

p kestaff

PLAIN LANGUAGE COMMISSION

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September 2013

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'Healthy' Nestlé laces drinks with twice the sugar of Coke

Cans boast of fruit juice and relegate high sugar content to the small print

If you're a multinational company whose website is full of uplifting stuff about 'wellness' and good nutrition, why would you be happy to sell millions of cans of premium-priced lemonade that contain twice as much sugar as Coke?

That's what the Swiss-based giant Nestlé does. An obesity and diabetes epidemic might be raging, but Nestlé – involved, as its website proudly proclaims, in anti-obesity campaigns – ladles **eighteen teaspoons of sugar** into every little can of San Pellegrino Limonata and San Pellegrino Aranciata, which it exports to the UK and the rest of Europe from factories in Milan.

The cans, which sell for about 65p, lure customers with pictures of succulent oranges and lemons above large bold type stating the fruit-juice content – 18% for Aranciata, 16% for Limonata. But in smudgier small print the nutritional details show there's 32g of sugar in Aranciata and 33g in Limonata. In each case, this is more than a third of an adult's 'guideline daily amount'. These quantities mean there's an amazing 18 teaspoons of sugar in every can, at 1.8g per spoonful. Coca-Cola, much criticized for its persistent sugar-pushing, puts 'only' nine teaspoons in a can of ordinary Coke.

Nestlé told us: *'The Sanpellegrino [sic] Company is now working to further reduce sugar [in Aranciata and Limonata] by 10%, a process that will take 2-3 years to be completed.'*

In other words, it will take three years to cut 18 teaspoons of sugar to about 16 – so three years to achieve virtually nothing.

Most Nestlé brands are sugar-rich, its sweet parade of household names being led by tooth-rotting cereals like Cheerios (20% sugar, though Nestlé's website says it's 'healthy'), Golden Nuggets (for children, 25% sugar), Frosted Shreddies (for children, 28% sugar), and Cookie Crisp (for children, 33% sugar).



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But the company talks up its health credentials, claiming to be 'the world's leading nutrition, health and wellness company' and saying 'At Nestlé we use four simple words to describe what we offer: "Good Food Good Life"'

Nestlé is eager to develop what it told an investor seminar at its Swiss HQ in 2008 is 'a strong innovation pipeline of premium and luxury products'. Its seven varieties of San Pellegrino sugar drinks – which Nestlé calls fruit drinks – are a big part of this plan, which it dubs 'premiumization'. At the seminar, Lars Olofsson, Nestlé's head of strategic business units and marketing, said the company had global leadership in 'Nutrition, Health and Wellness, which is an important lever in the premium segment'. Then, in full gobbledygook mode he declared: 'Sanpellegrino Aranciata and Limonata represent the most up-scale premium sparkling fruit beverages that fulfill the pleasure of Italian authenticity.'

An authentically Italian consumption of sugar is widely thought a factor in the obesity and diabetes epidemic sweeping richer nations, as Nestlé's own propaganda tacitly acknowledges in corporate spin-speak:

'Obesity is a complex problem driven by multiple social, economic and environmental factors. If we are to tackle this major public health issue effectively we need a multi-sector response and we firmly believe industry has a vital role to play in this. We were the first company to develop policies to reduce fat, sugar and salt in our products, and we continue to develop products that are both tastier and healthier. We work to provide clear and information rich labeling and to restrict our marketing to children. We actively promote healthy lifestyles through education programmes and communications. It is part of our policy, to work closely with national and international public health bodies to help reduce the incidence of obesity around the world.'

This kind of language, which owes much to the lexicon of other great sugar-pushers like Coke and Pepsi, is reminiscent of the self-serving words of tobacco companies down the years. And there's nothing better than 'working closely' with high-powered industry and health-body committees, whose main output is reports loaded with words like multidisciplinary, socioeconomic and multi-sector, to help ensure that positive change is snailpace slow. Having got their consumers used to a heavily sugared and salted diet, companies like Nestlé know that talking to them about healthy eating is much easier than coaxing them back to healthier foods.

