WN *Columns*

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What do you think?
Geoffrey Cannon



Sao Paulo. This month continues with the theme of 'What I believe'. The series helps to explain this column's new overall title 'What do you think?' The beliefs outlined are points of view. There is no such thing as a one and only point of view. The most fervent dogmatists will admit that there are beliefs other than their own, even if they dismiss them as mere rubbish or even as wicked. Introducing the concept of belief into discussion about nutrition may seem subversive, inasmuch as practitioners believe that the purpose of research is to 'discover the truth'. But there is no such thing as a final everlasting 'the truth' outside mathematics or (if you are that way inclined) religion. The human element remains. We are all, even statisticians, human.

Food and nutrition, health and well-being
What I believe. The series: 7

Access February 2013 column on ideas and meals here
Access March 2013 column on dimensions of nutrition and on best being small here
Access April 2013 WN column on dietetics as the mother of nutrition here
Access May 2013 WN column on the need to agitate here

This series develops ideas on key topics. Links to the relevant columns are above. In February two beliefs were stated. The first concerns epistemology – the theory of knowledge. Here I believe that '*in the beginning is the idea*'. In science it is not facts (quantity) but ideas (quality) that come first. Science is driven not by induction but by

deduction. The second February topic was '*Don't think nutrients or foods, think meals'*. While being concerned with physical health, we should also engage with health and well-being in their mental, emotional and – fasten your seatbelts – spiritual aspects.

In March nutrition was celebrated in its social, economic and environmental as well as biological dimensions, and so I proposed '*Our four-dimensional world'* (as symbolised by the spiral images that introduce this current columns, as above). This was a novel notion in 2005, when a large group of us were convened, hosted by Claus Leitzmann, to discuss and to hammer out *The Giessen Declaration* on the New Nutrition Science. The second March topic, an example of the new nutrition in action, proposes that: '*It is best to be small'*. With both some tales are told of the evolution of the ideas.

In April the proposition was that nutrition as now taught and practiced is an attenuated descendant of dietetics, which originally was, as it should be, the natural philosophy of the good life well led. Hence '*Dietetics is the mother of nutrition'*. The theme of last month's column is '*Agitate!*': the evidence- and experience-based belief that the protection of public health and public goods needs activists.

Ideology
Watch our language



Masters, users, and abusers, of language. From left Calgacus, George Orwell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Michael Dummett, Ronald Reagan, and Achin Vanaik

This month's theme is *'Watch our language'*. It is about the use, misuse and abuse of words and terms. We all need to be aware that language embeds ideology. I give six examples that affect the understanding of public health and policy. This month's column is constructed in bite-size chunks. Below it begins with 'America'.

Tacitus (56-117 CE) records (or some say invents) an early example of protest against abuse of language. Calgacus (above left), the chief of the Caledonian Confederacy of Picts (early Scots), is quoted as stating of the Romans as follows, just before his alliance was overwhelmed by the army of Agricola in the year 83 or 84 CE at the battle of Mons Graupius in north Scotland (perhaps by the Chapel of Garioch under the sacred hill of Bennachie). As recorded he said: 'They lust for dominion; neither

the east nor the west has been able to satisfy them. Alone among men they covet with equal eagerness poverty and riches. To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire; they make a wilderness and call it peace' (1).

Quite. Though he was wrong in one respect. The Romans were and are not alone. George Orwell (1903-1950, second from left), who identified 'doublethink', says: 'Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind' (2). He had plenty of examples after the invasion of the land of the Picts on which to base this observation.

Faithful readers of these columns will know that my training at university was mainly in linguistic philosophy, as taught at Cambridge and Oxford in the middle third of the last century by thinkers such as (middle two above) Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), and Michael Dummett (1925-2011), a fellow of All Souls who was my tutor. This austere school of thought is about the meaning of language itself. So I became and remain sensitive to words, terms, phrases, and whole documents, whose sense, when we pay attention, slips and slides and which even may have no real meaning.

Take a speechwriter's offering, spoken by Ronald Reagan (next to right, above) when US president. 'We might come closer to balancing the Budget if all of us lived closer to the Commandments and the Golden Rule'. So, who here is 'we' and 'us'? Which of the commandments, assuming these are those that Genesis says Jahweh handed to Moses? And why the golden rule? The idea is to convey a warm feeling by a string of phrases which, when you focus on them, are verbal cotton candy.

