

# The British Council Language Matters

## The Language Lab

In this column we want you to write to us about any little problems that you have with English and we will see if we can 'analyse' them. We will try to give the best answer possible in the space available.

Today's question combines lots of issues: the difference between American and British English; pronunciation; spelling; indeed, the whole question of the relationship

between what is said and what is written.

And that question is...

**Why do we sometimes hear that Americans say 'gonna' when British people say 'going to'?**

This is a very intricate issue. In fact over the next few weeks there will be articles that deal at some length with the various problems involved here. Watch out for future articles on simplification in the spoken language and the interrelationship of spoken and written forms. Here's only a brief answer for now.

Firstly, it is not true that British people say 'going to'. In normal speech, words are affected by their environment

in the sentence. Unstressed words are 'reduced' in various ways and an auxiliary like 'going to' will normally be unstressed. As a result it is normal to say something closer to 'gonna' or even 'g'na' (ie one syllable). If anything, in British accents the amount of reduction of this type is probably even greater than in American accents.

The real difference is in the tendency to write reduced forms. American writing adopted spellings to imitate the spoken language at a time when this was still considered 'lazy' speech and most certainly not printable by British writers.

## The Intro

Welcome to The British Council's second column in the Daily Star. We focus this week on two skill areas - Reading and Writing.

explanation of its approach and deals with something that we have had a great deal of demand for.

The Reading Questionnaire is the first of a series that will address various issues related to reading skills. It has been

our experience that this is often the area where students that attend the British Council Teaching Centre have difficulty.

We also continue two regular features - The Language Lab and The Word Processor.

The Writing Pad includes an

## The Writing Pad

### Requesting Information

Dear Sir or Madam

I am writing to you because I have heard that you run English language courses.

I am interested in joining one of your courses but I am unable to come to your office to collect any details.

Therefore I would be grateful if you could send me further details of the course dates, registration and fees.

Yours faithfully

The aim of this column is to look at various types of letter. We will look at the 'product' by giving model letters and then briefly discussing some of the features. The ideas for our examples will come from correspondence that we receive at our office.

Look at the example above. Notice the way that it is broken into five parts.

1. The salutation: in this case the writer uses 'Sir or Madam' because he or she is not sure if the recipient will be a man or woman.

2. The opening paragraph: often, as here, this will be a single sentence which puts the letter in context - Why are you writing? Notice that the letter has no subject heading. These are quite rare in personal letters but the first sentence very quickly gives the reader an idea of the context.

3. The main body: this gives further detail. This is general information but it must also be relevant as the reader must get a clear message. Too much detail will confuse the reader.

