

REFLECTIONS ON *GRAMMAR AT THE COALFACE*

Response by Rodney Huddleston

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I am writing to respond, as the unnamed retired academic referred to therein, to the Management Committee's and Author's statements published on pp. 3–4 of the September 2008 issue of *Words'Worth* in the section entitled 'Reflections on *Grammar at the Coalface*'. It is unfortunate that so much time has passed since these statements appeared, but I had to delay my response because I received a letter early in October 2008 informing me that Dr Ferguson intended to commence legal proceedings against me for defamation. She did not in fact proceed beyond the initial letter and a clarification of it that my lawyer requested, but we were not told that no further action would be taken, and I thought it would be best to delay my response until matters were settled. The defamation case has now lapsed and I am accordingly free to resume my efforts to warn ETAQ members about the serious and numerous defects in Dr Ferguson's first two Coalface articles. It would be quite wrong to say that it is now too late to pursue this matter: a Statute of Limitations applies to defamation proceedings, but not – fortunately – to the correction of error. The articles were presented as a teaching resource on English grammar and as such are akin to a mini-textbook that teachers might keep and use over a period of years in the preparation of classroom material: I feel I have a professional duty, therefore, to do what I can to help reduce the risk of the misinformation in these articles being passed on to school students.

PART A. RESPONSE TO THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE'S STATEMENT

1. THE ISSUE OF ETAQ'S RESPONSIBILITY

The Committee's position on this matter is stated as follows:

The 'Grammar at the Coalface' articles do not constitute a teaching resource issued or officially endorsed by ETAQ. Our journal *Words'Worth* exists to provide a forum for the sharing of ideas about English teaching in schools. Unlike the AATE journal, *English in Australia*, ours is not an academically 'refereed' one and contributors are generally practising teachers.

The inside front cover of every issue carries the reminder that: 'The views expressed in signed articles and reviews are not necessarily those of The English Teachers Association of Queensland.' As is only to be expected, ETAQ members have differing views on many aspects of their profession. It is therefore not at all uncommon for *Words'Worth* to publish articles expressing opposing views about English teaching.

...

ETAQ has adopted no official position in relation to the details of any of the Coalface materials or related articles commenting on them, and the Management Committee does not consider that it would be appropriate to do so.

I have three comments to make here.

(a) The principle that the views published in *Words'Worth* articles are not necessarily those of the Association is uncontentious: this principle will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to any comparable journal. It should also be uncontentious, however, that ETAQ has a responsibility to uphold standards appropriate for the journal of a professional teachers' organisation. My contention is that the two Coalface articles 'The structural basics' and 'Functional elements in a clause' fall

well below such a standard: the amount and kind of error, inconsistency and confusion in them is such that they should be withdrawn, with members being properly alerted to their unreliability.

Take, for example, the analysis of *Sam's* (in *Sam's fastest racing results*) as a possessive pronoun. It is not sufficient to say that ETAQ doesn't necessarily agree with this: ETAQ should know that this is a serious error and should have it corrected. It is not a matter on which it is reasonable to say: 'We don't agree with your analysis, but we respect your right to hold this view and express it in our journal.' The possessive pronoun analysis is simply untenable – and the author does not even alert readers to its unorthodoxy, let alone attempt to justify it or reconcile it with the earlier account of pronouns as forming a closed class.

My article 'Problems with the Coalface Grammar', published on the ETAQ website, provided a lengthy and detailed (but certainly not exhaustive) catalogue of the error, inconsistency and confusion in the two articles; in preparing my defence for the defamation case I wrote a new and expanded version, 'Defects in the "Coalface Grammar"', which works through the articles page by page, quoting defective passages and explaining why they are objectionable. This latter version is available at <http://ling.ed.ac.uk/grammar/CoalfaceDefects.pdf>; it demonstrates how numerous and serious are the defects in the two Coalface articles.

