

# AMONG THE NEW WORDS

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With the assistance of the New Words Committee

THE YEAR 1991 MARKS THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY of "Among the New Words." Consequently, this installment is devoted to a retrospective glance at the origin and history of the column. It includes reminiscences of three persons closely connected with the column from its early days: Dwight L. Bolinger, James B. McMillan, and Anne B. Russell.

If H. L. Mencken was the Pa of *American Speech*, Dwight L. Bolinger was the Pa of "Among the New Words" as its first editor. Born in Topeka in 1907, Bolinger took his bachelor's at Washburn College there in 1930, his master's at the University of Kansas in 1932, and his doctorate at the University of Wisconsin in 1936. After teaching at Washburn for seven years (1937-44), during which time he started "Among the New Words," Bolinger taught at the University of Southern California (1944-60), the University of Colorado at Boulder (1960-63), and Harvard (1963-73).

Dwight Bolinger has always been known for the perceptiveness and originality of his work. A teacher of Spanish, he has made major contributions to the study of American English and general linguistics, especially intonation. His books include *Interrogative Structures of American English* (1957), *Generality, Gradience, and the All-or-None* (1961), *Forms of English* (1965), *Aspects of Language* (1968, 1975, 1981), *The Phrasal Verb in English* (1971), *Degree Words* (1972), *That's That* (1973), *Meaning and Form* (1977), *Language, the Loaded Weapon* (1980), *Intonation and Its Parts* (1986), and *Intonation and Its Uses* (1989).

"Among the New Words" was one of Bolinger's earliest publications and is typical of much of his work, in that it examines general linguistic principles by observing the fluctuations of current use, and it focuses on lexis, rather than any of the more fashionable aspects of language, such as phonology. In his reminiscences below, Bolinger tells how he started the column under a different name ("The Living Language") in a different periodical (*Words: A Periodical Devoted to the Study of the Origin, History, and Etymology of English Words*, varying slightly in the subtitle over the seven years it was published). Twenty-six installments of the column appeared in that guise, from September 1937 until October 1940, and included more than 560 neologisms.

After the column moved to *American Speech* in 1941, its name was changed to "Among the New Words." Dwight Bolinger continued as editor until 1944, when I. Willis Russell succeeded him and edited the column for 42

years. Russell nurtured the column and kept it thriving for most of its existence; he was its foster Pa, rearing it with strict discipline but loving care in Cottdale, Alabama. We owe the origin of "Among the New Words" to Dwight Bolinger, and its continuity to Willis Russell.

Isaac Willis Russell was born on 10 May 1903. He took his bachelor's, master's, and doctor's degrees at Johns Hopkins, completing the last in 1931. In 1929 he had married Anne Bray Boyd, and they had a daughter, Jane. Anne Russell was to assist her husband in many aspects of editing "Among the New Words," as only a wife can; her recollections of the preparation of the column are printed below.

All of Willis's teaching career was spent in the South, in the early years at Birmingham and Rome, Georgia, but after 1935 at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. There he was fortunate to work with James B. McMillan, one of the leading scholars of American English, who held several administrative positions, including head of the English Department and director of The University of Alabama Press. McMillan's recollections of Russell and the preparation of "Among the New Words" are below.

Russell's formal association with *American Speech* began in 1934, with an article on "The 'All . . . Not' Idiom." In 1941 he became a member of the journal's advisory board. He filled various roles in the American Dialect Society, including Secretary-Treasurer (1956-66) and President (1973). In addition to his work for the ADS and AS, Russell served as a contributor or advisor for several word books, including the *Britannica Book of the Year*, the annual supplement of the *World Book Encyclopedia*, the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, the *Barnhart Dictionary of New English*, and the *World Book Dictionary*.

Russell had the help of others for short periods during his editorship of "Among the New Words"; thus Woodrow W. Boyette was also named on the masthead in 1957-59. In 1971, Mary Gray Porter joined Russell as an associate, and by 1985 she was doing so much of the work that her name appeared first on the masthead. Her extensive file of citations is still a major resource for preparing the column.

