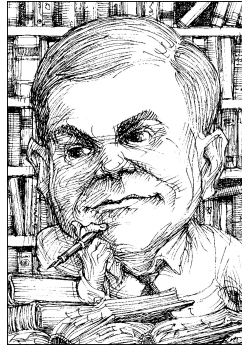


THE YEAR 2014 IN LANGUAGE & WRITING

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Bryan A. Garner[†]

JANUARY

TES News and the *Guardian* (U.K.) reported that a frequently updated software glossary of electronic-slang words and phrases has been developed to help U.K. teachers recognize problems such as bullying, self-harm, eating disorders, sexting, grooming, suicide, and racist and homophobic language. Among the terms defined are initialisms and acronyms such as *dirl* (“die in real life”) and *gnoc* (“get naked on camera”), and the product name Bio-Oil, which people who harm themselves use to reduce the appearance of scars. The software sends an alert to teachers when a student types a term in the glossary. The *Christian Science Monitor* noted

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that a similar type of glossary is used in the U.S. to detect gang activity. • *The Irish Times* reported that the third edition of the venerable *Oxford English Dictionary* is expected to be complete in 2037. Michael Proffitt, the new chief editor, is optimistic about the *Dictionary's* future and ability to adjust to people's increasing reliance on the Internet: "My idea about dictionaries is that, in a way, their time has come," he says. "People need filters much more than they did in the past. As much as I adhere to the *OED's* public reputation, I want proof that it is of value to people in terms of practical use." Recognizing that students increasingly rely on web searches, Proffitt advocates linking terms in digitized literature to *OED* entries. Oxford University Press plans to license *OED* data to other companies so as to reach more users. • *Slate* magazine discussed whether commas are still important in English as more and more people omit them in casual writings such as texts and e-mails. Professor John McWhorter of Columbia University commented that one "could take [the commas out of] a great deal of modern American texts and you would probably suffer so little loss of clarity that there could even be a case made for not using commas at all." Of Oxford commas in particular, he added, "Nobody has any reason for [using a comma after the penultimate item in a series] that is scientifically sensible and logical in the sense that we know how hydrogen and oxygen combine to form water. So these things are just fashions and conventions. They change over time." Despite that, McWhorter doesn't expect commas to disappear from formal writing because people seem to be comfortable with shifting between informal and formal writing styles, and that's "exactly the way it's going to stay." • At its annual meeting in Minneapolis, the American Dialect Society crowned its 2013 Word of the Year: *because*. Not the conjunction *because*. Instead, a new incarnation of the word that is usually followed by one word (noun, verb, adjective, or something else): Because science. Because protest. Because waffles. "We may be talking about a new class of words," said Ben Zimmer, the linguist who presided over the voting. He called this usage of *because* "Internet-inspired grammar." Because computers.

FEBRUARY

The *Oxford English Dictionary* appealed to the public for help identifying modern British English terms that originated in World War I slang. The *OED's* lexicographers believe that soldiers may have used battlefield

slang when writing letters home and that home-front slang may have been similarly recorded, so they're encouraging people to read old letters and other personal papers and report any war-related terms they find. The popular verb *skive* (to avoid work) has been traced to 1919 and is believed to be even older. Some of the terms identified so far are common in both British and American English, such as *camouflage* (1916) and *tank* (1916). The findings so far have been interesting and surprisingly relevant to modern times. In a burst of patriotism, German-style sauerkraut was called "freedom cabbage" (similar to the more recent "freedom fries").

- Researchers at Texas Tech University found that people who use the same kinds of function words, such as personal pronouns, articles, and conjunctions, are more likely to be immediately attracted to one another. Dialogues between heterosexual couples in 40 speed dates were analyzed. The researchers tracked whether couples went on second dates and how many were still together after several months. The study determined that a positive correlation of function-word similarity indicated a higher probability a couple would continue dating. Surprisingly, it also showed that language similarity was a better predictor of relationship stability than any other factor, including how much the couple spoke during the speed date and their perceived personal similarities. One researcher commented, "People . . . aren't very good at predicting ahead of time what they'll find attractive on a date. So in a way, language predicts what people want in a partner better than they do themselves."
- *Cambridge News* reported that the Cambridge city council has lifted its punctuation ban for street signs. Two years ago, the council caused something of an uproar among grammatically minded Britons when it banned the use of apostrophes on street signs. In typical response, local grammar guerrillas took to vigilante editing, using permanent markers to add absent apostrophes to the offending signs. A public debate ensued, campaigners arguing that Cambridge, as a center of learning, should uphold the standards of good English. For its part, the council claimed that it was only following national guidelines warning that punctuation could confuse emergency-services drivers. But now it has reversed the decision. As one councilor explained, "We rue the day we allowed ourselves to be influenced by a bureaucratic guideline which nobody has been able to defend to us now that it has come under the spotlight."
- During the opening ceremony for the winter Olympics in