After university I remained in training with a succession of editing jobs. These began by turning essays by social science academics, which as submitted were often rambling and obscure, into crisp sharp features that readers of the weekly journal *New Society*, of which I was a founding staff member, might like to read. Gradually I accumulated reasons for the misuse and abuse of language. Below are three as stated by the Indian International Peace Prize winner Achin Vanaik (above, right) (3):

Box 1

Reasons for misleading words and terms

Dehumanising the human: To make killing another person more easy, people are labelled with inhuman names, for example 'Gooks' in Vietnam and 'Japs' during World War II. This kind of labelling is also used to justify racism and sexism.

Humanising the Inhuman: Evil is made acceptable by positive names for methods of killing. The oxygen-sucking bomb used in the US war on Iraq and Afghanistan is named 'daisy cutter'. The bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima were 'Fat Man' and 'Little Boy'.

Euphemisms: Making the unpleasant pleasant: When civilians are killed it is called 'collateral damage', when smaller attacks are carried out they are 'surgical strikes'. But real surgery requires permission and is designed to cure not kill.

The language of nutrition

Attention to the use of language in the practice of nutrition, public health and allied areas, was for me focused at the SLAN (Nutrition Societies of Latin America) triennial conference held in Buenos Aires in 2001. Ricardo Uauy, Nevin Scrimshaw, and not sure) Rey Martorell, Ben Caballero and Carlos Monteiro were in a ring, and I joined them. Ricardo was in expansive mode, as usual. He was explaining the urgent need for a comprehensive revision of terminology used in nutrition and public health, so I chimed in. Don't tell me, I enthused. There's 'risk factor' and 'complex and multifactorial aetiology' and 'correlation' creep, and 'carbohydrate', and 'rich' as in 'rich in fat', and there's 'lifestyle', do you know its origin? Then there's 'stunted' and 'wasted', loaded terms used to label short thin children including those in energetic good health… Then I sensed a breeze of disapproval in the air, but plunged on.

Listen, I said, you are in luck. It's a safe bet that there is one person in the whole wide world engaged with nutrition and public health who is (a) a trained linguistic philosopher and (b) a trained text writer and editor with a range from scientific reports to women's weekly magazines. That's me! Let's do it. This prompted my first publication on bad words and terms, thanks to 2001-2005 IUNS president Mark Wahlqvist, in his *Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (4). Ricardo was in his grand panjandrum phase then, succeeding Mark from 2005-2009, which was when I proposed an IUNS task force on language. Nothing came of this.

Banning 'individual'

But I did have form. From 1992 to 1997 I had been director of the project that led to the WCRF/AICR *Food, Nutrition and the Prevention of Cancer: a Global Perspective* report (5) and, as such, also head of its secretariat. The panel agreed the need to watch language and to avoid being tendentious. So 'fruit and vegetables' was replaced by 'vegetables and fruits', as approved by the panel. 'Individual' was avoided where 'personal' could be used. Browsing the 670 pages now, it's evident that the panel agreed replacement of 'lifestyle' by 'ways of life', or 'patterns of life', encouraged by Robert Beaglehole who rightly used these phrases in a superb *World Health Report* (6). But when WCRF/AICR panel member Sushma Palmer gently wondered if 'undeveloped' or 'less developed' as in 'country' was appropriate, her point was unfortunately missed. Looking now at chapter summaries, the final text did get as far as 'economically developed'.

And oh, such tussles over 'associated', as in 'consumption of meat is associated with… [whatever]'! There was much discussion along the lines of: 'do we mean eating meat is a *cause* of [whatever]'? And then, how much, what kind, are we talking red meat, if so is pork red (a super-serious issue for pig processors) and if not is poultry 'meat', what about 'processed' meat, what does 'processed' mean anyway, and are burgers processed and when is a 'burger' not a burger, and what about hot dogs – much of this was reprised with the second WCRF/AICR report of a decade later (7). .

Deliberate obscurity

Once we attend to words, the sense of much of what we read all the time slips and slides. Thus, at random from my files: 'Synergistic proactive approach requires investment in enabling or practicality factors'. Or, as published: 'Synergistic Proactive Approach Requires Investment in Enabling or Practicality Factors'. Wow-ie, *impressive*! But what does it mean? There's no way to know. The eye scans beads of jargon strung with mangled grammar, the brain cannot engage. The mood is pleasant, the meaning is elusive. Could it be meant to be meaningless? Top level consultancies are hired by government and industry and big-budget professional organisations to sprinkle stardust like this over their annual reports, position papers, and public statements.