After Russell's death in 1985, John Algeo prepared several columns from England, first published in 1987. Adele S. Algeo, his wife, assisted from the beginning, but soon her role in preparing material became so extensive that from 1988 it was obviously appropriate for her name to appear as coeditor.

A few statistics about "Among the New Words" may be of interest. During its fifty-year history in *American Speech*, it has had four primary editors: Bolinger, Russell, Porter, and Algeo. Some 222 persons have been acknowledged as contributing citations or other help to the column; among the most frequent have been Walter S. Avis, Clarence L. Barnhart, Dwight L.

Bolinger, Thomas L. Crowell, O. B. Emerson, William W. Evans, James B. McMillan, Michael B. Montgomery, Porter G. Perrin, Richard E. Ray, and Anne B. Russell. The queen and kings of the contributors, however, were Mamie J. Meredith, Peter Tamony, and Atcheson L. Hench, who were represented in, respectively, 66, 50, and 47 installments.

The column has appeared in 113 installments, including information on some 3,940 words or expressions. We have now completed a citation-form index to all fifty years of the column, running from *AA* to *zippered*, which we hope will soon be available for general use. In the meanwhile, anyone who wants to know whether a form has appeared in "Among the New Words" is invited to write the editors, who will be happy to provide references.

One notable feature of the column is its fidelity to the purposes first envisioned for it by Dwight Bolinger. There have inevitably been some changes, but for the most part we are still trying to do what he set forth as the aims of the column in his introductory statement to the first installment of "The Living Language" in *Words* (3.6 [1937]: 133):

The language of an era is, by and large, a record of the problems which that era had to face; new ideas crop up, inventions are made, styles set in, and each of them calls for some new word or some new turn of phrase for its expression. Often the styles and the ideas are transitory, so that they leave no mark upon the dictionary; and even those which are fortunate enough to make their way into that solemn repository are usually not recorded in such a way as to show just how they came into being, what was their original context, what suggestive power they may have had aside from their literal meaning, or any other of many facts of interest to linguist, historian, or psychologist.

This department of *Words* has been conceived, therefore, with the idea of supplying this lack, albeit in a small way. It will endeavor to set down, from month to month, the new words and new idioms as they appear, warm from the presses; to fix, as closely as possible, the date of their coinage; and to define them, giving examples. In order to accomplish this the editors request the cooperation of all the readers of *Words*; the *Living Language* is to be a partnership of editor and readers, as with the bulk of modern prose it would be impossible for a single reader to assimilate even a small fraction of the amount that will have to be consumed in order to make the department a thorough and successful enterprise.

The words contained in this first number of *Living Language* will show roughly the sort of plan to be followed. If in your reading you encounter a word or phrase used in an unfamiliar way, if you observe that some expression has caught the public fancy and is being quoted wholesale, or if you discover any other verbal thing which you feel would be of value in the department, it is our earnest request that you call the editor's attention to it, giving as full an account as possible. Individual credit will be given for all such contributions to *Living Language*.

We will be grateful, too, for any comment you may wish to make about material which has already appeared in the department. In particular your help in determining the date of coinage will be appreciated. Except in very unusual circumstances no word or expression more than from eight to ten years old will be included; but

where it can be done, the editor would like to set down, within a margin of a year or two, just when the expression appeared. Where this cannot be done, the date will be left blank, to be filled in later by any of our readers who may have the necessary information.

Our purpose, like Bolinger's, is to record new words as an index of the life of the times. Therefore we do not limit ourselves to words that seem likely to be long-lasting additions to the English vocabulary but deal also in ephemera and even stunt words. However, we try to give enough information about new words to show something of their origin, relationship to the social context, and suggestive power.

In several minor respects we differ from Bolinger's original program. He tried to identify as closely as possible the date of origin of new words, and Russell continued that practice. Although we always give the earliest citation we have for a word, are happy when we think we have spotted a first use, and are grateful to be told of antedatings, we do not make an extraordinary effort to establish the first date of use. The *OED* has been computerized and several other dictionaries now cite the date of earliest documented use of word-shapes, if not of senses. It seems best to leave the search for earliest dates to those dictionaries, because their resources for dating words are greater than ours.