My criticism of ETAQ is not that the articles were allowed to appear in the first place but that after I drew attention to their defects action has not been taken to ensure that the articles are withdrawn, properly corrected or revised. In the March 2008 issue of *Words'Worth* Dr Ferguson acknowledged four errors and, following the publication of the article in *The Australian*, she acknowledged two others in the September issue, but these represent a small proportion of the errors catalogued (and the amendment of *a pair* to *pair of* as an example of a numerative or quantity adjective merely replaces one serious error by another): it is not acceptable that teachers should be given to believe that the articles otherwise represent a reasonable view of an outline of English grammar from a functional perspective.

(b) The two Coalface articles I have criticised were not just ordinary *Words'Worth* articles. They were explicitly presented as a teaching resource for members of the Association. Moreover, they were part of a large-scale project organised by ETAQ comprising eight articles, two appearing in each issue of the 2007 volume of *Words'Worth*. In the Editorial to the first number, the editorial team (Lenore Ferguson, Greg Howes, Ray McGuire) write:

For the past twenty years, functional grammar has been promoted in Queensland schools, and professional organisations and individuals have conducted seminars and workshops to assist teachers. Follow-up messages show that many teachers are still uncertain how to include functional grammar in classrooms. This year, ETAQ has decided to include regular classroom-level support in this area through this journal. These will be prepared and/or co-ordinated by Lenore Ferguson and Ray McGuire.

This indicates a significant involvement by ETAQ, and the Management Committee's claim that the teaching resource was not issued or officially endorsed by ETAQ needs to be evaluated in this context. Certainly it makes it more important than might otherwise be the case for ETAQ to ensure that errors are corrected. If, in response to requests from its members, arrangements are made for them to be provided with a teaching resource which turns out to be highly defective, ETAQ can't disclaim responsibility for rectifying the resultant situation.

(c) The statement that 'ETAQ has adopted no official position in relation to the details of any of the Coalface materials' is at best misleading, given that the President has repeatedly expressed the view that there is very little wrong with the articles. Note in particular that in the article

published in *The Australian* on 13 June 2008 he didn't distance ETAQ from the Coalface articles, saying that views expressed in them aren't necessarily those of ETAQ and that it is the author herself who holds the copyright – he is quoted as saying, rather: 'If coming upon these couple of minor inaccuracies caused teachers to be having conversations about grammar in staff rooms then I would see that as not a bad thing'. This echoes what he had said to me in an email on 23 April 2008; I had written to him (before the appearance of the March 2008 issue of *Words'Worth*) saying how bad I considered the articles to be, giving a sample of half a dozen serious errors, and he replied: 'I do not agree that a few errors in Lenore's articles constitute "a most unsatisfactory state of affairs" at all. It would of course have been preferable if the errors had not been there but if they serve to generate some discussion and debate in school staff rooms about grammar then I think that could potentially be a good thing.' Later, after the publication of the material in *The Australian*, he wrote in an email reply of 20 June 2008 to David Vaux, a correspondent from the United States: 'The few real errors that appeared in the ETAQ journal **last year** were ones of proofreading in moving through several versions of a document. They were acknowledged and corrected in the next issue.'

These statements by Mr Collins, speaking in his capacity as President of ETAQ, are quite indefensible. The third of the statements is particularly explicit and as such can easily be demonstrated to be false, for – as noted above – Dr Ferguson herself later acknowledged two further errors in the September 2008 *Words'Worth*. Moreover, one of these two errors, the classification of *a pair* as an adjective, was included among the half-dozen examples that I had specifically drawn to Mr Collins' attention in the email mentioned above that I had sent him in April. When he sent me a copy of his email to Mr Vaux I drew his attention to a sample of striking errors that had not been acknowledged and challenged him to demonstrate that of the many items discussed in Part 1 of my website paper 'Problems with the Coalface Grammar' only the four corrected in the March 2008 *Words'Worth* were real errors. Not surprisingly, he did not attempt to defend the indefensible; but nor did he admit that his statement was false: he made no response at all.

