Research at UPEI

The English Department
An Interview with Prof. Robert Campbell

By Sam Okello

There's more to the English Department than meets the eye. In an interview with Chairman Robert Campbell, one finds out what occurs behind the scenes in the research area.

GEM: I understand a wide variety of research goes on in the English Department.

PROF. CAMPBELL: Yes, tehre is a considerable variety also. We have people edit plays, compile dictionaries, write critical articles and reviews, and publish creative works in areas as diverse as Linguistics, Middle English, and comtemporary literature.

GEM: How many full-time teachers do you have in the department?

PROF. CAMPBELL: We have ten full-time teachers, and because one year of English is compulsory at UPEI we have no trouble finding students to teach. Of course, we also offer advanced English courses to English majors and English Honours students.

GEM: Tell me something about specific research and creative projects now going on in your department.

PROF. CAMPBELL: One project that has generated some interest locally is Terry Pratt's work on PEI English. He has produced a dictionary of Island English which will probably be published in a year or so.

An entirely different kind of research is being conducted by Michael Foley in the field of Middle English. He produces meticulously researched bibliographic articles which have reached an internatinal audience, but because they are so specialized would not be of much interest locally.

On the creative writing side, both Frank Ledwell and John Smith have published books within the past year, and both are working actively on new material.

I can honestly say that these are just examples. Despite the heavy teaching and marking load that members of our department carry because of compulsory English courses, they are all ingaged in research of one kind or another. This doesn't make us unique within the university by any means, but I am proud of the work that is going on.

GEM: Will the proposed heavy costs of renovating buildings at UPEI cut into research funds?

PROF. CAMPBELL: There is a fund raising campaign currently being conducted to provide money for the renovations you are thinking of, so money will not be coming from things like research. Often professors receive research grants from agencies outside the university as well. If there is a problem in research funding at the moment it is in the attitude of governments, who sometimes seem to have difficulty appreciating the importance of research, probably because the benefits are often long-term rather than immediate.

Abroad Thoughts From Home

Bilingual is not always a good thing...

By Kaberi Dasgupta

"Mom was furious - she really jharooed me."

"Jharooed me?" What I was witnessing was the rebuilding of the English language.

In India, being "bilingual" is not a state worthy of praise; it is even, perhaps, a fact to be hidden. The most estranged of the sidewalk-dwellers (of which there is an abundance, thanks to the economic situation) knows something of at least three languages. In Calcutta, for instance, he knows Bengali, the provincial language; Hindi, the national language; and a smattering of Engish (two hundred years of British occupation has some longterm effects).

While the poor are often illiterate, the high-rise snob is at ease in all three languages, whether speaking, reading, or writing. In addition he may be studying a fourth tongue, such as German or French.

Hence words like "jharooed." With such repertoire of languages, boundaries between them begin to fade, and a true language laboratory is created. "To jharoo" is "to scold or admonish." If my deductions are correct, it originates from the Hindi word for broom. A colourful concept, isn't it?

A feature of Indian English that puzzled my sisters and me was the use of the word "yeah."

"It's a lovely day, yeah."

"He's nauseating, yeah."

Our first hypothesis was that it was analogous to the use of the French "non." (C'est bon, non?") However, clauses like the following did not quite fit the pattern:

"Let's go to a movie, yeah."

"How are you feeling, yeah?"

The mystery was solved while a friend and I were writing a serial together (so as to add excitement to the summer holidays). She ended one of the character's questions with the word "yaar." When she read the word aloud, she shortened the "r-sound." Ever alter, I noted it and consulted my father regarding it. It is the Hindi word for "friend" or "pal."

It was actually the Hindi language that was the root of most if my problems. Bengali I can understand and speak and even read, albeit at the level of an eight-year-old. Hindi, however, I was absolutely uneasy with, a fact of which my friends enjoyed taking advantage.

ONe word that I quickly picked up, however, was the word "Shadhi" (wedding), a topic which my friends delighted in discussing. This piece of vocabulary proved to be of great use when I was forced to have conversations with my friends' grandparents, many of whom chose to communicate with me in Hindi, whether from necessity or pitifullness I am uncertain. I would generally, at most, hazard a word in the negative or affirmative guided only by the few Hindi words that resembled Bengali words. However, whenever the word "shadhi" cropped up, my answer in the negative was so vehement that the grandchildren were usually summoned for explanation.

Of course, I was not the only one having comprehension difficulties. Aware of the fact that other's might have problems understanding English, I generally slowed down and eliminated most peculiar colloquial phrases. When addressing members of my family however, I did not take this precaution. After hearing a short conversation I had with my father, one of my father's friends began shaking his head.

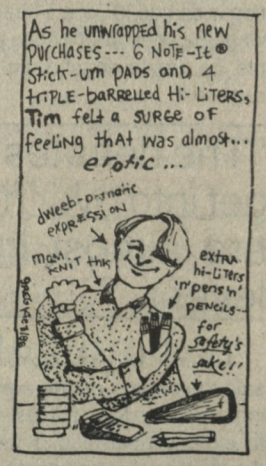
"What's the matter?" asked Dad in concern.

"It's hopeless... hopeless"

"What is?"

"If I can't understand a word your daughter says, what's my daughter going to do?"

Family consulations must have ensued, for on our visit to their house, his daughter adamantly restricted the conversation to Bengali.



The new and improved Gem

By Sam Okello

Anyone concerned about news around UPEI and other Canadian colleges should be pleased to read the new and improved Gem.

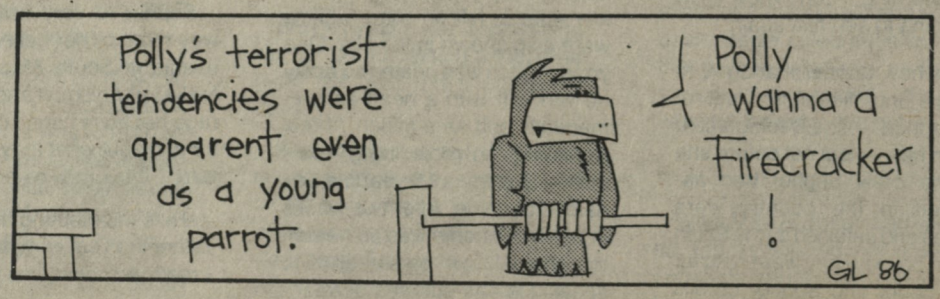
The Gem serves to inform the reader and find the truth, wherever it may lead, in the quest for a demographic and open society.

The role of the press at UPEI does not favour any particular ethnic, business, or political party interest and certainly does not serve the state.

The Gem is becoming a popular sensation and is now pioneering in investigative reporting of news on campus. Such should be the role of the press in a free society. Its duty is to inform and help shape public opinion, raise questions and aim at new and better directions.

Controversy challenged this role last semester when the article "why Beer is Better then Some Women," purported to be sexist, aroused critical but responsible public reaction. Commentaries stormed The Gem — seen by other people as provocative and sometimes searing indictments of the way things work in a society.

Nevertheless, The Gem staff did not ignore the criticism. The Gem is a free press, indespensible in its impact. It aims to develop and maintain democracy. It investigates and exposes news of mutual interest.

For an inquiring mind, join The Gem. We've got it all.

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