

QUIPS OF THE TONGUE

More Amusing Media Boners, with Puckish Rejoinders

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Recently, at a neighborhood French bistro, I spotted on the menu a side dish identified as “pommel frites.” A *pommel* is the knoblike protuberance on a saddle, or part of a sword. Not quite as tasty!

Typos on menus have long been convenient targets for ridicule. Another French term, *prix fixe*, is often rendered as *prefix*—or numerous other creative misspellings.

Now there’s another domain for amusing bloopers: dictation on mobile devices. Speech-recognition technology has improved considerably since the earliest systems, when users had to spend hours “teaching” the software to recognize their voices. Still, as with AutoCorrect, interesting transcription errors abound. I usually neglect to jot them down, but here are a few that I experienced and noted: *Audubon* became “*autobahn*.” *Barbuti*, “*bar booty*.” *Mill and Locke*, “*Mel landlocked*.” *Operetta*, “*a Beretta*.” And *prima donna*, “*pre-Madonna*.” Got any of your own risible examples?

As in my 17 previous *Word Ways* roundups of funny errors, the media provide the most fertile territory for sightings by dedicated blooper snoopers, who are always armed with snappy comebacks. Consider the following. . . .

The Wall Street Journal, April 17, 2020:

“‘They’ve been thrust in the stoplight at a level of scrutiny that’s typically applied to the biggest tech companies in the world,’ Mr. Stamos said.”

▶ **Well, the worst that can happen is a traffic ticket.**

The West Side Spirit, N.Y.C. community weekly, June 11-17, 2020:

“We see true need, poverty and desperation every single day right in front of our eyes and yet most have just become immured and do nothing or very little.”

▶ **So we’re emotionally walled off?**

Bullseye, National Public Radio, July 22, 2018:

“She walked in to use the restroom and spilled her guts to the bartender.”

▶ **Ma’am, it’s in back on the right.**

New York Post, March 3, 2020:

“But SJP Chairman Steve Pozycki had called Perry’s decision ‘a dangerous precedent’. . . . Many real estate lawyers greed, arguing that revoking permits retroactively would. . . .”

▶ **As if the industry doesn’t get enough criticism on that front.**

The Wall Street Journal, December 29-30, 2018:

“Then again, maybe somebody at AT&T is reckoning with the question of whether it really makes sense to try to replicate Netflix’s business model. . . . How many steaming services will consumers really support?”

▶ **Have no fears. As usual, the executives will work everything out in the sauna.**

Sometimes, typos and other mistakes are subsequently caught and corrected. I found the following three specimens in the Corrections column of *The New York Times*. As always, the retorts are my own.

December 3, 2019:

“An article on Thursday about Frank Sheeran, whose life inspired ‘The Irishman,’ misstated the given name of an organized crime figure killed in a shooting in 1972. He is Joseph (Crazy Joe) Gallo, not Vincent (Crazy Joe) Gallo.”

▶ **We take no responsibility, however, for the moniker.**

May 30, 2020:

“The Horror Roundup on Page 56 [of the *Book Review*] misstates the title of a novel by Grady Hendrix. It is ‘The Southern Book Club’s Guide to Slaying Vampires,’ not ‘The Southern Book Club’s Guide to Killing Vampires.’”

▶ **Doesn’t matter to the vampires.**

September 17, 2019:

“An Op-Ed article on Saturday about performance-enhancing drugs and technology referred incorrectly to the classification of ostriches. They are birds, not mammals.”

▶ **Did the editors have their heads in the sand?**

Credits: For spotting the “greed” typo, thanks to Iris Bell, N.Y.C. Article title: I thought I had invented it, but a Google search proved that at least 16 clever people had anticipated me.