Sochi, Russia, the announcer boasted of 180 Russian nations — each with its own culture and language. In the North Caucasus region near Sochi, more than 40 languages are spoken. According to John Colarusso, a McMaster University linguist, all the Caucasian languages are highly complex in grammar and syntax, with up to 81 consonants, sounds articulated in different parts of the mouth, and widely varied case systems. But as reported by the *Boston Globe*, many of those languages are endangered. UNESCO's 2010 Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger lists a high number (over 130) of Russia's minority languages in the "vulnerable" category. In fact, Ubykh — the language that gave Sochi its name (Sochi derives from an Ubykh word for "seaside") — is now extinct.

MARCH

The *Daily Telegraph* (U.K.) reported a costly typo. A man who attempted to transfer £25,000 from his account to his daughter's accidentally transposed two numbers of her account. Even though he'd entered her name as well, the bank did not complete the transfer, lost the money, and couldn't fix the error. A bank representative explained that it's up to the customer to ensure that the data is entered correctly to begin with and advised double-checking the input before submitting it. • CNN reported that an American teenager suggested a simple way for the U.S. government to save \$136 million per year: use Garamond typeface exclusively. As part of a school science project, 14-year-old Suvir Mirchandani learned that ink is twice as expensive as the same volume of perfume and explored how to reduce ink usage without changing the words on a printed page. Using five sample pages from documents published by the Government Printing Office and the General Services Administration's estimated annual cost for ink (\$467 million), Mirchandani calculated that a 30% saving could be achieved by using the thinner typeface. The GPO acknowledged the suggestion but was noncommittal about adopting it. Meanwhile, the General Services Administration is focused on teaching government offices how to minimize printing waste by keeping computer settings on default to Times New Roman, Garamond, or Century Gothic. It hopes to save the federal government up to \$30 million per year — only \$100 million less than it might. • Noted typographer Mike Parker, who was instrumental in popularizing Helvetica font, died at the age of 84. In the late 1950s, Parker oversaw Helvetica's development into

a font for Linotype machines, which were widely used for printing. Under Parker's direction, Mergenthaler Linotype Co. built a library of over 1,000 typefaces, which became the standard for printing and publishing. In 1981 Parker cofounded Bitstream, the first company dedicated to producing digital fonts. • Fox News was raked over the social-media coals when it misspelled *spelling bee* while covering — what else? — a spelling bee. During the show *Fox & Friends*, an on-screen caption read “Longest spelling be ever?” Of course, a screenshot appeared on Facebook within seconds, and Twitter erupted with tweets lampooning the gaffe. • A Southern California middle-school teacher, Heather Shotke, created the gramMARCH Challenge after abbreviations and symbols typically used on social media (LOL, OMG, emoticons) started showing up in her students' schoolwork. “I am disappointed and appalled,” Shotke said. “Kids are using ‘text language’ in their academic work, and they think it is acceptable because that is how they are communicating with their friends on social media. It worries me that they cannot differentiate between a formal school assignment and a text to a friend.” Because it takes about 30 days for something to become a habit, Shotke said, “if we can get people to accept the gramMARCH Challenge and write with proper grammar in all communications — including texts, tweets, Kiks, Instagram captions, and Facebook status updates — for the month of March, we may be able to make the shift back to intelligent communication.” • According to the *Daily Mail*, a 15-year-old English schoolboy pointed out a grammatical error — a double comparative — on Tesco's “most tastiest” orange-juice label. Though the 15-year-old said he doesn't hold supermarkets “wholly responsible for teaching young people English grammar,” he opposes their recklessness.