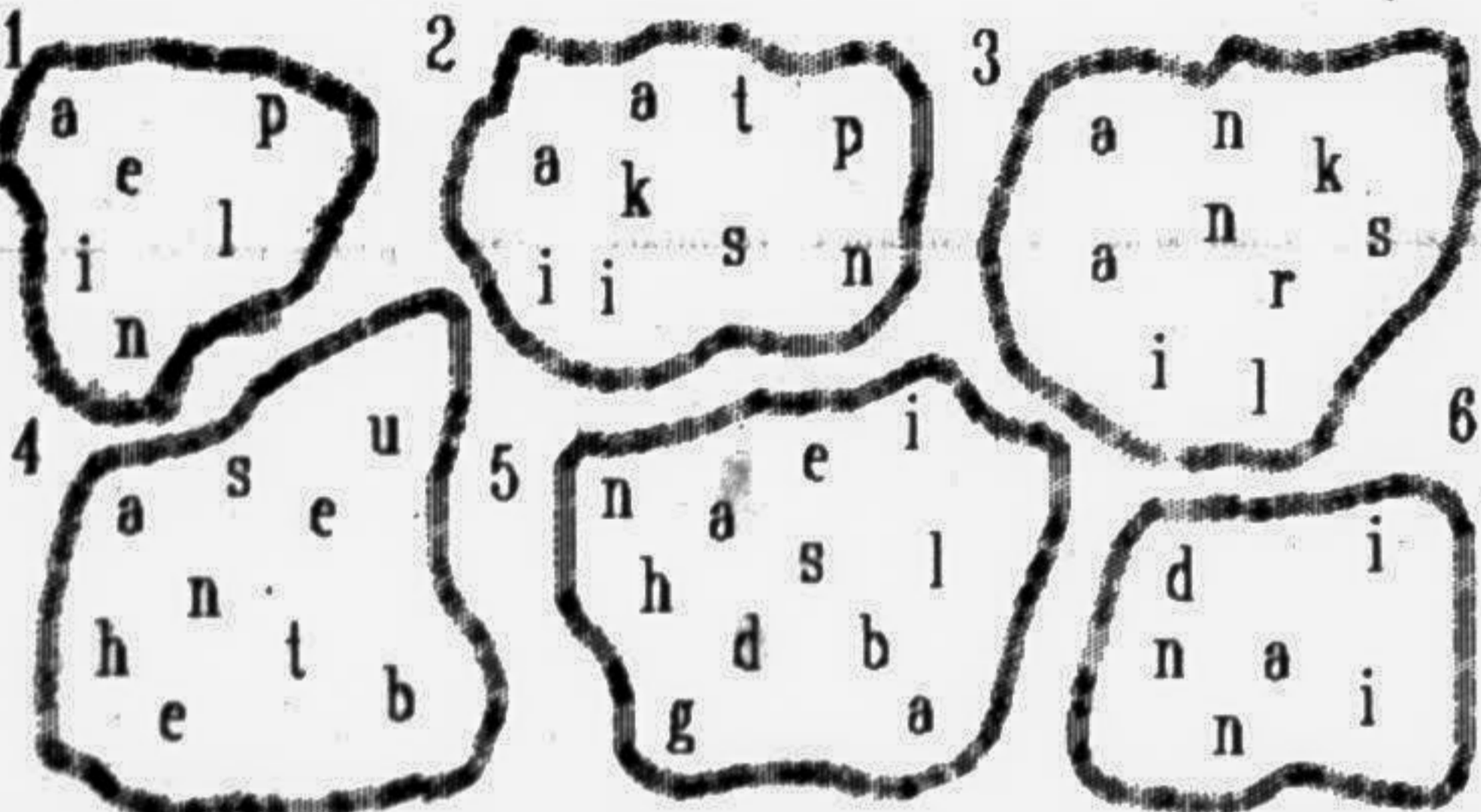
4. The action required: once you have given the background, say clearly what you want. Do not use phrases that are so long that the message is difficult to extract. Here the writer uses 'I would be grateful if you could.....'. This has become the most common phrase for making a request of any type.

Remember also that the end is a very important part of the letter. It is what the reader is most likely to remember and so your main message should be here.

5. The signing off: traditionally we use 'Yours faithfully' when there is no name at the top of the letter.

## Wobbly Words

Try this word puzzle. In each shape the letters are jumbled up. Put them in the correct order (Be careful - one contains more than one word!). What do all of them have in common? What is missing?



- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

Answers: 1. Nepal; 2. Pakistan; 3. Sri Lanka; 4. Hurricane; 5. Bangladesh; 6. Indian. They are all SAARC nations. Message: Mohd. Iqbal/Mohd. Iqbal

IN November every year the Sovereign opens the British Parliament amidst great ostentatious splendour. It displays the supremacy of the Sovereign to the people, harnesses national pride and creates a sense of single nationhood. This is an event of great constitutional significance filled with history and tradition. Every year millions of TV viewers round the world watch the event. While in England, I had the opportunity of vividly watching this grand pageantry. Thousands of visitors stood along the road-side through the chilly night of November to be the first in the row to wave their hands to cheer up the Queen by saying, "We want the Queen", and "God save the Queen".

The State Opening of Parliament is the largest royal parade and it marks the beginning of the parliamentary year. The Sovereign travels from the Buckingham Palace to the Palace of Westminster in the Irish State Coach, drawn by four horses with a Household Cavalry escort. The Royal Procession proceeded through the processional route down the Mall across the Horse Guard Parade into Whitehall, and then to the House of Lords. Troops line the route and outside the Palace of Westminster in a guard of honour with a colour. The spectacle of so many senior sober citizens putting on traditional coloured dresses to take part in a long protracted parade looked exceptionally funny even to the British people as well. The whole procession looked like a grand travelling circus. There was a traffic jam in the west end of London because a square mile of roads north of London had been cordoned off from 9.30 am to 1 pm.

