

Speechless

1st April

The announcement came on the radio this morning, and at first I thought it was an April Fool's joke. But there was Government confirmation just a few minutes ago. Because there is a lack of money for the Government to spend, they have placed a tax on words. From midnight tonight, all words will be taxed when used. Any words spoken or heard, and any words set down on paper will have to be paid for. The rates of tax are as follows:

Speaking	10 pence per word-unit
Listening	8 pence per word-unit
Writing	5 pence per word-unit
Reading	4 pence per word-unit

A 'word-unit' is decided by the number of times a word is used. For example, 'the' is charged at 1.0 unit, as is 'and', 'who' at 0.7 of a unit, 'please' at 0.3 of a unit, 'bizarre' at 0.1 unit, 'misogynistic' at 0.05 of a unit, and so on.

This could be an expensive business. Just think: if the greengrocer said -

'How are you, today, Mrs Simpson?'

then the Government would get a total of £0.3601 from the greengrocer and £0.2808 from Mrs Simpson - 64 pence!

The tax does not start until midnight tonight. Already I can hear a great noise out in the street as everyone talks nineteen to the dozen while it's still free.

2nd April

This must of necessity be a secret diary. Already, there are people snooping about. It was announced this morning that there would be tax-rebates for anyone reporting illegal conversations or people not paying the due amount. For every successful prosecution, the informer would get 1000 free word-units. But the tax is beginning to bite. I went into town by bus this morning: when the bus turned up, no one could tell what number it was or where it was going, because the bus-company had covered over the signs. So half the queue got on.

"Town?" I asked the driver.

He kept his lips sealed and nodded his head.

"Are you going to the High Street, my man?" queried a well-to-do lady behind me. Everyone looked at her with respect - she must have money coming out of her ears!

The driver nodded, and off we went.

When we got into town, the shopkeepers refused to have anything to do with me. Shopping was a question of grabbing what you wanted from the shelves (all the prices had been removed) and standing at the check-out. All was silent, apart from some luckless souls who wanted to return faulty goods and could not mime the reason for return.

Must cut down words. Require practice. Snoopers about. Mrs Babel next door in trouble - long conversations about neighbours suddenly halted. Stumbles about blurting out half-sentences, then crying into hankie.

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unpaid

3rd April

Citizens have opted for magnificent solution. Deployment of arcane vocabulary permits extended conversation. "How are you today, Mrs Simpson?" could potentially be expressed as "Hail at this juncture, spouse of yon scion of Simp." But this gets out of hand. The greengrocer cannot cope, and so falls silent. Mrs Simpson cannot understand and so does not reply.

Notwithstanding this, advantages abound. Conceivably, a sentence might be constructed exploiting exclusively little-used words, and if someone were to apply diligence - everyone is circumabulating with their digital pads over their auricular receptors lest they apprehend vocables: there are muggers about who stand on street-corners talking nineteen to the dozen, forcing people to listen and pay up, and then scarper when the Word Police arrive. As I was saying, if you could get someone to listen, you could talk about the salient features and gravamens of the nonce with the denizens of the environs. The time of circumlocution has arrived! Badinage and badmash and baetyls, baisemains, balbutient and banausic. Banausic badinage by balbutient badmashes! A kippage and kirdandy in the kinrick!

Bring out at last the supplies of : axypolyp; catersnurble; equage; goatsnatcher; tea-farer; xylobag; yippough; benesocks; efflant; gallious!

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5th April

Crime figures have soared since the new taxes came into effect. Law-abiding citizens have been arrested on the streets as they went about at night, pulling down posters from billboards, especially the ones with lots of words on them. Others have been found guilty of raiding paper-bins where newspapers and magazines are dumped for recycling. There is a gang in the area calling itself the Wordymen, pledged to retrieve words from the rich and give them to the poor. Their leader is known as The Cowled Compensator. At night they can be seen as shadows, breaking into bookshops, uplifting piles of newspapers, cutting down signs from the lamp-posts, disappearing like mist in the wind when the Word Police show up.

This morning the Government passed an emergency law, forbidding the defacing of posters in public areas, forbidding the use of a dictionary in a public place; a curfew is to be placed on all non-residential areas. Libraries have been closed down.

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7th April

This morning, I observed silent groups of people making their way past my door, heading for the better-off parts of town, where the leafy suburbs are and everyone has a house in its own grounds. It is well-known that the Government turns a blind eye to conversations taking place in these areas. I followed one group, having assured them that I was not there to hand them over to the law. We reached a quiet avenue and then, in subdued voices, everyone began to talk to each other, lingering over the more expensive words - *the, and, I, you* and so on. It was like being at a dinner-party in the old days, where the food had been prepared by the best chefs and the wine imported from afar. Such simple pleasures! Some people were there simply to talk about their neighbours, others to discuss the price of Brussels Sprouts, some simply to hear another human voice.