Mr Collins' statements completely misrepresent the scale and seriousness of the defects in the Coalface articles. It is not a question of merely a couple of minor inaccuracies or merely proofreading errors: I ask you to evaluate these statements with reference to the catalogue of errors in the web document mentioned above, 'Defects in "Coalface Grammar"'. It was a disservice to teachers to distribute to them so defective a teaching resource as the two Coalface articles, but to make a public statement to the effect that (contrary to the evidence I have presented) it merely contains a couple of minor inaccuracies, is to compound that disservice.

2. WHY I FOUND IT NECESSARY TO DRAW PUBLIC ATTENTION TO THE DEFECTS IN THE COALFACE GRAMMAR.

The Management Committee go on to say:

The brief burst of negative publicity in the national press ... was ... quite unnecessary.

Certainly it could have been avoided – if Dr Ferguson or Mr Collins had appreciated the seriousness of my criticisms and taken appropriate action to correct the defects in the two articles. As things turned out, however, I came to the view that neither the author nor the President would acknowledge that members had been given a highly unreliable teaching resource and that I therefore needed to go outside ETAQ to try and have this situation rectified. Let me give a short summary of how matters unfolded.

In July 2007 a member of ETAQ, concerned at the errors she herself had noted in the first Coalface article, asked me to have a look at it: I was dismayed to find that it contained so much error, inconsistency and confusion. Functional grammar is a difficult and complex theory, and if teachers are to base their classes on this model they need a clear and accurate guide; in my professional view, the extensive misinformation in the Coalface material was bound to confuse

them and make their task a great deal more difficult.

With a view to trying to mitigate the effects of the published article, I contacted Dr Ferguson, suggesting that I write a reply to appear in *Words'Worth*. She welcomed my comments, agreeing that the work 'must not be in error' and acknowledging that she was 'probably not the ideal person who should be preparing such material' (email of 26 July 2007). By this time the second article had appeared, and it was arranged that my reply would cover both of them – and that for the third and fourth of her scheduled articles I would send comments on pre-publication drafts.

I was conscious that the numerous and serious defects in the Coalface articles would be a source of embarrassment to the author and endeavoured to handle the matter with tact. When I submitted the first version of my article I asked that it be regarded as a draft and that input from Dr Ferguson would be welcome, but she did not take up this suggestion. I might add that in this version I mentioned her name only twice, both in a laudatory context: for the rest I referred throughout to 'the Coalface Grammar'.

Because there was so much error, inconsistency and confusion in the Coalface material this version of my article was much longer than is normally permitted in *Words'Worth* articles: I believed it would be more useful to include explanation and discussion rather than giving a bare listing. In her response of 30 November Dr Ferguson made the following proposal:

Firstly, I suggest that you [RH] prepare a shorter version of your *Remarks* for *Words'Worth* – up to 2 pages ..., bearing in mind the second part of the proposal.

Secondly, we develop material for a webpage containing:

- a brief overview of Standard English Grammar (mainly your responsibility)
- a brief overview of systemic Functional Grammar (mainly my responsibility)
- notes on aligning both grammars (joint responsibility – many of your comments in *Remarks* will contribute to the planning of this component)

The first part of this proposal I regarded as quite unsatisfactory: two pages was clearly far too little to cover the extensive defects in the Coalface articles. After some discussion we in due course agreed that I should write a fairly short article for *Words'Worth* and a longer one to be posted on the ETAQ website.

As for the second part of the proposal, where 'Standard English Grammar' is Dr Ferguson's curious name for the approach to grammar underlying *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Rodney Huddleston & Geoffrey K. Pullum et al.: Cambridge University Press 2002), I wrote a twenty-page article entitled 'A Brief Overview of English Syntax: Based on *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*', which was posted on the ETAQ website, but nothing came of the components of the proposal given in the second and third bullet points.