In a sign of how much power and influence these multinationals wield, the Government has just appointed Nestlé's chief executive and chairman, Fiona Kendrick, as one of five new commissioners at the UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

Nestlé, the world's biggest food company by revenues, issued a gleeful press release that its sugar-seller-in-chief had landed a post at the top table: 'Fiona's appointment is recognition of the leadership role Nestlé, and Fiona personally, has taken in highlighting the need to build skills within the food industry, developing innovative programmes such as the Nestlé Academy Fast Start programme, as well as championing industry wide initiatives such as the UK's first food Engineering Degree with Sheffield Hallam University.'

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Exactly how much 'food engineering' would it take for Kendrick and her colleagues to cut by, say, two thirds, the sugar they stuff into their lemonade and breakfast cereals? And how much innovation would it take for them to state as prominently on their cans the sugar content of their drinks as well as their supposedly healthy ingredients? But then, of course, fewer people might buy them.

Overweight in financial jargon

How seriously do investment companies take their commitment to clear public information? Not very, if the 'Short Form Report & Accounts' of Threadneedle Investment Funds is anything to go by.

The report has just plopped on to the doormats of tens of thousands of investors and begins promisingly by telling them, 'The information in this report is designed to enable shareholders to make an informed judgment on the activities of the fund during the period it covers...'

But honeyed words and moneyed words don't always lead to clarity. Here are some of the jargon-strewn brain-dumps of Threadneedle's fund managers:

Vanessa Donegan: *'While the fund has continued to have a positive investment stance towards the consumer discretionary sector, where the structural drivers of growth are well underpinned, it has reduced the overweight in the sector by selling out of Korean auto-parts manufacturer Hyundai Mobis and Astra International in Indonesia, where the earnings outlook is less certain... Fund performance during the period was negatively impacted by the underweight in the Australian market, as the market outperformed on the back of strong flows into the high dividend yielding sectors, notably the Australian banks, as well as by stock selection in China, as some US-listed Chinese stocks were hit by corporate governance fears.'*

Martin Harvey: *'Over the course of the review period, we also exploited price volatility to vary our exposure to peripheral issues, adding further value... We maintained an off-benchmark position in non-government bonds and emerging market bonds... The fund is positioned for deteriorating fundamentals in Australia...'*

Alasdair Ross: *'There remain on-going signs of credit quality improvement within these sectors at a time when the valuation is better than the market as a whole. The fund was invested with an overweight in overall corporate bond risk and had some off-benchmark exposure to the high yield market which again added to performance... Corporate bond yields are at the lowest levels for many years, reflecting the tightening of spreads last year and the level of interest rates and gilt yields. This means that a replication of the returns seen in 2012 is improbable.'*

Replication – now there's a word we should all repeat, if only to avoid our fundamentals deteriorating.

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Mounting pressure for a taxidermal verb

Actress Amanda Seyfried (*Mamma Mia!* and *Lovelace*) lives in West Hollywood, USA in a house she has filled with stuffed animals. To *The Times* she declares undying love for a pet dog but says: 'I would never taxidermy my dog, because I love him. But there's no emotional attachment to my horse, my chicken or my wolf.' Leaving aside the eccentricity of possessing a solitary un-Paxoed chicken (naturally, most people in Hollywood have a solitary wolf), was Seyfried right to use 'taxidermy' as a verb?

The dictionaries allow it only as a noun, but if ever a profession needed a verb to describe its work, surely it is taxidermy, which Encarta defines as 'the art or skill of preparing, stuffing, and presenting dead animal skins so they appear lifelike'. It was coined from the Greek 'taxis' (arrangement) and 'derm' (skin), as you knew full well. To say that taxidermists 'stuff' and 'mount' their creatures has connotations of backroom bestiality. So, since a well-established plain-language principle is to use the verb that best expresses the action in the sentence, we asked the Guild of Taxidermy to let us know if it has a verb of choice. The silence so far may be just a polite way of saying 'get stuffed', but if the guild does respond, you'll be the first to hear.

Apostrophe worry – the least of our problems

'A school dinner lady with 11 years service has been sacked after she accidentally served pork to a Muslim pupil,' begins a recent newspaper story.

Language zealots will be appalled by this, because years should have an apostrophe after the s, the rule being that the service 'belongs' to the 11 years – just as in *one year's pay*, the pay belongs (in traditional grammar) to the singular year.

Another eye-catching feature of the story is the comment from Lunchtime UK, the catering firm that runs the school's canteen. Its operations manager Peter McAleese said: 'Anyone losing their job is regretful. But there was a full and transparent procedure that Alison [Waldock] went through, as well as an appeal procedure, which she lost.'