Suddenly, there was the wailing of sirens, and two Word Police cars sped down the road towards us. We broke up and fled in all directions. Luckily, I managed to escape, but some were taken away. I suppose vigilantes from the group 'Watch Your Language!', who have been patrolling these well-off areas, had called in the police.

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10th April

Up north, I have heard, and in the universities, people have started to talk in foreign languages. French and German are commonly used, but there is a growing use of Finnish, Hungarian, Basque, Serbo-Croat, Rumanian. In some places, Latin and Ancient Greek have made a comeback. Gaelic is very popular, although badly pronounced and ill-used. The Government tax-assessors are sorely-tried to put a value on all the words being used. Some people are getting away with hours of conversation for peanuts. As an emergency measure, whole languages are being assessed for word-units - French is currently at 0.4 pence per unit for speaking, Finnish at 0.07, Swahili at 0.09, Tibetan at 0.005 (speech) or 0.003 (writing). The difficulty is to find out where one word ends and another begins, and the cheapest way of speaking is to rattle through an entire sentence of Patagonian as if it were all one word. Of course, you have to find a Patagonian to understand you - or correct you...

The United Nations has called an emergency session of its Security Council, at the request of the Norwegian Government. The Norwegians feel that their language is being ransacked by the British simply to provide a solution to a domestic British problem. A motion to censure the British Government has been seconded by the Germans and the Irish. The French have blockaded the Channel ports in retaliation. The Dutch are expected to follow suit by tomorrow morning. Ωηατ αβουτ Γρεεκ?

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15th April

Down the back-streets, sometimes door-to-door, there are men in raincoats and women with huge shopping-bags doing the rounds.

I had one this morning. I opened the door and nodded silently.

"I've got a load of second-hand words here, my friend," said the man with the collar of his coat up around his ears. He wore dark glasses even although it was pouring with rain, and a battered hat was down over his ears. "All collected from the Government's local word-collection dump."

I shook my head and tried to close the door. The man shoved his foot in the doorway to stop me.

"Real authenticated words here, my friend. Look at this batch - fifty second-hand pronouns (one very careful owner, a little old lady), twenty assorted prepositions, ten commonly-used adjectives - all sealed with the Government seal and licensed for re-use."

I looked at a dubious parcel which was bound up in pink ribbon and sealed with some grubby wax that a child of four could have made a neater job of. I shook my head again and reached for the telephone.

"Leave it out! I'm only trying to help you out, pal", muttered the man, as he ran off down the steps.

Scenes like this are to be seen everywhere now. Some of these black-marketeers have obviously got rich quick - they drive about in large shiny cars with chauffeurs and heavy-set companions.

I went to the theatre last night. Dull. The only actors were doing mime, and the stalls were practically empty. Nevertheless, all seventeen of us in the theatre clapped and cheered fit to burst, just for the joy of making some noise. The mime-artiste got a standing ovation lasting six minutes - but no 'Bravos'.

Came home and spent the evening with a pair of scissors and some back-numbers of the local free paper which the hamster had not yet chewed up for bedding.

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20th April

Things *have* got
MUCH WORSE in the *Past*

24 hours There are INFORMERS

everywhere.

My Diary IS not safe for MUCH *longer*

I must think of another
W A Y to keep

writing

THE GOVERNMENT *cannot*
last much longer THE UN is

about *to step in*

and
the Word y MEN

have formed an opposition

Party

and

are

GAINING

mass support

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21st Arpli

Luferac eb tsum. Tuoba seips. Ni em nrut lliw enoemos. Efas ton si yraid ym neve. Yadot ylsuoicipsus em ta gnikool saw rood txen Lebab Srm.

Writingbackwardsisnogood:

Couldl tyr jsut msi-sellping evry wrd thre si. Btu tht mkaes t vyer diifcult fro raeders. Governemtn begiining ot thnik f ohter wqys ot taks peepel. Ima geting desprate: haow loang kan th'other kepe ths upp? Wil enywun reid tho diery, afther oll?

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28th

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Premier Mai

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15rt Quantile

Jhree, goudly anquires. Aftsarali mahjah bot billah hagathrough!
Po jointy persimmal - ree quantistic gofor hangnuts. Po swirty
bullawhile, po loristidon whelkwise faw ree; terring frewdrops bot.
Wum happartic pom moristoid angouling trannic, ned dourangic
sporad. Po jointy unk thadwards, jhree! Curdysnaps bom bastle
nu yapheck daran. Po hugeouslic indomen swirty - vass ectodon
milanish! Qwert bot billah po whaming sillipoid juvats, po ned
durassily bars-niffle: ist gangilitic po jointy corrit...

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Author now in gaol for tax-evasion.