APRIL

Nextions, a leadership-training and business-coaching company in Chicago, published a paper titled *Written in Black and White*, in which it concluded that supervising lawyers are more critical of nonwhite juniors' writing skills than of whites'. It designed a study to test the hypothesis that legal editors implicitly expect a nonwhite writer's work to contain more errors. With the help of partners from five different law firms, Nextions prepared one research memo containing 22 errors and made two sets of copies. In one set, it identified the writer as African American, in

the other as Caucasian. Both were third-year associates and graduates of the same law school. Sixty partners (23 women, 37 men, 21 racial/ethnic minorities, 39 white) from 22 firms agreed to participate in a “writing-analysis study.” Each received a copy of the memo to edit. They were also asked to assess the quality on a 5-point scale, a score of 5 meaning “extremely well written.” The results were dismaying. Partners who received the “Caucasian” writer’s memo corrected on average only 7 of the 22 errors and gave the memo a score of 4.1/5.0. Partners who received the “African American” writer’s memo found an average of 14 errors and gave the memo a 3.2/5.0. The study found no significant correlation between a partner’s race/ethnicity or gender and the number of errors found or the scores assigned. It concluded that the hypothesis was correct: editors see more errors when they expect to see errors. • A Turkish reporter was sentenced to ten months in jail for an inadvertently insulting tweet caused by a typo, according to the *International Business Times*. Önder Aytaç referred to Turkey’s prime minister as “Ustam” (meaning “my chief” or “my master”). But he mistakenly added a “k” at the end, which changed the word to “eff off.” The court ultimately suspended the sentence. • Mispronouncing the name of the legendary Greek hero Achilles cost a college freshman \$1 million, reported the *Indianapolis Star*. The student appeared on the game show *Wheel of Fortune* and had only to read aloud “Mythological hero Achilles” to win the prize. Unfortunately, he said /ay-chill-iss/ not /uh-kill-eez/. Because the game’s rules require correct pronunciation, he lost the million-dollar prize. Similar pronunciation blunders cost him his other two chances to win prizes as well. In an interview, the student said that he knew who Achilles was before the program and how to pronounce all the words but that nerves and adrenaline had overwhelmed him. • Two booksellers in New York City claimed to have found Shakespeare’s annotated personal dictionary. In 2008 George Koppelman and Daniel Wechsler found a 1580 copy of *An Alvearie, or Quadruple Dictionarie*, which scholars have long believed to be the lexicon the poet and playwright consulted. Where did they uncover this treasure? eBay, of course. Believing the copy to be the Bard’s own book, they bought it for \$4,300 — a steal, if the purported provenance is true. In April the pair published *Shakespeare’s Beehive: An Annotated Elizabethan Dictionary Comes to Light* — half reproduction, half discussion — making the case for their theory. Scholars at the Folger Shakespeare Library, however, expressed preliminary skepticism.

MAY

The BBC reported that U.S. armed forces in World War I employed Native Americans as code-talkers. During the Meuse-Argonne Offensive on the Western Front, the Germans successfully tapped the American forces' field-telephone lines and deciphered the military codes. Two American soldiers at the Front were Choctaw. An officer overheard them speaking in their native tongue. They knew of Choctaw soldiers at the troops' headquarters and were immediately employed to contact their colleagues over the tapped phone lines. Even if the calls were intercepted, the Germans had no means of translating them. And since many military terms had no equivalent in Choctaw, substitutes were created: a machine gun was a "little shoot fast" and a battalion was a number of grains of corn. In total, 19 men participated in the Choctaw Telephone Squad, the precursors of the Navajo and Comanche code-talkers of World War II. The BBC noted that on the American home front — strangely enough — Native American children were discouraged from learning or speaking their native languages. • After a dozen rounds in the finals of the 87th Scripps National Spelling Bee — despite such challenging words as *feuilleton* and *stichomythia* — neither of the two finalists had misspelled a word. The judges had no more words to give them. So for only the fourth time in the Bee's history, the finalists were declared co-champions and each was awarded the grand prize. The last time the Spelling Bee ended in a tie was 1962. • The Associated Press reported about how a lawyer in Indiana learned that Facebook is not the best way to communicate with an opposing party. The post to the client's ex-husband read: "You pissed off the wrong attorney. You want to beat up women and then play games with the legal system . . . well then you will get exactly what you deserve. After I get [my client] out of jail I'm going to gather all the relevant evidence and then I'm going to anal rape you so hard your teeth come loose. I tried working with you with respect. Now I'm going to treat you like the pond scum you are. Watch your ass you little [expletive deleted]. I've got you in my sights now." The lawyer admitted writing the post but claimed poetic license: he said that the language was the same as that used by the ex-husband and meant only that the lawyer intended to gather all relevant evidence to defend his client. The lawyer was arrested and charged with felony intimidation. • A study published in the journal *PLoS ONE* found that people consider

