

concede that 'at the end, his self-indulgence and exorbitant subjectivism prevent him from creating the kind of pure and immortal art he is aiming at' (p. 22).

The question of the writer's relationship with society as a whole is boldly enunciated by Hopewell Seyaseya, Albert Chimedza and Charles Mungoshi. Seyaseya also provides an apt retort to Ngugi's clamour for vernacular literature:

Another point: Ngugi wa Thiongo can say, you must write in your own language. For him it is alright. For no matter what he is going to write now, it will be translated into English. Whereas for people like me, if I want my voice to be heard, it is best to write in English (p. 94).

Writers must be free to choose how they write and what they write about. Some of the poets cited write both in English and Shona and use the medium which best conveys their thoughts and feelings at that particular point in time.

Mrs Wild, by and large, manages to convey her sentiments clearly, although the odd expression here and there reveals that English is not her mother tongue. Careful editing could, however, have ironed out clauses like: These statements are mainly based on J. Haasbroek's *English commentary of Shona love poetry* in collection mentioned in footnote 1 on page 18, in which he ends with the following perspective . . . (p. 19). More trying are inconsistencies and typographical errors made when referring to anthologies or individual poems, as in: 'A storm is brewing' (p. 15) and 'A Storm is Brewing' (p. 16); 'Up-in-arms' (p. 29) and 'Up in arms' (p. 35); '*Arrow of God and Things fall apart*' (p. 31), for example. Names have occasionally been misspelt — as in 'Ezekiel Mphahlele' (p. 26), 'T. O. McLoughlin' and 'S. Mutsvairo' (p. 31).

Nevertheless, as Professor Lewis Nkosi's Preface makes clear, 'for anyone wishing to achieve a certain measure of intimacy with the men and women who produce [the new Zimbabwean poetry], this book will undoubtedly prove to be a compulsive reading' (p. viii).

Mrs Wild is to be congratulated for editing these interviews with some of Zimbabwe's younger poets, and for providing a selection of their poems, which should serve as a good introduction to those who are unfamiliar with their work and to those who wish to discover what compelled these poets to write. Her publisher, Mambo Press, deserves credit for producing a well-bound volume with good quality paper.

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**Better English: A Handbook on Common Errors** By M. Lewis and W. Masters. Harare, Longman Zimbabwe, 1987, 114 pp., illus., Z\$7.25.

The teacher of English in a second language situation is always faced with the temptation to collect errors. Many teachers have dauntingly large, some might even say impressive, collections of errors painstakingly amassed almost as a by-product of the language classroom process. Once the collection begins to run to thousands of examples rather than mere hundreds, the collector makes an assumption common to all collectors: that these errors must have some value.

The search for the value of the collection proceeds along predictable lines. As

is the case with matchbox labels, postage stamps, coins and the like, classification, often crude, seems the best way forward. Stamps, for example, have dates, gauges of perforation, gum type, paper, ink colour, block-faults, etc., as their taxonomic determiners. However, in the case of language errors, the question why they happen is of greater interest than their prevalence. The question why would seldom be posed of stamps, coins and matchbox labels, and, when it is asked (except in the case of oblique propaganda in ancient Greek and Roman coins), the answer is usually immediately apparent in the coin, stamp or label itself.

It is unfortunate that Lewis and Masters and Longman Zimbabwe fall into the trap of the zealous collector: the belief that the error can be explained by reference to itself. The authors split their copious collection in two: the first part is entitled 'Rules for Good Writing' and the second part is called a 'Dictionary of Common Errors'. It is not their collecting *per se* that is faulty but their analysis that is naive. Lewis and Masters have an extremely rudimentary understanding of linguistics, and no familiarity at all with the development of contrastive analysis, error analysis and interlanguage studies in ESL. The result is that teachers will be misled by this book. For example, we witness widespread confusion of the levels of language: on page 9 the reader is informed that pit and pity represent a noun-noun confusion. This is what it will look like to the L1 speaker of English (Longman neither involve an L2 author nor acknowledge any L2 or linguistic consultancy). But, contrary to the blurb on the back cover, such a classification does not 'explain why the errors are wrong'. The reason for the error in this example is, in fact, phonotactic and syllabic and is further from grammar than the authors may suppose: while English allows words to end with closed syllables, the CVCVCV (consonant-vowel) structure of Shona does not.