Also, Bolinger aimed at recording words that were new in an absolute sense (within the limits of a decade). There are, however, many uncertainties in deciding what is new, so we follow Russell in adopting a relatively objective decision procedure: A NEW WORD IS A FORM, SENSE, OR USE THAT IS NOT RECORDED IN ANY OF A LIST OF GENERAL DICTIONARIES. Only rarely for special reasons do we knowingly violate that principle.

Something of the scope of the last fifty years of "Among the New Words" can be seen by comparing its entries in the alphabetical range *A-Baz* with those in volume 1 of the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, covering that same range. ANW has listed some 280 neologisms from *AA* to *bazooka*; of those, 178, or nearly two-thirds, do not appear in the *OED*'s second edition. The reasons for that large percentage are several.

"Among the New Words" includes ephemeral words that illustrate a pattern of word formation and are signs of the times, but that would not be expected in any dictionary, for example, *-gate* forms such as *Abdulgate*, *Altergate*, and *Batgate*. For similar reasons—the exemplification of lexical patterns and social changes—"Among the New Words" has included some nonce and stunt words, for example, *againstism* 'an attitude that is predominantly negative', *air-mailer* 'one who throws garbage out of a window', *A-question* 'a question about whether one has committed adultery', and *bananologist* 'one who practices the art of going bananas'. There is no expectation that such

words will become institutionalized in the language—although predictions about what words will or will not be widely adopted are often based on a very cloudy crystal ball.

The column has also listed lexical combinations that are freely formed and so are on the borderline between syntax and lexis, of interest as illustrations of lexical patterning rather than for their own sake. For example, the formative *-happy* (of which the prototype was *slaphappy*) generated a spate of forms in the 1940s, including *auto-happy* 'excessively interested in cars', *bar-happy* 'eager for promotion in the army', and *battle-happy* 'disoriented from having been in battle'. The vogue for *-happy* in the 1940s was parallel to that of *-holic* more recently, and the forms are partly overlapping in sense.

Similarly, the prefix *anti-* can be freely combined with a wide variety of words—too many for any dictionary to list. ANW has included *anti-anti-communist*, *anti-fluoridationist*, *anti-gas guzzler*, *anti-marijuana*, *anti-Nounspeaker*, *anti-pot*, *anti-Reagan*, *anti-Ronald Reagan*, *anti-supply-sider*, *anti-Titoist*, and *anti-woggism*, not for the intrinsic importance of those words, but as illustrations of the life of their times. The *OED* also includes some nonce words of this type, for example, *anti-contagious-diseasist*. However, the number of such potential formations is infinite (an *anti-anti-communist* might be opposed by an *anti-anti-anti-communist*), so in principle no dictionary can list all of them.

Some of ANW's words may not have made their way into the *OED* simply because they are still too new. *Backlighting* 'internal illumination for LCD displays on laptop computers' and *ballistic* 'highly excited, angry, emotionally explosive' are recent forms from ANW that are candidates for future dictionary recording. *Baby-boom* and *baby-boomer* made it into the second edition of the *OED*, but their more recent antonyms, *baby bust* and *baby buster*, did not.

Deciding what words to enter and what to omit is a judgment call for any lexicographer, and judgments will differ. Among the ANW words not in the second edition of the *OED* (1989), but entered in the second unabridged edition of *Random House Dictionary* (1987), are the following (the date is that of the year of *American Speech* in which the word was listed, not the earliest attestation of the word):

- 1955 *A-B-C* '(of warfare) atomic, biological (bacterial, bacteriological), chemical'
- 1945 *activate* 'to call (a military unit) into active service'
- 1961 *active* '(of an artificial satellite) capable of sending signals'
- 1969 *aerobat* 'a stunt flier'
- 1949 *aerobee* 'a kind of rocket'
- 1953 *aeropause* 'the boundary of the upper atmosphere above which conventional aircraft cannot operate'