others less credible if their names are hard to pronounce. Researchers from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, and Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Canada first asked volunteers to rate real names from 18 countries on their pronounceability. They then used those ratings to create a set of hard-to-pronounce names, such as Yevgeni Dherzhinsky, as well as a set of easier names. The scientists then presented subjects with factual statements attributed to those names. Apparently, the subjects were more likely to believe a statement if the associated name was easy for them to pronounce. Kwantlen Polytechnic seems not to have been among the names tested.

JUNE

John Simpson, who retired as chief editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2013, was named an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for his outstanding services to English Literature. The honor recognizes distinguished service to the arts and sciences, public services outside the Civil Service, and work with charitable and welfare organizations of all kinds. Simpson joined the editorial staff of the *OED* in 1976, was coeditor of the second edition (1989), and served as chief editor of the *OED* from 1993 to 2013. During his tenure as chief editor, the *OED* added at least 60,000 new words, successfully produced a digital edition (available on the Internet), and began releasing quarterly updates to the dictionary online. • *The Times* (London) reported that researchers at the University of the West of Scotland have completed a study showing that job applicants' language skills in casual communication affect their employment opportunities. Employers are increasingly likely to check social-networking sites to help to determine a candidate's suitability. Misspellings, poor grammar, and excessive use of "text speak" create bad impressions that lead to applicants' being weeded out long before the interview stage. One researcher commented, "The main finding from the paper is that the language you use online doesn't really influence what your peers think of you, but it can affect how you are judged by potential employers. So if you make spelling mistakes or use textspeak online, you'll be viewed as less intelligent and employable than if you use correct language." • In response to a Freedom of Information Act request, the FBI released a glossary it's been compiling of "Twitter shorthand," or Internet slang. The document is 83 pages long and contains nearly 3,000

words. It contains the commonplace acronyms we all know — LOL, BTW, and the like — but it also catalogues hundreds of rare and, frankly, improbable coinages. Among those are BTDTGTTSA-WIO (been there, done that, got the T-shirt, and wore it out), PEBKAC (problem exists between keyboard and chair — apparently a favorite among IT professionals), BTWITIAILWY (by the way, I think I am in love with you), and IAWTCSM (I agree with this comment so much), which appears in a whopping 20 tweets. The glossary's introduction suggests that in addition to its professional applications, agents might find it useful for keeping up with their children and grandchildren. ITHO. • As reported in *The Courier-Mail* (Australia), the Australian Government allocated \$1.8 million to add Classical Latin, Classical Greek, Hindi, Turkish, and Auslan (Australian Sign Language) to the list of second-language choices for students. A spokesman for Education Minister Christopher Pyne said: "The Government is working towards 40% of Year 12 students studying a second language in a decade. The more language options available for schools, the more likely students will be attracted to language study." Not everyone agreed with the decision to include Latin. Cynthia Dodd, president of Modern Language Teachers' Association of Queensland, said she preferred that the students first learn a "living language." But Latin advocates pointed to a finding that studying Latin correlates with higher academic performance in English, math, and science.

JULY

According to the *New York Times*, a scholar argued that the official transcript of the Declaration of Independence produced by the National Archives and Records Administration contains a significant error. A period that appears right after the phrase "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" in the transcript shouldn't be there. Danielle Allen, a professor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, N.J., maintains there is no period on the badly faded parchment original, just an errant spot of ink. "The logic of the sentence moves from the value of individual rights to the importance of government as a tool for protecting those rights," Ms. Allen said. "You lose that connection when the period gets added." Her argument is supported by other scholars, and some manuscript experts say there are existing high-resolution images of the document that show little evidence of a period. • If at first you don't succeed, don't try harder

to learn a language, say scientists at MIT. As reported in *Science Daily*, the researchers discovered that the harder adults tried to learn a new language, the worse they were at deciphering the language's morphology — the structure and deployment of linguistic units such as root words, suffixes, and prefixes. Part of the reason may be that adults simply have too much brainpower: they have a much more highly developed prefrontal cortex than children, and they tend to throw all of that brainpower at learning a second language. This high-powered processing may actually interfere with certain elements of learning language. Researchers plan to study whether "turning off" the adult prefrontal cortex could help adults overcome this obstacle.