On 5 January 2008 I submitted a short article for *Words'Worth* and the following day I sent a few pages from the website paper I was preparing, conceiving of it as a supplement to the *Words'Worth* article. Dr Ferguson had meanwhile suggested that we should meet together, and I visited her at her home on 9 January. She summarily dismissed the *Words'Worth* article as too negative: it focused on a sample of errors in the Coalface Grammar. Instead she wanted the material from the website paper to be made the basis for the journal publication: it was more positive in that I had space to present an account of functional grammar's distinction between functions and classes. It was agreed that I would deal with this topic together with two others, complements and adjective phrases. I sent in a new version of the *Words'Worth* article on 14 January showing how my account of these three topics enabled one to resolve some of the problems that had arisen in the Coalface Grammar. Dr Ferguson objected to this version on the grounds that it still contained specific criticism of the Coalface Grammar: she claimed that the combination of information-giving and criticism was confusing and likely to be offputting. What was needed, she said, was a sharp separation between information-giving, in the journal article,

and criticism, in the website article: this was apparently the arrangement that had been approved by the ETAQ President. And this is what we ended up with: I wrote a third version of the article in which there is no mention of any specific error and produced a revision of the website article detailing my criticisms.

A number of other academics had been invited to write short articles for *Words'Worth* on other aspects of the whole Coalface project, and in the course of further email discussion Dr Ferguson told me that she and Mr McGuire would be writing responses to the journal and website papers, and I asked her to let me see a draft of what she would say about mine. She ignored this request. I was therefore surprised and shocked, when the March 2008 issue was published in April, to read what she did say.

In the first place, she had a paragraph headed *Errata* (p. 57) which acknowledged and corrected just four, less than ten percent, of the errors I had catalogued in the web paper. This implied that there were no other errors than these four – an implication that was formulated as an explicit assertion by Mr Collins, as quoted above, and by Dr Ferguson herself in the defamation documents. Secondly, she said (p. 41) that my web paper ‘identified some errors/oversights in the classification of “structural elements” ... which appear as errata [in the paragraph on p. 57]’. Thus readers were not directed to my web article in order to find corrections to the Coalface material, as I had expected, since all errors were said to have been corrected in the *Errata* paragraph of *Words'Worth*. Instead, my web article was said to require readers ‘to have extensive knowledge of traditional, structural and functional grammars’ (p. 41) and was recommended to teachers ‘who are interested in comparing similarities and differences in traditional, structural and functional grammars, and in identifying areas of possible confusion’ (p. 57). Such remarks are not likely to motivate many readers to consult the article. We thus had a situation where all specific criticisms had been removed from my *Words'Worth* article and relegated to a web article that had been presented as suitable for a highly restricted audience.

I regarded this as a completely unacceptable outcome. After months of work and discussion Dr Ferguson had acknowledged just four errors, but at no time during the long period of negotiation had she given any hint that she rejected the great majority of my specific criticisms. Nor has she given any specific grammatical arguments to support her position.

Teachers were thus still in possession of a teaching resource telling them that *Sam's* is a possessive pronoun, that *a pair* and *set of* are adjectives, and so on. I felt I had a professional duty to continue my efforts to rectify this situation. It seemed clear that nothing would be achieved by approaching the President on this matter, for he had already made it clear to me, as noted above, that he thought there was very little wrong with the Coalface material. I decided to wait for a while to see if anything came of the proposal mentioned above for Dr Ferguson to produce a brief overview of systemic Functional Grammar: the object of this of course was to provide a corrected account to supersede the defective Coalface articles. By the end of May nothing had appeared and I correctly inferred that the proposal had been dropped: it was clear, therefore, that I would have to go beyond ETAQ itself to seek a remedy. Can it be denied that this was necessary?

3. MY STATUS AS A NON-MEMBER OF ETAQ

Mr Collins appears to attach considerable importance to the issue of whether a critic is a member of ETAQ or not: he raised this in his reply to David Vaux mentioned above, and also in a reply to Professor LaPolla, President of the Australian Linguistics Association, who had written to Dr Ferguson urging her to follow my advice. The Management Committee's statement likewise says:

This person [RH] is not, and never has been, a member of ETAQ.