- 1950 *airboat* 'a small boat with an airplane motor for use in shallow water'  
 1944 *Alcan* 'the Alaska Highway'  
 1985 *altered state (of consciousness)* 'consciousness affected by drug use, near-death experience, meditation, etc.'  
 1942 *America Firster* 'a member of the America First Committee'  
 1946 *Amvet* 'a member of the American Veterans of World War II'  
 1942 *anchor* 'a key position in a military operation'  
 1954 *appostat* 'an appetite-regulating function of the brain'  
 1959 *asphalt jungle* 'a large, crowded, and dangerous city'  
 1954 *atomic cocktail* 'a radioactive liquid medicine'  
 1969 *audible* '(in football) a call from the scrimmage line changing the play called in the huddle'  
 1960 *auding* 'listening with retentive understanding'  
 1982 *audit* 'a survey of a building (as for energy use) to determine its condition and needs; to make such a survey'  
 1952 *avgas* 'aviation gasoline'  
 1981 *back-to-basics* 'pertaining to education with emphasis on verbal and mathematical skills, traditional information, and assessment of competency'  
 1954 *bake-off* 'a baking contest'  
 1972 *barhop* 'to frequent many bars in an evening'  
 1969 *bariatrics* 'the study of obesity'  
 1942 *battlewagon* 'a battleship'

To be sure, it is dangerous to say what is not in the *OED*. Some of the forms asserted above to be missing from it may in fact be included in it. The style of arranging forms in that great dictionary is so Byzantinely labyrinthine that it is extremely difficult to be confident that one has not overlooked a form somewhere in the bowels of its entries. The problem with the *OED* is not just that it includes so many forms and so much information about them— although that is certainly a factor. The real problem is that James A. H. Murray (peace be upon him) decided to eschew a strict adherence to the arbitrary but elegantly simple order of the alphabet in favor of a complex, mixed semantic, formal, and functional grouping of expressions and senses.

Thus, to find a form beginning with *anti-*, the searcher must examine the main alphabetical sequence of well over 400 primary entries, and if the sought form is not there, then turn to the entry for the prefix, which includes more than 30 groupings of forms organized into an outline structure running to five levels. For example, *anti-corrosive* is under B.II.3.c.(2). Such entries in the *OED* are not listings of words, but a very Scottish effort to categorize and order the universe. The entries must have been intellectually satisfying, because challenging, to construct. But they are hell to use. Working with "Among the New Words" leads one to an enormous respect for, and exasperation with, the *OED*, accompanied by an increased fondness for straight alphabetical order.

As it was when Bolinger started it, this column remains a cooperative venture between the editors and enthusiastic contributors who send in the citations without which we cannot prepare installments. Anyone who would like to join this band of helpers is cordially invited to do so. For words suspected of being new, we need citations (preferably full-page tearsheets or photocopies of the relevant parts of printed sources, or accurately recorded instances of oral use) with full bibliographical data. Anyone who sends us such citations is accounted a member of the New Words Committee and will receive irregular newsletters and be acknowledged at year's end.

Although we can use in current printed installments of "Among the New Words" only a fraction of the citations we receive, all citations are stored for future use. Our extensive older back files, collected mainly by Mary Gray Porter and I. Willis Russell but with citations from many others, are valuable resources, frequently supplying earlier examples of now-popular new words. So all the citations sent to us by presently active members of the New Words Committee, in addition to providing evidence for current installments of "Among the New Words," will be a resource for others hereafter. We cordially invite anyone interested in the subject to join our jolly band of word-watchers and assure the continuation of the column into the future.

Now, however, a few words about the past fifty years from three who know them best.

#### I. AMONG THE NEW WORDS: LOOKING BACK (BY DWIGHT BOLINGER)

"Among the New Words," the department that continues to appear in *American Speech*, was born in 1937, under a different name and to a different mother. It first appeared as "The Living Language" in the little magazine *Words* published by I. Omar Colodny in Los Angeles from 1934 to 1941. Colodny taught English at Los Angeles City College—after making and losing a fortune in Los Angeles real estate—and had a local radio spot in which he discussed meanings, usage, and etymologies. Except for a 1934 heavily edited piece which I never really felt belonged to me, *Words* was my first outlet for publication, and Colodny's openness was a step up for me as well as several other word buffs, including Peter Tamony, who has finally been recognized for his contributions to the study of current English (see Marjorie W. McLain's *Peter Tamony, Word Man of San Francisco's Mission* [Folsom, CA: Wellman, 1986]).