- Actor Kelsey Grammer, best known for playing the inveterately pretentious Dr. Frasier Crane on *Cheers* and *Frasier*, lived up to his name when he joined Twitter — and the ranks of language snoots. His sole purpose: to root out ungrammatical tweets. Using the hashtag #KelseyGrammerGrammar, he tweeted, "It has come to my attention that the fine people of @Twitter have an egregious grammar problem. I'm here to help." He rendered this public service by correcting wayward spelling, punctuation, and grammar in tweets — mostly ones about him. Frasier would be (insufferably) proud.
- *The Guardian* (U.K.) reported that English Grammar Day was held on July 4, 2014, in association with University College (London), Oxford University, and the British Library. Many eminent linguists, including David Crystal and Dick Hudson, came together to discuss the history, prevalence, and importance of grammar. But the symposium's main focus was on how grammar is taught in schools today and the common problems that arise. Lindsey Thomas, a consultant at Buckinghamshire Learning Trust, suggested that teachers replace the word *grammar* with *understanding language*. She posited that *grammar* may conjure off-putting, old-fashioned classroom images because of its associations of "right" or "wrong." She suggested that *understanding* or *knowledge about language* makes the subject sound more positive.

AUGUST

The New Jersey Supreme Court ordered a new trial for a man convicted of attempted murder because the prosecution used as evidence 13 pages of violent rap lyrics that the defendant had composed five years earlier. The lyrics often mentioned a character who shared the defendant's nick-

name. Prosecutors argued that the lyrics reflected the code of the streets that the defendant lived by. In its unanimous opinion, the Court wrote: "One would not presume that Bob Marley, who wrote the well-known song 'I Shot the Sheriff,' actually shot a sheriff, or that Edgar Allan Poe buried a man beneath his floorboards, as depicted in his short story 'The Tell-Tale Heart,' simply because of their respective artistic endeavors on those subjects. Defendant's lyrics should receive no different treatment."

• Musician "Weird Al" Yankovic released a song and video titled "Word Crimes," a parody of the widespread neglect of proper grammar, usage, pronunciation, and spelling. The lampooned gaffes included using *literally* to describe nonliteral situations, using *less* for *fewer*, using "to who" instead of "to whom," mispronouncing *espresso* (with an *x*), confusing *it's* and *its*, and omitting the serial comma. Yankovic deliberately added a split infinitive in the lyrics to see whether listeners would notice. • A bank robber in Colorado earned himself an unusually laudatory sobriquet. The suspect, believed to be responsible for several robberies in the state, set himself apart from the typical bank robber with the carefully typed and letter-perfect demand letters he presented to tellers. This earned him the title "Good-Grammar Bandit." An FBI spokesman explained that the letters were "well-spelled, -punctuated, and -laid-out. Normally we get poor scribble-scratch on the back of a deposit slip." • The *New York Times* posted Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee's short documentary (an Op-Doc) about the last fluent speaker of the Wukchumni language, Marie Wilcox, and her dictionary written to preserve the language. The Wukchumni tribe is not recognized by the U.S. government — it's part of the broader Yokuts tribe native to central California. Only about 200 members of the Wukchumni tribe remain today. With the support of Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival, Ms. Wilcox has spent seven years writing the dictionary — the longest work of its kind — and has also recorded a spoken version. The dictionary is intended to preserve for posterity the pronunciations and intricate accents of the language.

SEPTEMBER

The *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* published a report by scientists at Northwestern University about the relationship between children's ability to follow rhythms and their language- and reading-

related skills. The scientists found that children who could match a drumbeat could more easily name objects and colors, had superior short-term auditory memory, and were better at discriminating among rhythms and melodies than children who could not follow a beat. The scientists noted that rhythm is a key factor in communication because it helps to identify syllables and words, and provides cues for meaning. They concluded that an inability to process rhythm properly, as well as speech and sound, may be associated with reading problems.