Furthermore, the examples are offered as citation forms (single uncontextualized forms) and this further reduces any sense that the volume is based on authentic, human-language exchanges. I can cite an actual example drawn from my own experience of the pit/pity type. A senior Shona-speaking colleague of mine had just delivered a superb lecture in English in which he broke new ground in the discipline in which he is an expert. As part of my congratulatory remarks afterwards, I said 'We all have our pet subjects'. He heard and understood that I had said 'petty'. The whole incident required some elaborate repair on my part.

It is significant that where Lewis and Masters come closer to an accurate analysis, the work improves. The lexical component (Part II) is valuable but the authenticity of some of the examples is questionable: were they really observed in real life or were they demanded from the intuitions of the authors, the students, colleagues or passers-by? I expect we shall never know.

This brings me to the whole subject of sampling. All language, spoken or written, takes place in a context. In this book we shall never know who was talking or writing to whom when these errors were perpetrated. In fact, no mention is made of the point at which 'errors' become acceptable as Zimbabwean English. If the work of Platt, Weber and Ho in Singapore can be regarded as a pointer,<sup>1</sup> a stage will have to be reached where phrases like 'cope up' or 'pick you at six' are accepted as legitimate Zimbabwean English in some measure. Lewis

<sup>1</sup> J. Platt, H. Weber, and M. L. Ho, *The New Englishes* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

and Masters seem locked into the right and wrong of prescriptivism in language and ignore any descriptive view of change in Zimbabwean English. The very title *Better English* invokes many assumptions.

In many ways the meandering nature of this book could not have been avoided: a book on errors should follow the completion of a survey of contemporary Zimbabwean English. At present, no one can state objectively the degree of prevalence of these errors in the English of Zimbabweans. We don't know the age of the perpetrators of the errors, nor, which is much more serious, have we any idea of the level of their language development when the collection was made. If the readers find some of the examples eccentric or like none they have ever encountered, this could be to do with the fact that the authors have taken them from speakers whose English is too poor to offer any systematic pattern of error. Singularity of this kind is not confined to a preference for grandiloquent terms — a frequent manifestation of pre-systematic errors.

A further problem is that the competence of the same error-makers varies from situation to situation. Indeed, even the time they have in which to produce a particular form has some bearing on their performance.<sup>2</sup> Generally, speakers have less time for the retrieval of forms than writers, and spoken/written would be a further valuable parameter for inclusion in collections of errors.

Some form of salvage might, in later editions, be undertaken by the publishers to compensate for flaws in the conception and unevenness in the presentation of this volume. A first step might be to discourage collectors of errors from publishing until their skills of taxonomy have been plumbed. A collection of errors looks temptingly like a manuscript. In the case of the present work a teachers' resource book written by a linguist could plaster over the cracks. That linguist will be hard pressed to account for the mixture of language levels and the absence of contrastive analysis and a level of discourse, to say nothing of the presence of (if one dares to use the word) errors.

Collectors will be collectors and one can expect with some confidence and trepidation that errors will soon be collected and managed or mis-managed using computers. One positive pointer is that computer software will, of its nature, invite the statement of some of classificatory parameters missing from this work.

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**Lost Chance: Southern Rhodesia 1945-58** By *H. Holderness* Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1985, 235 pp., ISBN 0-949932-88-4, Z\$6.95.

**Caught in the Crossfire** By *Patricia Chater* Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare, 1985, 206 pp., 16 plates, ISBN 0-949932-82-5, Z\$6.50.

Although they are consecutive, not contemporaneous, accounts, to read together Hardwicke Holderness's *Lost Chance* and Patricia Chater's *Caught in the Crossfire* is to have most clearly illuminated the reasons for the failure of the White liberal movements in the then Rhodesia and the inevitability of a war to break the deadlock.

<sup>2</sup> S. Makoni, D. Phil. thesis in progress on Zimbabwean Interlanguage Grammars, to be submitted at Edinburgh University.