The idea for a regularly updated series on new words came from the frustration I felt with the dried-as-dust historical bias of the only linguistics with which I was familiar, the legacy of the neogrammarians that still lingered in the graduate school. If people wanted to know what makes

language tick, why should they work with data whose context was all but forgotten, and by asking questions—mostly about the evolution of sounds—whose relationship to any context was seen as secondary to the long-range mechanical forces that produced linguistic change? If the nature of language was the same at all times and everywhere, surely one could learn more about its developments by watching them happen than by waiting for some future stopping place that never really arrives.

The announcement of that original issue of September 1937 (reproduced above) expressed no less than a yearning—with its appeal to historians and psychologists as well as linguists—for a socially relevant approach to language. Naturally, a column on words and their meanings could do little more than nip the heels of such an approach, but it still seemed a practical undertaking because words were where one could most easily get one's bearings. There was already a canon—the dictionary, with its successive editions and additions and deletions—that offered some measure of what was truly new. Resources for looking at other developments—in syntax, prosody, age-grading, style, and all the vast topical flowering of recent decades in linguistics—were mostly lacking, and the new feature had to content itself with being a sort of dictionary companion.

"The Living Language" lasted till 1940, when the greener pasture of *American Speech* beckoned (remember the shade of those covers all the way up to 1970, when they turned blue). W. Cabell Greet added a P.S. to a letter in April 1940: "We envy *Words* your regular reports on the living language." In November of that year I proposed transferring the column to *American Speech* and the editors approved. The obvious title "Neologisms" was suggested, but I preferred something a little jazzier and came up with "Among the New Words." That was the heading we adopted in January 1941.

The early stages had their bad moments. I had taken a year's leave from my job in Kansas to exchange places with a teacher in Costa Rica. Library resources were limited there, and so was my time. And for my citations I had to rely too heavily on the Air Express Edition of *Time* which was not freely available in the United States—and anyway *Time* has always had its own peculiar slant on the English language. The ANW entries could not be critically checked, some of my new words turned out to be less than new, and readers objected. I think that the editors were close to terminating the enterprise right then, but they mercifully accepted Allen Walker Read's offer to help while I was out of the country and gave me a reprieve.

A lesser hurdle came in late 1941, when it was proposed to set up an AS department of "Pre-1900 Evidence" under Woodford Heflin of the *Dictionary of American English*, and the editors thought that Heflin's format might be good for ANW. I tried to work this out and made good use of other



suggestions from Heflin, but he was shortly to be grabbed by the Air Force and I don't believe that his new department ever became a reality.

In any case, by 1943 ANW was running smoothly, and in that year it acquired an offshoot, the Committee on New Words of the American Dialect Society, in which I was involved along with Henry Alexander, T. A. Knott, C. L. Barnhart, I. Willis Russell, Charles Funk, and Mamie Meredith, plus Merriam's John Bethel in an unofficial capacity. Either the Committee or ANW or both seem to have attracted the attention of the editors of the *Britannica Book of the Year*, who invited us to take responsibility for a new entry, "Words and Meanings, New," to start with the 1944 edition. The motive must have been in large part the deluge of new expressions that came from the war and its political effects. Of the 47 headwords in the 1944 list, 32 were directly military.

By this time ANW was beginning to interfere with my regular work—I was supposed to be teaching Spanish, not English—and I felt that someone else would be able to do a better job. My first choice was Willis Russell, and our journal had the great good fortune that he was already interested and willing. The bargain was sealed in December 1943, and Willis took on not only ANW but also the running of the New Words Committee. I must add that he carried on for at least ten years with the *Britannica* and three times that long with ANW, proving again and again the depth of his scholarship. If I can claim to have succeeded in any way by initiating ANW, I declare that the real success was my successors.

## II. I. WILLIS RUSSELL AND ANW (BY JAMES B. McMILLAN)

Watching Willis prepare an installment of "Among the New Words" was a lesson in careful scholarship. He checked and re-checked every citation, being sure that he had the exact wording of the citation and the title of the source, the date, and the page number exactly right. He went to every appropriate dictionary to be sure that each proposed entry was a genuine new word or new sense. Some of his contributors would guess that they had found a neologism but fail to look it up in one of the big dictionaries and would turn in a citation that had to be discarded.