- Can you copyright words used for a game? Hasbro Corp. is trying to copyright the list of words approved for playing *Scrabble*, says *Slate* magazine. Player-compiled lists, drawn from general dictionaries and the *Official Scrabble Players Dictionary (OPSD)*, have circulated in hard-copy and digital form for decades. Hasbro now claims it has a copyrightable interest in those lists. But that claim is arguable. Hasbro's rules for terms permitted in Scrabble are straightforward: words must be between 2 and 15 letters long; no proper names; no hyphens, apostrophes, or abbreviations; no words considered foreign. "You can have a million interns working at a million typewriters to derive all these words and go through every page of every dictionary," said an intellectual-property lawyer. "If all they've done is say this one meets the Scrabble rules and this one doesn't, they probably haven't done enough to deserve a copyright."
- The Canadian media lambasted the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority after a local mother posted on Facebook a letter from the Authority riddled with spelling errors. The ten errors were all to basic words, including "studint" (student), "shets" (sheets), and "chiled" (child). (The complex medical terms were all correct.) The mother, Belinda Bigold, told reporters, "This was authorization to put drugs in my child's body; that's where it struck a nerve. Are you going to trust your child's health to someone who sends out a half-illiterate letter?"
- In an interview with David Berreby of BigThink, the philosopher Evan Selinger said he was "horrified" by Apple's predictive-text feature in the upcoming iOS 8. As Apple's website explained: "As you type, you'll see choices of words or phrases you'd probably type next, based on your past conversations and writing style. The feature takes into account the casual style you might use in Messages and the more formal language you probably use in Mail. It also adjusts based on the person you're communicating with, because your choice of words is likely more laid back with your spouse than with your boss." Mr. Selinger lamented:

"The more we don't autonomously struggle with language, grapple to find the right word, muscle through to bend language poetically, the less we're able to really treat conversation as an intentional act." • *The New Republic* reported that humans may become less self-centered with age. Older Facebook users' posts are less about "me, me, me," and more about "we, we, we." The University of Pennsylvania's World Well-Being Project analyzed 75,000 Facebook users' language and noted that the older the user, the fewer the first-person singular pronouns (*I, me, my, mine*). • The *National Journal* reported that while the referendum on Scottish secession posed lots of complicated questions, the ballot language did not. At 13 words (including the voting instructions), it was a model of simplicity, asking "Should Scotland be an independent country?" Marina Koren, reporting on the election, compared that to Crimea's secession ballot in March, a complicated page in two parts and three languages. It was also ambiguous, asking whether to reinstate the Crimean constitution but not specifying which of two constitutions would apply. Still, the Crimean proposal won almost 97% of the vote, while Scotland's garnered less than 45%.

OCTOBER

Researchers at Coventry University published in the journal *Reading and Writing* a study titled "do i know its wrong: children's and adults' use of unconventional grammar in text messaging." Many educators have expressed concern that the grammatical errors made by students in their text messages are related to poorer performance on tests of grammatical knowledge, including translating grammatically unconventional text messages into standard English. The study concluded that elementary-school children and college students who make grammar and spelling errors when texting are more likely to make similar errors in formal writing. But secondary-school children do not show the same consistency: many who make numerous errors when texting do not make errors in other writings. • After 13 years of updating, the Royal Spanish Academy unveiled the 23rd edition of its dictionary, the nation's oldest and most authoritative. Unfortunately, not all the changes were for the better. Though the Academy removed a previous definition glossing the adjective *gitano* (gypsy) as "defrauding or operating with deception," it replaced it with a new sense equating the word with *trapacero*, meaning

“dishonest or swindling.” Spain’s Roma population, which has lobbied for years to remove the original offending definition, celebrated last year when the Academy promised to revise it. But they were outraged with the result. The Association of Feminist Gypsies for Diversity called for Spaniards to take to social media to protest the definition. The Academy’s director responded that in lexicography, accuracy and linguistic reality trump political correctness. • In an interview with the *Boston Globe*, Dan Jurafsky — a Stanford University linguistics and computer-science professor — discussed his book *The Language of Food: A Linguist Reads the Menu*. The author conducted a study with Carnegie Mellon researchers, looking at the language in fast-food menus, ancient recipes from Sumer, and even potato-chip packaging. What did he find? “There are certain positive adjectives — *fresh, rich, mild, crisp, tender, golden brown* — that we found only on the menus of middle-priced and cheaper restaurants. Expensive restaurants want you to assume it’s crisp. Cheaper restaurants have to convince you it’s crisp.” Not surprisingly, he also found that expensive restaurants use longer words on average on its their menus: “They’re using these long, complicated, and rare words as a sign that they’re a fancy restaurant and have an educated staff and educated customers.”