The Royal Procession was preceded by the Regalia which having been collected from the Tower of London was transported from Buckingham Palace in a carriage of their own. The Imperial State Crown was carried by the Comptroller of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, while the Assistant Comptroller bore the Cap of Maintenance. The Sword of State was

# The Opening of British Parliament

## Witnessing the Royal Pageantry: Traditional Reminder of History

by Prof. Roushanara Hoque

carried by a specially appointed Gentleman Usher. They were accompanied by two of the Sovereign's Surgeant-at-Arms with their maces. Before the Royal Procession started the cellars of the Houses of Parliament were searched by the Yeoman of the Guard, as a routine work, which dates back to 5th Nov, 1605 - the Gunpowder Plot of Guido Fawkes to blow up the House of Parliament with its Members.

At about 11-15 am the Royal Procession arrived at the House of Lords and the Guard of Honour gave a Royal Salute. The Royal Standard was unfurled on the Victoria Tower, replacing the Union Flag, and remained there while the Queen was within the Palace. The Sovereign was received by the Earl Marshal, and the Lord Great Chamberlain, at whose hip hung the Golden Key to the Palace of Westminster. The Royal Procession entered through the Royal Gallery to the House of Lords. Then according to the order of precedence, entered all the Peers and Peerses, all in their Parliamentary robes, with the Peerses wearing *titras*. It was a magnificent scene, with the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the Bishops of London and about 25 Diocesan Bishops in their ecclesiastical robes. Some Judges of High Court of Justice, robed and bewigged, sat in the centre facing the Throne in their traditional Woolsack.

The Queen sat on the throne with her Consort on the left, and the Prince of Wales as heir to the Throne, on her right. Other members of the Royal family sat on the front benches nearest to the Throne. The two Peers holding the Sword of State and the Cap of Maintenance stood to either side of the Queen. The Lord Chancellor then advanced, removed the Queen's speech from the

special silk bag and handed it on bended knee to the queen. The Gentleman Usher of the

Black Rod, in his capacity as Queen's Messenger, made his way to the House of Commons.



The Queen opened Parliament from her throne in the House of Lords.

As he approached, the Surgeant-at-Arms slammed the door on his face. Black Rod then knocked the door three times with his rod, and the Surgeant-at-Arms looked through the grills and then opened the door. The shutting of the door of the Commons to Black Rod affirms the constitutional acceptance that the Sovereign has to right to enter the House of Commons. It demonstrates the supremacy of the Parliament and the independence of the Members of Parliament. The presence of both parties side by side in the Lords for the Speech reflected the unity of the State under the Monarchy.

The Sovereign's summons to the Commons was thereupon conveyed to the Speaker by Black Rod and of 635 MPs only a group of 250 attended by standing at the opposite end of the Sovereign listening to the Most Gracious Speech which the Cabinet had already written for her. The Speech ended with the final words, 'I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels', and Parliament was then officially opened. The Commons retired to their House to start debating the policy decided for the next year in the Queen's Speech.

The Royal Procession of carriages then re-assembled and returned to Buckingham Palace and the Guard of Honour march past as the finishing touch to the pageantry of the State Opening of Parliament. Through these constitutional niceties symbolise the supremacy of the Sovereign, the truth is that, the Queen has neither even voting right nor any opinion and that she must sign even her death warrant if both the Houses put it up to her.

To any viewer the question arises how far this royal pageantry and splendour is justified in a democratic country. The

traditionalists believe that it is a reminder of their history. The functionalists believe that it is a complete waste of time and money. The pragmatists believe that the Sovereign, as both Head of State and Head of Nation, commands respect and loyalty of the nation more powerfully than an elected President, so the show is justified. They believe in saying, 'God save the Queen' and 'People save the Democracy.'

## Lawyers to Keep Wigs and Gowns

by Kofi Akumanyi

JUDGES and barristers are to retain their wigs and gowns, the hallmarks of the British legal system, the Lord Chancellor Lord McKay and the Lord Chief Justice Lord Taylor announced on 30 September in London.

