word shinning. On other occasions, it doesn't feel quite right, until after pondering upon it for a while I know why that word came up for exactly that spot.

In searching for the location and language that fits a copywriting job I sometimes wait for that moment of shine. Perhaps I'm writing an article for a UK English magazine, or an interview with a Dutch director. Perhaps today it's content for a website for the American market or an e-newsletter for a European wide organisation. It can be in the beauty of interviewing someone and finding that fine line in writing an article that is true to their style whilst being written with your own pen.

Writing is never dull as there as there are always new ways to stretch into some new creativity. To wait for the shine be in UK English, US English or Euro English.

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