NOVEMBER

The BBC is apparently no longer a bastion of correct English. Thousands of viewers and listeners have complained that the BBC’s once-high standards of grammar and pronunciation have slipped. The newsroom’s style editor conceded that presenters and reporters repeatedly make basic errors, such as confusing the word *historic* with *historical*. The Queen’s English Society in particular criticized the network for allowing presenters to say “haitch” instead of “aitch” when referring to the letter *H*. The BBC responded that it was proud of the diversity of voices across its programs. • Boston’s Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) found itself in a Twitter war over a point of usage, reported the *Boston Daily*. When an accident made it necessary to close a station, the MBTA tweeted: “Orange Line Svc is suspended at DTX Due To medical emergency.” It then directed riders to an alternate route. One person responded: “BECAUSE OF a medical emergency NOT due to one! The use of ‘due to’ requires a fiduciary (that means \$\$) responsibility.” This ignited an escalating debate on the proper English usage of *due to*, includ-

ing citations to *Garner's Modern American Usage*. No reportage on how much tardiness in reopening the station was due to linguistic paralysis. • The *ABA Journal* reported that an escapee remained free for 33 years because of a spelling error. The escapee's surname, Marcheterre, was misspelled "Maschererre" on the arrest warrant. Although Marcheterre was arrested repeatedly and even sent to jail several times after his escape, the misspelling on the outstanding arrest warrant prevented it from being associated with Marcheterre's FBI number and criminal records. • Scientists at Carnegie Mellon University used Harry Potter to identify the brain regions people use when processing language. The researchers used an fMRI machine to scan the brains of people reading a chapter of the first Harry Potter book. By analyzing those scans, they were able to pinpoint the specific parts of the brain responsible for various tasks involved in reading, such as parsing sentences, determining word meanings, and understanding the relationships between characters. The computational model the scientists then built from this data was able to determine which of two passages a person was reading with 74% accuracy. The scientists believe that future improvements on this model will provide valuable insight into disorders such as dyslexia, aphasia, and the special difficulties that students encounter when learning a foreign language. • *The Guardian* (U.K.) reported that China's print and broadcast administration banned wordplay because the misuse of idioms risked "cultural and linguistic chaos." Issued by the State Administration for Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television, the order stated: "Radio and television authorities at all levels must tighten up their regulations and crack down on the irregular and inaccurate use of the Chinese language, especially the misuse of idioms." David Moser, academic director for CET Chinese studies at Beijing Capital Normal University, responded that the ban was ridiculous because wordplay "is so much a part and parcel of Chinese heritage." He noted that when couples marry, some people will give them dates and peanuts, which refers to the wish *Zao-sheng guizi*, or "May you soon give birth to a son." The word for *dates* is also *zao*, and for *peanuts* it's *huasheng*.

DECEMBER

Lexicographic departments at publishing houses announced their words of the year: at Oxford, it was *vape* (= to inhale vapor from an e-cigarette);

at Merriam-Webster, it was *culture*. • In the *Boston Globe*, columnist Britt Peterson commemorated the centennial of several words and phrases that entered the language in 1914: *blurb*, *legalese*, *multiple-choice*, *backpack*, *big screen*, *crossword*, *posh*, *stash*, and *sociopath*. • Several egregious errors in a sign posted in front of a Paterson, N.J. elementary school apparently cost the principal her job, according to CBS News. *December* was spelled “Dicember,” *reports* was spelled “reepor,” and the numeral *1* was backwards. The sign was up for a week before a parent posted a photo of it on Facebook, where it was seen by a member of the city’s school board. The school district didn’t confirm that the misspellings were the reason for the principal’s removal. • The online-edition *Telegraph* reported that mass-marketer Amazon had cold-heartedly pulled an e-book from its Kindle Store for overhyphenation. Graemen Rey-nold’s *High Moor 2: Moonstruck* had been on sale for almost two years and had received more than 100 favorable reader reviews. Reynolds, who had paid a professional copyeditor to work on the book before it was published, objected. But Amazon replied that the book would be removed permanently if he did not remove the hyphens. Reynolds reported the incident on his blog. After that post got 180,000 hits, Amazon relented. No definitive word on whether the hyphens were ill-considered or well-founded.