Frankly, I find this preoccupation with membership status parochial and irrelevant. The quality of the Coalface articles is not a matter that exclusively affects ETAQ: they constitute a resource for use in the preparation of teaching materials in Queensland schools, and it is thus a matter of

concern to the public at large that this resource should be sound and reliable. What does it matter, for example, that the person who pointed out that *Sam's* had been incorrectly classified as a possessive pronoun was not a member of ETAQ? What is important is that the error should be corrected – and that has still not been done. And similarly for the other errors that have gone unacknowledged.

The statement goes on:

Even though the association was under no obligation to do so, space was provided in the *Words'Worth* issue for March of this year for the publication of an article by this person and, in addition, two other articles were loaded onto the ETAQ website.

I would argue, on the contrary, that any association IS under an obligation to correct serious errors in articles published in its journal. Furthermore, the *Words'Worth* article was written in response to an invitation by the editor as part of a collection of comments on the Coalface material as a whole. And, as noted in §2, the Overview web article was likewise written in response to a proposal of hers.

PART B. RESPONSE TO THE AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

4. THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TWO FURTHER ERRORS

Dr Ferguson here acknowledges two errors not included in the *Errata* paragraph published in the March 2008 *Words'Worth*: the classification of *a pair* as an adjective and the inconsistency in saying within the space of five lines that the largest unit on the rank scale was, first, the clause complex and, then, the clause. There are three points I would make on this matter.

(a) I drew attention to both of these errors in the two versions of the website paper, and to the first of them also in the first two versions of the *Words'Worth* article and in an email of 3 January 2008 to Dr Ferguson in which I expressed my concern that she had not appreciated the seriousness of the defects in the Coalface articles. The acknowledgement of them in the September issue thus raises the question of how they came to be omitted from the March 2008 *Errata* paragraph. She calls them 'proofing oversights', which excludes the possibility of her having changed her mind as to whether or not they are errors, so they must simply have been overlooked in spite of my explicitly drawing attention to them. This seriously undermines the credibility of her *Errata* list: if she unintentionally omitted *a pair* from the list after being told about it five times, how many other errors were similarly unintentionally omitted?

(b) The statement says *a pair* 'should have been presented as *pair of* or a *pair of*', but this is to replace one error by another: *pair of* is no more an adjective than *a pair*. This is the same error as classifying *set of* as an adjective, and in the website article I give grammatical evidence showing that *set of* is not an adjective. For Dr Ferguson to now say that *pair of* is an adjective too implies either that she has forgotten my argument or that she rejects it. In the latter case she should give her reasons: readers are surely likely to be confused by finding *pair of* in a list of adjectives with no explanation as to why it is so classified. (This error is discussed in item [46] of the 'Defects' document.)

(c) In a letter from her lawyer dated 31 October 2008 it is said that Dr Ferguson 'adheres to the view that all errors in her articles (of which she is presently aware) were corrected in the September 2007 and March 2008 issues of *Words'Worth*'. Her acknowledgement of these two further errors in the September 2008 issue (i.e. after the report in *The Australian*) shows this view to be manifestly untenable.

5. THE CLAIM THAT THERE ARE NO FURTHER ERRORS.

In acknowledging those two errors, Dr Ferguson writes:

Amongst the `errors' nominated in the media attack, three appear as errata in the March issue this year, and two others were actually errors. The remainder appear to be the result of:

- an apparent perception that my brief articles should provide exhaustive details, or
- differences in perspectives and purposes – between structural grammar ... on the one hand, and traditional grammar ... and functional grammar ... on the other.

This claim is completely false. It is effectively the same as that made more generally (i.e. with reference to the full set of items catalogued in my website article rather than the subset mentioned in *The Australian*) in the later defamation documents, except that the latter, as noted above, do not even acknowledge the two listed in the September *Words'Worth*.

