

Community highlights

Written by Cory Zaroni, Community Manager, The Conversation

The Conversation receives a lot of comments each day and you can't read everything. That's why we occasionally end the week with a selection of community highlights: comments we enjoyed or thought worth discussing.

[How the dictionary is totes taking up the vernacular](#)

Kate Burridge's article explains how dictionaries keep up with our ever changing vocabularies:

Vocabulary changes more than other aspects of language and lexicographers are constantly redrawing the exclusion boundary for marginal vocabulary items. "Yeah-no" has been around since the 1990s, but is only now appearing in dictionaries.

And while many original misspellings now have entries, such as "miniscule" (with its erroneous "i") and even "nucular", an entry for "accomodation" (with one "m") seems a long way off.

It's not easy for dictionary-makers. They are seen as the guardians of the language and when they take on board expressions like "yeah-no" and "nucular", we hear howls about declining standards. Yet people will usually discard dictionaries if they don't keep up-to-date.

Thomas Johnson [raised](#) a questions about how dictionaries can (and should) approach common errors in writing and speech:

This article raises an interesting question about how to treat common grammatical or spelling errors. As dictionaries need to be informative sources of language usage, then it could be argued that even mistakes such as 'miniscule' and 'nucular' should be included. However, this would defeat the purpose of providing a guide to correct usage.

Community highlights

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Instead, it would be better to have a separate dictionary of misuse. An online guide would be ideal. Perhaps something like this but much more comprehensive. For example, where you could look up 'should' and find the error 'should of' along with its correction.

<http://public.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html>

Kate [replied](#) with the following:

Most dictionaries will indicate when a usage is considered non-standard. The Oxford English Dictionary for example describes 'nucular' as "a colloquial pronunciation (widely criticized by usage guides)".

But the problem is — when does misuse become use? History shows that slang — misuse, if that's how you'd prefer to describe it — will typically become part of the repertoire of the standard, if it survives. Inevitably, this creates a murky time when the expression falls into a kind of linguistic no man's land — not clearly 'misuse', but not yet 'use' either.

That's why early dictionaries make for such interesting reading. The entries labeled unfit for general use in Samuel Johnson's dictionary (1755) were words like abominably, nowadays, bamboozle and novel — all wholly respectable today.

[Man Up: inspired genius or half-baked celebrity expertise?](#)

Steve Ellen provided a review of Man Up, a new three-part series exploring men and suicide:

Overall, Man Up is well worth watching. It's both a TV show and an experiment — a description of the problem of male stoicism, and an attempt to change it. It is narrow in its focus, but it's a true insiders view — Worland is about as Aussie as you can get and has a refreshing, honest

Community highlights

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and genuine approach.

Also, a team of scientists are sitting behind the scenes doing the research to see if this approach works. It's nice to know that in world where opinion seems to trump evidence, there are still people who back up their ideas with science. I liked that it's a curious mix of celebrity, culture and science.

Mairi Rowan left a [comment](#) asking about the possible link between suicide and feelings of control:

I wonder whether there has been any research done on the requirement of masculine culture that men be 'in control', and its relationship to suicide.

This factor has been shown to be a major contributor to the most destructive expressions of feelings by men, violence against women, children, and animals.

This irrational expectation of anybody, that they be at all times in control of themselves and others, to say nothing of the imponderables of workplaces, climate, and economy, is enough to drive anyone to drink. Yet, it continues as a fantasy ideal of success in our culture.

Are men just accepting their failure to control, and killing themselves, often along with their children, as a final act of control?

If so, some serious attention needs to be directed to what boys and young men learn about being human.

Glen Poole left two replies. The [first](#) discussed male homicide-suicide:

Community highlights

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Murder-Homicide is a tragic and thankfully rare occurrence as was covered in [The Conversation previously](#) :

“Australia’s yearly homicide-suicide rate, which takes population size into account, equates to fewer than one death per million people, on average. This is comparable with other Commonwealth countries such as New Zealand, England and Wales, and Canada.”

The main risk factors for male suicide are mood disorders, unemployment, relationship separation and alcohol/substance abuse.

The [second](#) addressed Mairi’s question about control:

Good question re: “control” by the way.

Yes research has been done and is referenced in the article.

Professor Jane Purkis’ research group has completed a study of almost 14,000 Australian men (due for publication next year).

It used Mahalik’s “ [Development of the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory](#) ”.

The aim was to measure correlation between aspects of masculinity and suicidality. This included measuring dominance and “power over women”.

According to a presentation made at the National Suicide Prevention Conference in Canberra, this research found no significant correlation between dominance, “power over women” or any of the other measures of masculinity....and suicidality.....with one exception.

Community highlights

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As the article above says correctly, only “one defining characteristic of masculinity, self-reliance, is a key predictor of suicidal thinking”.

[Under the Milky Way: what a new map reveals about our galaxy](#)

Lister Staveley-Smith explained a “new view” of the Milky Way and what it means for our understanding of the galaxy:

Today sees the opening of a new chapter of discovery with the release of a brand new view of the Milky Way, published in the journal *Astronomy and Astrophysics*.

The map stems from a decade of analysis and thousands of hours of observing time on the 64-metre CSIRO Parkes radio telescope in New South Wales, Australia, and the 100-metre Max-Planck radio telescope in Effelsberg, Germany.

The outcome is a brand new hydrogen image of the Milky Way and its environment with a level of detail that is at least four times better than previous images.

Chris Booker [asked](#) what seems to be smart “dumb question”:

“the complete path of the stream of hydrogen being pulled from the Magellanic Clouds by the Milky Way.”

Okay, dumb question - why is the stream of hydrogen being pulled in that direction. The Magellanic clouds look much closer to the section of the Milky Way that is depicted as green to the right of the image above. If anything, I would have thought any gas would be pulled towards the closest part of the Milky Way. Is the section depicted in purple so much denser or

Community highlights

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something?

Even looking at the globe animation in the embedded video, or the linked Scientific American article, it seems quite odd for that hydrogen stream to take such a long route.

Lister [posted](#) the following answer:

That's been a matter of debate among astronomers for many years. In theory, a tide should 'pull' gas out one side of the Clouds and 'push' it from the other side.

But the 'leading' arm, which is not even visible in the images above, contains much less neutral hydrogen.

The difference could be due the hot halo of the Milky Way which is stripping and ionising the gas clouds more on the leading side than the trailing side.

[**Meet Savannasaurus, Australia's newest titanosaur**](#)

Finally, Phil Bell introduced us to Australia's newest dinosaur:

Enter Savannasaurus, Australia's newest face in the world of dinosaurs, a long-necked plant-eater named by Poropat and his team today in the journal Scientific Reports. The new skeleton includes most of the vertebrae from the back, parts of the hips, forelimb and a scattering of ribs, foot bones, neck and tail vertebrae.

It was a fairly small animal as far as sauropods are concerned, perhaps measuring around

Community highlights

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12-15m long based on the published drawings, but belongs to a group known ominously as the titanosaurs, which were most common in Asia and South America.

Bruce Miller [floated](#) a name change:

I think Michael Rowland's (ABC morning show) suggestion of renaming the discovery Brucasaurus is an excellent one. Is it too late to change or are we stuck with the name Savannasaurus?

But Phil [explained](#) why that's unlikely to happen:

Naming any new species (either living or fossil, plant or animal) follows a very strict set of guidelines. Once the name is formalised, as with Savannasaurus, the name is here to stay unless there is cause to say that the species doesn't exist. For example, the well-known Brontosaurus is now defunct as it has been argued that it is actually the same as an animal called Apatosaurus, which was named some years earlier. In this case, the first-named takes precedence.

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