And now, to business. Once you focus, it's easy to locate so many words and terms that are bad language – that are tendentious in a corrupt sense of masking or concealing real meaning. As George Orwell states, the goal is to rub them out, and replace them with terms that are accurate and descriptive. Not easy! Of the so many that need obliteration, here are six. These are 'America', 'the free market', 'developing (or 'developed') country', 'lifestyle', 'hunter-gatherer' (probably), and 'industry'.

'America'

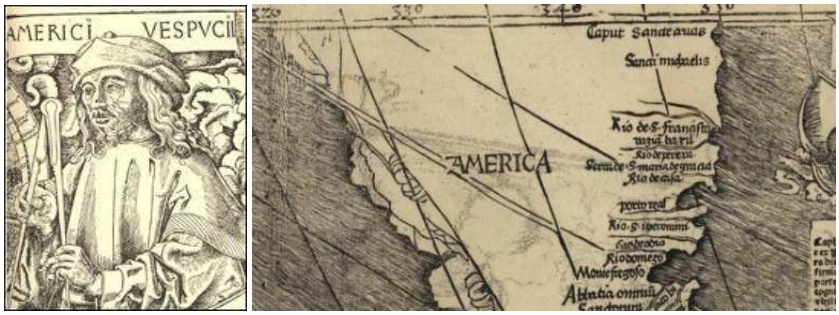


When I am asked by a Brazilian 'Are you American?' I say 'No. I am English. You are American'. One country, now very large, is claiming the hemisphere

Now to hum the Stephen Sondheim/ Leonard Bernstein *West Side Story* number: 'I like to be in America/ OK by me in America/ Everything free in America' Oh, really? Tell me about it…

This first item is not about 'God' (phew), it's about 'America'. Long ago I was taught by TC (Teri) McLuhan (8) that many Canadians, like her, object to people from the USA talking about 'The American Dream' or 'American destiny' – or 'God Bless America'. Canadians are Americans too, and it also does not work for people from the USA to back off a bit and refer to themselves as 'North Americans'.

At the time, I felt she was over-reacting, but she is right. It is incorrect, improper and an act of imperialism to term people from the US 'Americans' and to refer to the USA as 'America'. You may feel I am being a bit shrill. Well, if the world was divided into those who think it is OK to refer to people from the US as 'Americans', those like me who think it is not OK, and those who don't care or who have never thought about it, the proportions might be something like 30 per cent OK, 0.025 not OK, and 69.975 don't know or care. If a poll was carried out in the US the result might be 75 per cent OK, 0.025 not OK (including postal votes from deportees), and 24.975 dunno. But a poll in this southern continent of America where I live, would give a different result. Judging from my impact on taxi-drivers and parents at my son Gabriel's school who ask if I am American, to which I reply no, I am English, you are American, the not OK number is nudging up in this part of Brazil. There is no need for me to spread the word in Cuba, Venezuela or Bolivia, and other countries in the South where the words for people from the US – said with aggression or affection – are 'yanqui' or 'gringo'.



Amerigo Vespucci, and (right) a detail of the 1507 Waldenseemüller world map that first used the word 'America' – in the centre of what is now Brazil

Let's look at the facts. Start with Amerigo Vespucci (1454-1512, above left). Did this merchant and explorer ever set foot in or even see the land that is now the USA? No, he did not. Nowhere near. His great achievement was to prove the extent of the southern coastal landmass. In 1501 he landed at what is now Cabo Frio in the State of Rio de Janeiro (where I have a house), and established a post trading in brazil wood – thus the country's name. So what about the first map of the world showing what is now the Americas, made in 1507? Did the German cartographer Martin Waldenseemüller (1470-1522) use the name 'America' on the map, in honour of Vespucci? Yes he did, for the first edition of 1507-1513, and here it is above, right. The word is placed fairly discreetly on the part of the map showing what is now – wait for it – Brazil! As you may be able to see, the S. Francisco river, so named by Vespucci, is close by.