In neither case was any example given of an alleged error that could be discounted for one or other of the above reasons. Her lawyer's letter of 31 October says that she `is not interested in engaging in a point by point analysis of the ... alleged "errors" identified by' me and rejects any `moves to have the parties go back over matters previously discussed'. But there had been no previous discussion in which she had rejected all the other errors I had catalogued. The letter talks of our having `agreed to disagree', but we hadn't. How could I `agree to disagree' as to whether or not *Sam's* is a possessive pronoun, for example? Under the natural interpretation of that expression this would mean that I had said I disagreed with her analysis but recognised that she had reasons for adopting it. But she never gave any arguments for her analysis; she never challenged my classification of it as an error and we never discussed it: I had no wish to embarrass her by asking her why she had made such an obvious and elementary error. And the same applies to virtually all of the errors I had identified. In our reply to this letter of 11 November, my lawyer wrote:

If Dr Ferguson wishes to demonstrate that the two Coalface articles are not riddled with errors she needs to do more than make the general assertions contained in your letter of 31 October 2008. What is needed is a careful examination of the numerous specific errors identified by my client, with evidence and argument to establish that only a small minority are genuine errors. Dr Ferguson has never shown any willingness to engage in this kind of exercise.

It is reasonable to infer that a major reason for Dr Ferguson's failure to proceed with the defamation case was that she could not provide any such demonstration.

In the revised catalogue of defects I have in a number of cases addressed the issue of whether an error might be discounted on one or other of the above grounds. Here I will make just four comments.

(a) In late June 2008 I wrote to the President of the Australian Linguistics Society, Professor Randy LaPolla, to ask him to look at the Coalface articles and my website critique of them and if he thought it appropriate to write a letter of support for me to use in my efforts to have the errors corrected. Instead of sending a letter to me he wrote directly to Dr Ferguson. I should add that I had had no previous contact with Professor LaPolla and that he had a long experience of teaching functional grammar at University level, making him an ideal person to evaluate the Coalface articles.

His letter strongly supports my position and explicitly rejects the idea that my criticisms are due to my taking a different perspective:

he [RH] has a very good grasp of the theory and his criticisms of your articles ... were

largely from the viewpoint of [functional grammar], and so were essentially the same as mine, and not criticisms that could be said to be due to him having a different theoretical stance.

Dr Ferguson not only ignored Professor LaPolla's advice to replace the two Coalface articles by a corrected version, but failed to mention in her *Words'Worth* statement that he rejected the claim that she was making about theoretical perspectives.

(b) A good many of the Coalface errors involve misunderstandings or misrepresentations of functional grammar on the part of Dr Ferguson herself. One might think from the above quotation, for example, that she thinks that my criticism of the classification of *Sam's* as a possessive pronoun stems from my failure to look at it from a functional perspective. But functional grammar doesn't analyse it in that way any more than any other modern or traditional approach. According to functional grammar, *Sam's results* is a nominal group containing another nominal group within it: *Sam's* is a possessive nominal group which is rankshifted to function as Deictic in the structure of the larger nominal group. Deictic is functional grammar's term for the function most commonly filled by determiners, such as *the, these, some*, and so on. Thus in the first instance *Sam's results* has the same structure as *these results*. Functional grammar recognises, therefore, that a single function can be filled by expressions from different classes – in this case, possessive nominal group on the one hand, determiner on the other. Dr Ferguson misses this essential point, and tries to account for the functional similarity between *Sam's* and *these* by saying that *Sam's* is not only a possessive pronoun but also a determiner. But that doesn't make sense, for determiner is the name of a class, not a function, and as such is mutually exclusive with pronoun: leaving aside cases of ambiguity, no particular instance of a given word can belong simultaneously to two different parts of speech. Dr Ferguson doesn't give a proper functional account of noun group structure, and hence has not provided for a correct functional description of *Sam's results*.

