

STOP PRESS! NEWSPAPER LANGUAGE LAPSES

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My friend and fellow recreational linguist Richard Lederer is surely the master of amusing language gaffes and bloopers, having immortalized the form in his popular *Anguished English* series of books. But I trust that Dr. Lederer will forgive me for attempting to game him at his own beat.

For many years, I have also collected typos, ambiguities, and other oddities attributable either to the publications' editors or to the people they quote. Some of my specimens follow, with commentary. To the best of my knowledge, none have been published before—except, of course, as they originally appeared.

The New York Times, Associated Press article, April 17 1985

“The survey did not ask women why they engaged in sexual activity before marriage, and the authors of the report declined to speculate on the matter.”

A prize will be awarded for the best suggestion.

Corrections, The New York Times, February 11 1989

“The Auctions column in Weekend yesterday misidentified a brand of watch. It is a World Time, not a Waldheim.”

That's what happens when you forget to Adenauer.

New York Press, Letters to the Editor, September 18 1991

“[Regarding] ‘no pets’ clauses in apartment leases...Approximately 55 percent of rental housing in New York *does* allow poets...”

But how do they pay the rent?

The New York Times, reporting on a libel case, quoting an executive, 1998

“As a company that operates throughout the world selling food products, you can well imagine that the most important thing for us is that we operated off a high moral and ethical plane.”

Is off the opposite of on?

The Wall Street Journal, in an article about longevity, quoting an elderly Florida woman

“If I become a burden, I would like to bite the bullet.”

Is that how the instructions tell you to do it?

Corrections, The New York Times, May 29 1993

“Because of a transmission error, an interview in the Egos & Ids column on May 16 with Mary Matalin, the former deputy manager of the Bush campaign who is a co-host of a new talk show on CNBC, quoted her incorrectly on the talk show host Rush Limbaugh. She said he was ‘sui generis,’ not ‘sweet, generous.’”

Well, that probably depends on your politics.

The New York Times, on a TV evangelist accused of sexual misconduct, February 23 1988

“Another Swaggart cousin is Jerry Lee Lewis, but Mr. Swaggart, whose honey-like baritone sining is a central part of his ministry, has called rock-and-roll ‘the music of Satan.’”

Evidently, he knows whereof he speaks.

Corrections, The New York Times

“An article today about skin care, on page 16 of Men’s Fashions of the Times, misidentifies a product...The Product is Aramis’s Lab Series Lift Off, not Aramis’s Lab Series Face Off.”

Ouch!

The New York Times, in a report on an Iraqi delegate’s speech at the UN, March 12 1992

“France’s representative, Jean Bernard Merimée, said he was surprised ‘at how predictable the speech was.’”

But on the bright side, he didn’t have to take notes

The Wall Street Journal, Jan 10 2001

“In the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai, hundreds of patients who describe both mental and physical ailments flock to the home of teenager Peerawat Ariyasubkamol for treatment. Called Richy for short, the chubby-faced youth...”

And Richy is short for what, exactly?

The New York Times, restaurant review column (guest-written), November 2 1990

“Bryan Miller is on medical leave.”

Was it something he ate?

The New York Times, TV listings, April 24 1983

“‘Toni’ (1934), Charles Blavette, Célia Montalvan, Jenny Hélie; directed by Jean Renoir.”

***Sacre bleu!* He takes his cut off the top and *never* lets you forget it!**

The New York Times

“It may be frightening to some to realize that the Vienna Choir Boys...have been singing the music of Josquin Des Prez and Palestrina since it was written.”

Only to those who feel intimidated by the Old Boy Network.