The great name-grab

The term 'United States of America' was a name-grab. When the territory of what is now the USA was occupied by the Spanish, French or English, not forgetting the original peoples, there was no reason to use a name for the whole territory. A name was needed when the 13 British colonies on the East Coast, together occupying maybe 6 per cent of what is now the USA and 2 per cent of the hemisphere, banded together. As urged by the English revolutionary Thomas Paine (1737-1819), and the drafter of the Declaration of Independence Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826, the tall man touching the document, right below), in 1776 they proclaimed the existence of the United States of – America (as you see, left below), using the name which up to then was occasionally used to refer to the whole hemisphere. One alternative discussed at the time was the United States of Columbia, a name that survives within Washington DC, equally inappropriate because Christopher Columbus also never saw the territory, which later was used to name a country in the southern continent. Some might say that the US government and ruling classes have been indulging such acts of reckless and ultimately self-defeating aggrandisement ever since (9) but Let's Not Go There.


IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.
A DECLARATION
BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
IN GENERAL CONGRESS ASSEMBLED.



The Declaration of Independence of 1776 was a grab of the name of a whole hemisphere by one country. Thomas Jefferson (tall man, right) did the deed

Does this matter? The question is best addressed to the people of countries in the hemisphere who are not US citizens. In the Southern continent, people generally think of themselves as Chileans or Peruvians or Brazilians, and so on, or else sometimes as Latin Americans (with its implication of junior status), but politically conscious people refer (Portuguese version) to the 'Estados Unidos' and to 'Estadosunidenses'. Is this relevant to public health and nutrition? Yes, it is. Politically unconscious people, who comprise the vast majority in any country, want to be like 'Americans' and to consume 'America' in the forms of Disneyworld and Coke, Tommy Hilfiger and McDonald's. In Brazil, the country I know best, the feeling of inferiority to 'America' persists, and one of the reasons is the name, which everybody knows without thinking about this all the time, refers to the hemisphere.

The US government is not about to propose a name-change to, say, Washingtonia, or (the Mohawk name) Anowara ko'wa. So if we drop 'America' what should be the

name for the US people? Easy. People from Germany are Germans. People from Russia are Russians. So, there we have it. 'Usans', while apt, perhaps would not fly. 'Usanians' has a nice feel to it. Let's make this catch on.

'The free market'




Bangladesh, April. Over 1,100 textile workers killed. Pictures of the missing and dead, and mass burial of the dead. A consequence of the 'free market'

'If you want to know what "the free market" means', an Indian colleague said to me, 'look at these'. She was referring to photographs taken in Savar, near Dhaka in Bangladesh, after 1,127 workers were killed in the collapse of a clothing factory on 24 April. You read about it, I'm sure. Above are two of the photographs, showing pictures of the dead and missing posted on walls, and of burials in mass graves.

Tragic accident? Not exactly. A *New York Times* news story the next day helped to explain what my colleague meant. ' "The front-line responsibility [for safety] is the government's, but the real power lies with Western brands and retailers, beginning with the biggest players: Walmart, H&M Industries, Gap and others," said Scott Nova, executive director of the Worker Rights Consortium. "The price pressure these buyers put on factories undermines any prospect that factories will undertake the costly repairs and renovations that are necessary to make these buildings safe".

Recently I needed a new pair of running shoes. In a main shopping street of Juiz de Fora, the large Brazilian provincial city where I live, shops at the top end near the main street of the central district were selling shoes branded with the logos of transnational corporations for between the equivalent of $US125 and 200 a pair. Not being willing to pay that price or to be a jogging advertisement, and having been tipped off, I walked six blocks down the very same street and found a shop stacked with locally made shoes priced at the equivalent of $US20 to 40 a pair. After rummaging, I found a pair in the colour I prefer for 35 *reais*, which is a bit less than $US20. No patented gizmos claiming to do my running for me or to bound like Bolt, or to avoid the dreaded pronation, but they're fine, and also do not look ridiculous when I wear them to work in São Paulo under long trousers. So think about it. Workers here in Brazil earn a lot more money than workers in Bangladesh. Trades unions remain strong.

Building regulations are enforced. Owners make profits. Shops sell at the usual mark-ups. So where is all that massive price difference going? No need to ask, eh?

Predatory capitalism

So let's reflect on this phrase 'the free market'. It feels good. 'Freedom' is not a term that ever likely to be defined negatively, and 'market' suggests a bustling collection of stalls crowded with eager people buying and selling fresh produce.

The word 'market' is clever, for what the term actually refers to, is a political and economic system in which regulation of business is minimal or absent. The nineteenth century term for this was the French phrase *laissez faire*, meaning that industrialists should be able to do whatever they wanted to do, without intervention from government. And 'free'? The freedom is for those who are thus best able to increase their wealth and power, and in Bangladesh, sorry to say, the big owners of factories tend to be politicians, or else are free to bribe officials.