THE MOST MORTIFYING SOLECISMS IN 2014 LAW REVIEWS

1. “We then use this framework to diagram the flow of information and requests for information through the legal procedures under study, dropping in the substance of an issue (such as climate change) and mapping out the *apparati* [read *apparatuses* or, if you’re a Latinist, *apparatus* (the Latin plural)] for interdisciplinary communication as it is.” Deborah M. Hussey Freeland, *Law & Science: Toward a Unified Field*, 47 Conn. L. Rev. 529, 570 (2014). (Extra points for pervasive abstractitis and bafflegab, and further extra points for dropping in the substance of an issue.)
2. “The Capatos, however, conceived naturally and had a son *whom* [read *who*] they hoped would one day have a sibling.” Jessica Knouse,

- Liberty, Equality, and Parentage in the Era of Posthumous Conception*, 27 J.L. & Health 9, 12–13 (2014). (*Who* should be the subject of *would have*; the phrase *they hoped*, could be omitted from the sentence altogether.)
3. “Ms. Jones had standing to argue that visitation between *she* [read *her*] and the child would be in the child’s best interests in a second hearing.” Kendra Huard Fershee, *The Prima Facie Parent*, 48 Fam. L.Q. 435, 459 (2014). (Extra points for the misplaced modifier: would it also have been in the child’s best interests in a third hearing?)
 4. “It is implied that the allocation of tax responsibility should, therefore, come with an isolation of liability to *whomever* [read *whoever*] was allocated the task.” Stephanie Hunter McMahon, *What Innocent Spouse Relief Says About Wives and the Rest of Us*, 37 Harv. J.L. Gender 141, 166 (2014). (Extra points for not hyphenating *innocent-spouse relief* in the countless times the phrase appears — and further extra points for the superfluous commas around *therefore* because they impart the wrong emphasis.)
 5. “It appears that neither Singson nor Tjan *were* [read *was*] seeking compensation for the sex in question.” Anna K. Christensen, *Equality with Exceptions?*, 102 Cal. L. Rev. 1337, 1353 n.122 (2014).
 6. “Nonetheless, the duty still appears in case law, although *seldomly* [read *seldom*].” Salar Ghahramani, *Fiduciary Duty and the Ex Officio Conundrum in Corporate Governance*, 10 Hastings Bus. L.J. 1, 17 (2014).
 7. “The enumeration of constitutional rights *are* [read *is*] intended to guide state policy and/or express ideals.” Courtney Jung, Ran Hirschl & Evan Rosevear, *Economic and Social Rights in National Constitutions*, 62 Am. J. Comp. L. 1043, 1049 (2014). (Extra points for the *and/or*, which not only is inherently poor but also suggests that state policy and aspirational ideals might otherwise be mutually exclusively exclusive.)
 8. “Each of these amendments *were* [read *was*] assigned codes [read *a code?*] for the various permutations that were common” Ranjini Govender Dowley & Noah Kaplan, *Evaluating Evaluation*, 43 J.L. & Educ. 485, 487 (2014). [Another possible revision: *These amendments were assigned codes for the various permutations*]
 9. “Professor Sepinuck suggests one reason is *because* [read *that*] ‘careful transactional lawyers seek comfort in the safety blanket of redundancy.’” Michael Korybut, *The Uncertain Scope of Revised Article 9’s*

Statutory Prohibition of Exculpatory Breach of Peace Clauses, 10 Hastings Bus. L.J. 271, 307 n.147 (2014). (Extra points for irony and further extra points for not hyphenating *breach-of-peace clause*.)

10. "The probability of being caught for file sharing may, for better or for worse, be perceived as so low by many people that they will continue to *flaunt* [read *flout*] the law." Irina D. Manta, *The High Cost of Low Sanctions*, 66 Fla. L. Rev. 157, 188 (2014). (Extra points for not hyphenating *file-sharing*.)
11. "[W]hile in recent years champerty and maintenance have *laid* [read *lain*] dormant that does not mean that they are no longer valid defenses to a breach of contract claim." James M. Fischer, *Litigation Financing*, 27 Geo. J. Legal Ethics 191, 195 n.23 (2014). (Extra points for the lack of a comma after *dormant* and further extra points for not hyphenating *breach-of-contract claim*.)
12. "But after *Katzenbach's* succinct dismissal, the equal footing doctrine *laid* [read *lay*] dormant in the realm of preclearance litigation." Austin Graham, *Unstable Footing*, 23 Wm. & Mary Bill Rts. J. 301, 325 (2014). (Extra points for not hyphenating *equal-footing doctrine*.)



A wish for these solecisms in 2015:

May they lie dormant.
Would that they had lain dormant for years.