So let's just look at the meaning here. McAleese says 'anyone losing their job is regretful'. This means that anyone who loses their job is in a state of regret. That may be true. But what he meant to say was: 'Anyone losing their job is regrettable' or 'That anyone should lose their job is regrettable' or 'The fact that anyone has lost their job is regrettable.'

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Heteronyms trotted out with peddle power

Headline in the local paper says: 'Saleswoman is fined for no licence' and the story begins: 'A Derbyshire woman has been convicted of pedaling without a licence in Buxton, a court heard.' This piqued our interest at Plain Language Towers. Since when did salespeople need a licence to ride a bicycle? And if they did, wouldn't it be better spelt 'pedalling'?

Then, slow-witted creatures that we are, the penny dropped. The saleswoman was selling household products door to door, and for this she needs a licence. She is a pedlar, she peddles, and she was peddling illegally so someone grassed her up. As to whether she was using a bicycle to help her get about, the story is tomb-silent. You just can't find the facts you need, these days.

Cable wrong about 'obscurity' of those illegal migrant vans

Vince Cable, the business secretary, has criticized his own Government for trundling two billboard vans around the streets of six London boroughs that declare: 'In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest.' Cable said that apart from being 'stupid and offensive', the £10,000 campaign (since described as a pilot scheme) would be likely to fail partly because illegal immigrants would lack 'a sophisticated grasp of English, read at a distance'.

Bond's testicle torment no excuse for 'hereby'

After two hours (it seems like more) of gratuitous violence and incomprehensible betrayal in *Casino Royale* (why would anyone make such a bad film?), a world-weary Daniel Craig (aka James Bond), recovering improbably quickly from being tied up and having his genitals thwacked repeatedly with a thick rope, decides to send a resignation email to his boss, M: 'I hereby tender my resignation with immediate effect.'

Thus is another generation of secret agents – and plenty of other impressionable people whose balls have not been as badly bruised – inspired to use the archaic and unnecessary word hereby.



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Taboo word not a blasphemy – vicar

Rather impressive defiance from the Church of England vicar who was accused of blasphemy in an anonymous letter to her local paper for sporting a bumper sticker that asks 'WTFWJD?', a variation on the popular Christian slogan 'what would Jesus do?'.

Uplifting jargon... yet BBC forfeits moral high ground

The BBC's decision to pay immense sums to 'executives' whose services it no longer requires – £369million in an eight-year period, according to the National Audit Office – has led to a splendid phrase to describe the £266,288 payment the corporation made to one of its bosses, whose departure settlement totalled £866,000. It's 'pension augmentation'.

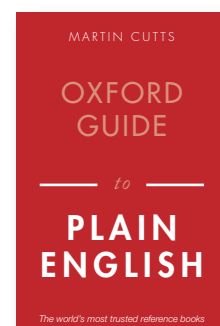
Plain English guide – new edition

The fourth edition of the *Oxford Guide to Plain English* was published on 15 August. Fully revised and extended to 288 pages, the book sets out 25 guidelines on how to produce clear documents and website text.

It includes sections on sentence length, reading ages, everyday vocabulary, clichés, legal language, 'easyread', passive and active voice, punctuation, proofreading and layout, as well as advice on how to plan and organize the written word.

The book, which has been in print since 1995, is meant for anyone looking for practical ways of improving the clarity of their written English, including managers and professionals who want to coach their staff towards better writing and improve their own, as well as anyone who has to write letters, reports, notices, and legal documents. It's part of a series covering grammar and punctuation, English usage, and spelling.

The book is published by Oxford University Press at £7.99. ISBN 978-0-19-966917-2



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Parking rip-offs – an update

In a website article called 'Complaining about bad writing...' (see ['Publications > Articles > Campaigns >](#)), we showed how UK councils were extorting vast sums from motorists to fill holes in their balance sheets. Drivers often fall foul of unclear signs and petty rules that induce them to make mistakes, leading to parking and other fines.

When a road system is so badly designed that it generates thousands of fines, which highway authorities pocket, they have no incentive to redesign them. Panorama showed this on 12 June 2013 when it highlighted the 30,000 contraventions a year at the Bagley's Lane box junction in Hammersmith and Fulham, which raked in £2million in fines.