Willis usually went to likely sources for an earlier citation than the earliest supplied by his contributors, especially to professional and trade publications, some in obscure and arcane areas. Once he was satisfied that an earlier occurrence was unlikely, he tackled the definition, sometimes the hardest part of composing an entry. Frequently a writer using a brand-new word defines it as he uses it, but sometimes the writer assumes that the definition

is obvious to his particular readers and does not consider other readers who may find the word baffling. Willis would always search through his citations for one that supplied a definition (or for conflicting definitions to show the range of meanings).

When a definition had to be found, Willis would consult people in various departments of the University and frequently write to people who were informed in a particular subject, asking for help with a definition. When two or more informants disagreed, he would press them for a consensus definition or for complementary definitions. He worried as much about writing good definitions as about using accurate and earliest citations.

Both Willis and his wife, Anne, became dedicated word-watchers, continually marking up and saving newspapers, magazines, and fugitive publications for extraction of citations. They had to supply much of the material during periods when he did not have active contributors. Members of the New Words Committee of the Dialect Society varied greatly in their diligence and ability. Some, like Mamie Meredith and Peter Tamony, were prolific contributors; others soon became bored or had other obligations that caused their interest to slacken. But Willis would never chide committee members for not contributing and did not scold those who failed to check obvious dictionaries before reporting to him words that they thought were new but which were already recorded.

Willis conducted an eclectic and unsystematic search for neology, relying on uneven contributions from mostly unsystematic readers, just as the collections of commercial lexicographers are also eclectic samplings. But he was aware of the possibilities of wide-ranging minute reading made possible by electronic scanning and sympathized with the proponents of such scanning. He would have welcomed the demise of the James Murray methodology and the arrival of computerized scanning of corpora beyond the reach of individual readers.

### III. A CONJUGAL VIEW (BY ANNE BOYD RUSSELL)

It is a wonder that copy for "Among the New Words" ever made its way out of the office in Morgan Hall at the University of Alabama, where my husband, I. Willis Russell, held sway for thirty-seven years, with all those years' accumulations. The room was jammed from floor to ceiling with books, book cases, files, cartons of newspapers and magazines with citations waiting to be typed, cartons with typed citations to be proofread, stacks of citation slips to be filed, and the manuscripts, proofs, and correspondence for the *Publication of the American Dialect Society*, which he also edited then, plus student papers to be graded and the materials necessary for class

preparation. If you entered the room for consultation, work, or just to visit, stacks of books, magazines, and papers had to be removed from a chair to the floor before you could sit down.

Finding a place to sit was a frequent chore of mine since I often went in to help with filing citation slips, checking the words in dictionaries, proof-reading slips and occasionally copying citations. Some of the slips could be checked in the many dictionaries Willis had in his office, but some had to be taken to the university library, where there were different dictionaries, and some even went home with us to be checked there. No citation was ever used that had not been checked against every possible dictionary.

In the beginning Willis was, of course, helped tremendously with "Among the New Words" by the files of his predecessor, ANW's originator Dwight Bolinger, as well as by his friendly suggestions. Atcheson Hench also was a great help. Mamie Meredith was an indefatigable collector, sending slips on almost everything imaginable. Margaret Bryant sent many slips and later Mary Gray Porter, who seemed to read everything there was to read. Clarence and Robert Barnhart gave a special kind of help in checking their huge files. Members of the New Words Committee of ADS and many other people sent in slips which were all greatly appreciated. At first the New Words Committee was very active, but through the years interest in new words seemed to wane, and the Committee became rather inactive.

Because the University always seemed to be strapped for funds, there was never much in the way of clerical help. Sometimes there were periods when excellent student help was provided; other times there was no help at all. When Jim McMillan was head of the English Department, he did the best he could to provide assistance. I became a sort of all-purpose fill-in help. I would file slips, sometimes copy citations, proofread them, check them against dictionaries, help proofread copy, and even help mull over definitions. Willis was a most thorough and meticulous editor, but it was work that he enjoyed very much. Though very time consuming, it was also very interesting work. To this day, I can't read anything without noticing possible new words!