In a joint statement on the eve of the start of the new legal year, they said responses after an 18-month long public consultation on the need to reform court dress had shown 'strong support for maintaining the status quo'.

The overwhelming view of more than 500 responses from members of the legal profession was that formal dress had 'a significant role to play in maintaining respect for authority and status of the court.'

Of all the responses, 67 per cent favoured retaining court dresses in its present form, some 15 per cent favoured abolition in all aspects, and the rest favoured some simplification, including 14 per cent who wanted to banish the wig.

Lord Taylor, who set off the wigs and gowns debate when he was appointed Lord Chief Justice last April, had frequently made clear his view that wigs contributed to a 'fuddy-duddy' image, and made judges 'look slightly ridiculous'. Commenting on the decision, he said although he favoured some changes, he accepted the strength of feeling among the public, court users and judges. — LPS

## The Word Processor.....



- ignore the problem
- ignore it and return to it later
- panic and give up
- ask someone
- use a dictionary or other reference book
- guess the meaning from context

6. Did you find out anything new as a result of reading the text?

7. Did the content interest you?

Now check your answers against the comments below.

### Are your reading skills appropriate?

- If you answered 'don't know' for question 1, then you need to think more carefully before you start reading - it could save you a lot of time. Once you know your reason for reading, you can then select the most appropriate method.
- If you answered (d) for question 2, it would take you all day to 'read' the newspaper, which would not leave much time for other things, and would not do very much to improve your reading skills. You need to learn to skip the bits that are unnecessary or of no special interest to you.
- If the answer to question 3 is 'No', then at least it shows you are aware of what you should have been doing. Next time, try to match your method of reading with your purpose in reading.
- If you answered (a) or (b) for this question, then your reading is presumably very slow - like children when they first learn to read. Reading should normally be much quicker than speaking, so try to get rid of the habits that slow you down.
- If you answered (c), then at least you're honest, but that won't necessarily help your reading skills! Think which of the other options would have been better. If you answered any of the others, decide whether this was the best thing to do in the circumstances.
- If your answer is 'No', do you feel that you wasted your time? If so, did you continue reading right through to the end of the article?
- If it didn't interest you, presumably you just scanned it and moved on to the next article. If not, were you wasting your time?

If you had other answers to any of the seven questions, it seems as though you have good reading skills - but only you can decide whether they were appropriate or not!

Contributors this week: Dennis O'Brien, Janet Raynor, Robert Shrubbsall

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# Below Beijing

by Arjuna

WITH millions of bicycles, pedestrians, plus overloaded trolleys and buses, and air and noise pollution reaching critical levels on Beijing streets - one would think that going underground would be a refreshing experience.

Think again, as I did in a recent visit to the Imperial City's subways. It was the subways of New York and Tokyo all over again, with subway cars bulging with passengers.

The deputy director of the Beijing Mass Transit Railway Corporation (BMTRC) confirms this to me. Passenger volume has been growing yearly on average, by 20 per cent. Thus, a subway car often has to carry 270 passengers, 50 per cent more than its designed capacity of 180 passengers.

'We're often worried about safety in operation, though no serious accident has occurred,' Mr Li says. That is quite an achievement - or luck - considering that in 1992 Beijing subways carried 428 million people, equivalent to about one out of three of China's one billion-plus population.

The subways were originally part of Beijing's vast underground 'city' for use as evacuation centres in case of a nuclear war.

Indeed, the late Chairman Mao Zedong ordered in the mid-

## Finns are Still Wary

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phenomena that we are afraid of now. We used to be afraid that there was a plan to invade Finland, and so we kept quiet and asked few questions. Now we're afraid because the Russians aren't as organised as they used to be, and anything can happen.' — GEMINI NEWS

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## Achieving Western Standards

Continued from page 10  
should not necessarily be evaluated as negative, since the year taken as the comparative basis for the study, 1990, was characterised by extraordinary upheavals in the wake of the demise of the GDR. The sociologists Ulrike Stx, Ute Karig, Cornelia Lang, Bernd Lindner and Hans-Jorg Stehler regard this 'de-politicisation' as quite normal: 'The previous distance to the "major" political issues has returned in a new guise; young people are once again fully immersed in their daily lives.' — GRS