I would add that I compared the functional grammar and Coalface analyses of possessives in the second version of my *Words'Worth* article. As noted above, Dr Ferguson rejected this version but in doing so she offered to revise it herself in accordance with her requirement that there be no specific criticism of the Coalface Grammar. I didn't accept her version (received on 20 January 2008), but the interesting thing about it in the present context is that she chose to call it 'Omissions with the [Coalface] Grammar' – in particular, she was admitting that the Coalface Grammar omitted to provide an explanation of functional grammar's distinction between functions and classes. Yet it is an absolutely fundamental feature of the theory: functional grammar is so called because it insists on the need to describe constructions as combinations of functions, not just classes, regarding the former as more important, more relevant to meaning. Dr Ferguson's failure to deal with this contrast systematically is the source of a fair number of errors and her admission of this omission undermines her subsequent claim that it was me who was not adopting a functional grammar perspective.

(c) I likewise reject her claim that some of my criticisms could be discounted because they unreasonably expected her to go into 'exhaustive detail' in a short overview. I will distinguish between two types of case where I criticise the Coalface Grammar for its failure to cover various grammatical phenomena. One type is illustrated in its failure to provide a description at word group or phrase rank for expressions like *very large* in, say, *It was very large* – i.e. an adjective accompanied by dependents. Dr Ferguson has no class of adjective group comparable to noun group (a noun + its dependents), an adverb group (an adverb + its dependents), and so on. The reason why she has no class of adjective group is no doubt that functional grammar doesn't either – but in functional grammar *very large* in the above example does have a classification: it is a nominal group. A nominal group is a nominal together with any dependents it may have, and nominal is a class covering adjectives as well as nouns. Dr Ferguson hasn't adopted this concept

of nominal and talks of noun groups, not nominal groups; in itself this may be a perfectly reasonable decision, but she hasn't realised that since a noun group has a noun as its head she needs to introduce a further class of adjective group for groups with an adjective as head. This omission is an obvious error; it can't be discounted on the grounds that I'm expecting an exhaustive description of adjective groups: she simply doesn't introduce the concept at all.

The second type of case is illustrated in my criticism of the Coalface statement that imperative clauses are DEFINED by the absence of a subject (more fully, by the absence of a subject and a finite element). Imperative clauses in fact quite often include a subject: *You have a nice day*, *Don't you be so sure!*, *Nobody move*, and so on. Whether examples of this kind should be included in a brief overview is debatable: the point, rather, is that they should not be excluded by definition. Why say that imperatives can't contain a subject, which is obviously false, an error, when you can so easily say that imperatives usually don't contain a subject, which is true?

(d) Many of the errors in the Coalface Grammar are a matter of internal inconsistency. For example, as I pointed out in my initial email to Dr Ferguson, it says on one page that prepositions appear as head words in prepositional phrases and then on the next page that prepositional phrases have no head. The claims about exhaustive detail and different perspectives are completely irrelevant to errors of this kind.

In summary, Dr Ferguson has not identified any item in my catalogue of errors that can be shown not to be a genuine error. Her claim that the only errors in the Coalface articles are those acknowledged in the March and September 2008 issues of *Words'Worth* is manifestly false.

PART C. CONCLUSION

It is now almost two years since I first alerted Dr Ferguson to the presence of errors in the Coalface Grammar: it is time this saga was brought to a satisfactory conclusion. It is time she recognised that she made a grave mistake in attempting the very difficult task she had set herself without consulting specialists in the field or undertaking the research necessary to acquire a sound understanding of functional grammar, and in failing even to make a careful check of the final manuscript – time she acknowledged that, as a result, the work is indeed riddled with errors. It is time Mr Collins acknowledged that the Coalface articles contain numerous and serious errors: they cannot be dismissed as a few minor inaccuracies. It is time the Management Committee fulfilled its moral obligation to ensure that serious errors published in the Association's journal are properly corrected.

Most importantly, it is time the interests of the ordinary members of ETAQ were put first. They were given a teaching resource containing a very large amount of error, inconsistency and confusion, and then – unforgivably – they were falsely told that all errors had been corrected. It is time the Officers of the Association treated them with respect and told them the truth.