'The free market' is in fact, unrestrained capitalism. The term 'free market' disguises the fact that in many ways the world we live in now, is a new version of that in which the West and East India Companies, let rip by the politicians of the day many of whom had snouts in the trough, gorged the merchant and ruling classes of the European imperial powers with wealth, by gouging Asia and Africa.

As with 'America', 'the free market' is used in a vast number of contexts. But it is also applied to food and nutrition. Every time you buy products made by transnational food product corporations, you are part of a process that includes some combination of relentless exploitation of primary producers, replacement of appropriate agriculture by cash-cropping, destruction or acquisition of local industries, elimination of trades unions, foreign control of land and water, and displacement of long-established food systems that are rational, appropriate and part of national or local culture. In my opinion, more people would be more aware of this, if we all stopped using the term 'free market', replaced it by 'predatory capitalism', and explained why.

You may perhaps feel that 'predatory' is not descriptive. In my opinion, it is. Below is a charming picture from India. It shows children denouncing child labour whose conditions are close to slavery, as were those in the mines and factories of England in the first phase of industrialisation.



'The free market' really means currently dominant political and economic ideology involving global child labour, shown here in Andhra Pradesh, India

'Developing country'



The West Lake in Hangzhou, the capital of China 800 years ago. 'Developing country' is a bad name for a country with 4000 years of continuous civilisation

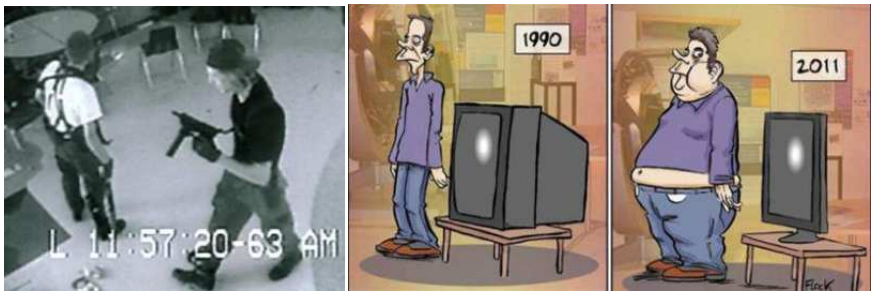
A recent visit to Hangzhou in China (its West Lake is above) reminded me of the crass insult of 'developing country' as applied for instance to China. In the Southern Song dynasty of 1127-1279 CE, fairly close now to a thousand years ago, Hangzhou was this great country's capital. We know what life there was like then, because the Venetian

traveller Marco Polo (1254-1324) visited as a young man. He was ecstatic. Of its food system and dietary patterns he said: 'In each of the squares is held a market three days in the week, frequented by 40,000 or 50,000 persons, who bring thither for sale every possible necessary of life, so that there is always an ample supply of every kind of meat and game, as of roebuck, red-deer, fallow-deer, hares, rabbits, partridges, pheasants, francolins, quails, fowls, capons, and of ducks and geese an infinite quantity… Those markets make a daily display of every kind of vegetables and fruits… certain pears of enormous size [are] white and fragrant like a confection...From the Ocean Sea also come daily supplies of fish in great quantity, brought 25 miles up the river, and there is also great store of fish from the lake' (10).

The city had many clubs. A text written in 1235 CE mentions the West Lake Poetry Club, the Buddhist Tea Society, the Physical Fitness Club, the Anglers' Club, the Occult Club, the Young Girls' Chorus, the Exotic Foods Club, the Plants and Fruits Club, the Antique Collectors' Club, the Horse-Lovers' Club, and the Refined Music Society. In other words, at least for prosperous classes, this great city of China was at least as culturally developed as any city in the world is now. Good food, too.

What 'development' really means

What 'developing' as in 'developing country' actually means, is a country whose people on average use relatively little money. In such countries a high proportion of the population may be really impoverished. Or, they may be peasant farmers who live well and don't need much money. In 'developed' countries a high proportion of people use lots of money, which may enrich their lives. But all expenditures go to 'develop' a country. Such purchases include those by adolescents on guns with which they kill other children (below, left), recorded on surveillance systems whose price is more 'development'; and on successive electronic development, and more and more ultra-processed food products that cause obesity (below right), which is also more 'development'. Maybe we should instead say 'thin' and 'fat' countries. Let's at least stay with 'economically developed' and make a point of reminding everybody, including ourselves, that economic development is not the way to instant bliss, and is the engine driving climate change and environmental devastation.