[Click here for an impressive graphic of how the scam works](#)

Mad march of 'obsessive lawmaking'

An occasional Pikestaff theme is the amount of new law that successive UK governments pass, as if they have nothing better to do with parliamentary time. So Gary Slapper's legal knowledge quiz in *The Times* on 8 August raised a question that piqued our interest, namely: 'Three years ago, Nick Clegg [deputy PM] said he wanted to end "obsessive lawmaking". What has happened since?

- (a) The coalition halved the number of its Bills
- (b) 800 new sections of law have been passed
- (c) Annual legislation has reduced by a fifth
- (d) 8,000 new sections of law have been passed.'

The answer is (d), naturally.

9.0% The astonishing rate the Government assumes old people can get on their savings

As everyone knows, the previous Government kicked into the pampas grass the question of how to help old people faced with crippling residential care-home costs – staying in a moderately decent care home can easily cost £650 a week or £33,800 a year. The coalition has scarcely done any better, planning only to bring in some footling changes after 2016 that will do little to remedy the worst problem, which is, put simply, as follows.

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If you have heeded successive governments and been thrifty, putting aside a little money to buy a house or build a savings pot of, say £75,000, you will be screwed for every last penny of your care-home fees down to the savings threshold of (currently) £23,250. And while you are being so screwed, you will have the pleasure of knowing that someone in the next room to yours will be getting everything free – paid for by the State – because they ignored the advice to work hard and save, and instead blew all their money on drink, gambling, prostitutes and luxury holidays.

In fact, the Government makes sure it bleeds you dry by inventing a ridiculous interest rate and assuming you are earning it. It tots up the value of your little savings pot – your unsold home, say, at £100,000 – and assumes that you make nearly 9% interest on it every year while you're in care. This astonishing rate – which is about six times what anyone can actually get on their savings at present – is thus assumed to bring in £9,000 a year, which puts you way over the limit for receiving pension credit towards your fees. Only when you've been pauperized – all your savings going towards your care-home fees until they've dwindled to £23,250 – will you get any help at all.

'Impacted' in collision with normal English

The unstoppable march of 'impacted' marches on unstoppably, it seems, replacing 'affected' in much corporate speech. *The Guardian* recounts the story of nine people who went for a job interview at electrical retailer Currys, only to be forced to show the management team their potential as back-office staff by dancing to rap music. Embarrassed, and peeved at not getting the job, one of the interviewees shopped Currys to the media. Currys said:

'We are investigating the store member who held the recruitment session. We are extremely sorry to those interviewees impacted.'

Conferences, events and journals

News of plain-language conferences, events, journals.

PLAIN, the organization of plain-language practitioners worldwide, celebrates its 20th anniversary this year with its ninth international conference in Vancouver from 10–13 October.



[This website tells you everything you need to know – click here](#)

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(Click on any item to view online)

5 Aug 2013 Pickles may be tubby but at least he's got guts

7 Aug 2013 Bongo Bongo Land – let's not go there, says Ukip at last

23 Aug 2013 HS2 budget – so that's what growth looks like

6 Sept 2013 Not drowning in sewage but waving goodbye

Readers write...

Stephen Day does not, er, support, the replacement of help in public-sector writing: *'In their zeal to eliminate the word "help" from written English, public-sector jargonistas have invented a totally unnatural phrase where you "support" someone to do something. A search on the web brings up such gems as "Supporting the police to succeed", "Supporting clients to overcome barriers" and more complex derivatives such "...this methodology supports easier administration of funds...". Some gobbledygook phrases such as "on a daily basis" become part of everyday speech, but I've yet to hear anyone say they'll support me to make the tea, wash the dishes or do the garden. It seems the intention was to write with a less direct tone but, in reality, it just gives more scope to obfuscate.'*

Ray Ward's quizzicalities

What are the terms (there are two) for the figure of speech in which a word is inserted in another word, like 'absobloodylutely'?

Facebook

Pikestaff has its own page on Facebook, thanks to colleague James Fisher-Martins, who has kindly set this up for us and is posting regular features there. So visit facebook.com/PikestaffNews and have a look for yourself.

Back issues

You can see back issues of Pikestaff on our website, as well as an index showing each month's content.

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Rolling the credits

Pikestaff is published by Plain Language Commission (clearest.co.uk ltd).
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Answer to quiz:

Tmesis or diacope