Images of 'development'. Boys who buy guns and whose killing of children is filmed on surveillance systems; and people who get fat on television and junk

'Lifestyle'



'Lifestyle'? This doesn't hit the spot, to refer to the ways of life of the tens of thousands of families who live on rubbish dumps, like these in Cambodia

Here is another general term constantly used in the context of public health nutrition: 'lifestyle'. These days there are even professors of 'lifestyle'. This is true! If any reader knows of a report on obesity or chronic diseases published after the mid 1980s in which this word is not used, do tell, using the address at the end of this editorial.

Take the political declaration issued in September 2011 on behalf of the UN following its High-Level meeting on prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (and we are coming to 'NCDs', below). In it the term 'lifestyles' is used six times, with reference to states of health and disease. By contrast, the terms 'food systems' and 'dietary patterns' are not used, 'globalisation', food processing and food prices are each mentioned once, and taxation is mentioned (in passing) twice.

The boys from Menlo Park

'Lifestyle' is just about the most insidious term used, in the context of public health and nutrition. Here's how it came into common use. The concept of 'lifestyle' was formulated in the late 1970s by the boys from Menlo Park, futurists Peter Schwartz and James Ogilvy of the Values and Lifestyles Program at Stanford Research Institute in California. They divided society up a whole new way. The idea was to forget boring old social class or occupation categories, and to eliminate fuddy-duddy political preferences. Instead, 'social and market typologies' were invented, like 'embracers', 'full nest II', 'weight watching worrier', easy rider', 'aromatic male'(11). Reason was out. Feelings were in. Politics was out. Shopping was in. When I visited the folks at SRI and VALS in 1980 I was impressed, as well I might have been. For although you might think the method was fanciful nonsense, it worked where it mattered to the

people who bought into it – big business and big government. Applied by social marketers, and advisors to candidates for political office, it shifted product, and it elected Ronald Reagan by making him appear to be a warm embraceable 'all-American' product. The 'lifestyle' surge is the best explanation of why so many people started to pay twice or more as much to wear clothes that prominently advertise names of the manufacturers of products, which if you think about it, is bizarre. But, the profit!

'Lifestyle' is an extremely problematic concept applied to disease. An obvious example is diseases the risks of which are increased by regular smoking and drinking of alcohol, both of which are and can be addictive (12). Also, environmental insults that increase risk of some chronic diseases have their effect early in life, tooth decay, obesity and now diabetes being obvious examples, and it is now believed that other serious chronic diseases may well originate early in life and even before birth. It is fanciful to use the word 'lifestyle' to apply to a young child or a fetus. Also, while middle-class people in high-income countries can have styles of life like you see in fashion and in-flight magazines, and may make choices, most communities in the world have little choice but to consume the food they are supplied with, and have little scope for style.

So why 'lifestyle'? Do I have to ask? The term gives the impression that public health policy and action should be all about information and education of individuals to choose to make wiser choices, which if they do not, is their fault. That is to say, 'lifestyle' is an intrinsic part of the 'free market' ideology. Smart stuff.

'Non-communicable diseases'

Oh yes, I said I would mention 'non-communicable diseases' or 'NCDs' for short. It's a term that is inaccurate, if only because some cancers are caused by microbes and are transmissible. 'NCDs' sprang into use a few years ago. It's said that the term was dreamed up by a public affairs agency hired by Coca-Cola, and was 'rung up the flagpole and saluted' in a series of 'public-private partnership' meetings with UN agency and government officials and then adopted by the 'NCD Alliance'. Why? Do I need to ask? Obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer: these are good plain words that we all understand, which sound ominous or scary. Whereas 'non-communicable diseases' is a term that I bet most people don't understand, and 'NCDs' are, like most acronyms, technical. That, of course, is the whole idea.

So what collective term should be used for the diseases mentioned above? Over the decades, 'diseases of civilisation' has been rightly replaced by 'Western diseases' or 'diseases of affluence' which have been rightly replaced, as in the two relevant WHO expert '797' and '916' reports of 1990 and 2003, by 'chronic diseases'. We need to stay with that term. 'NCD' turns what are the plain language names for symptoms of a global civilization gone wrong, into initials, indexed next to 'NCP'(National Car Parks) Clever stuff. Do I hear sardonic applause from the shade of George Orwell?

'Hunter-gatherer'



'Hunter-gatherer'. Are we really sure that the palaeolithic diet humans are evolved with, was mainly hunted by men, rather than gathered by women?

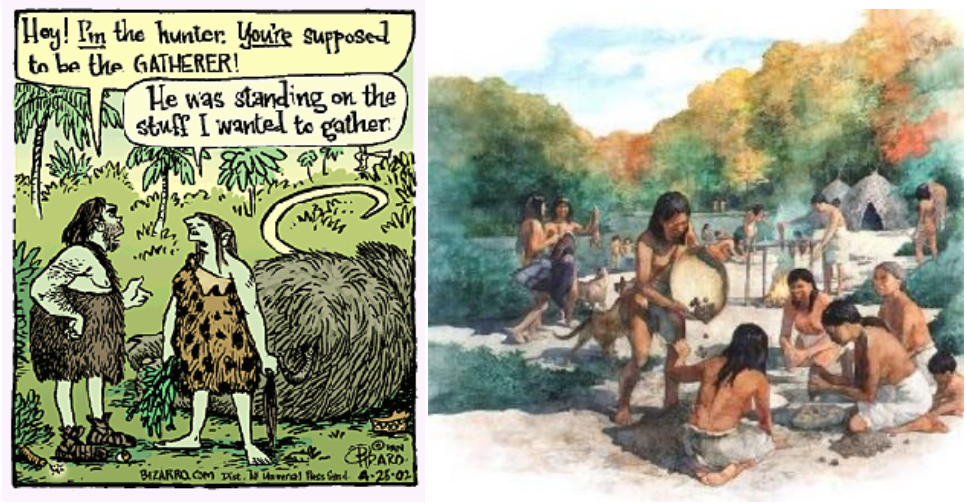
My fifth example is of a term whose implication continues strongly to influence advice on personal and population nutrition. This is 'hunter-gatherer', as illustrated by the model above of palaeolithic men spearing a mammoth in between beating their chests like so many primaeval Tarzans, while the women sat at home, sweeping out the cave, feeding babies, repairing their menfolk's loincloths, sharpening their spears, and weeping, wailing and nagging. A powerful concept. Men tend to like it, and Margaret Mead aside, in the past almost leading professionals in the relevant social sciences were men, often with big beards and wild imaginations.

However, the view of feminist archaeologists and anthropologists – who I should quickly say include men – is that the term 'hunter-gatherer', implying primacy for men and to meat, is probably just plain wrong. They propose, based on good and consistent evidence from remains of waste-heaps, shit-houses and other sources, that many tens of thousands of years ago it was the women who did most of the work, collecting plants, and also animal food from small game, insects and so on.

Primatologist Katherine Milton states that the survey data that led to the 'hunter-gatherer' concept was based on thinking and research that was partial and is outdated (13). She also points out that if we use an evolutionary argument to advocate the natural human diet, we should go further back in time, to the diets of primates, all of which are vegetarian, bar the odd grub, bird or rodent (14).

In other words, the palaeolithic culture was not hunter-gatherer, it was gatherer-hunter (or even gatherer-forager), and the many varieties of palaeolithic food systems

were plant-based except at times of locust gluts, or in parts of the world where few plants grew. And the men? Maybe as always: the primaeval equivalent of playing cards, arguing politics, and running off with other men's wives, occasionally pausing to spear a decrepit mastodon staggering past the cave entrance, and then singing songs about their daring deeds. In this case, the concept of 'gatherer-hunter' is not finally proved, but the force is with it, and it should be used preferentially.



Plausible constructions of gatherer-hunter societies indicate that women did most of the practical work, as they have done and do in most types of society

'The food industry'



Public health professionals too often use the term 'industry' to refer to the manufacturers of energy-dense fatty sugary or salty ultra-processed products

The last of this initial list of six bad words and terms, is 'the food industry'. Public health professonals shoot themselves and their cause in the foot, when they refer to 'the food industry', or even just 'industry', as a dark force. Just as we all need food, and – if we are relatively wise or fortunate – can enjoy wonderful delicious healthy meals, civilisation itself is dependent on and indeed partly defined by industry. After all, to be 'industrious' means to be active, lively, energetic.

When we speak ill of 'the food industry' or just 'industry' we are likely to annoy everybody engaged in the creation of food and even the creation of every type of goods. Similarly, when we say that 'food' marketing needs regulation or restriction, we are liable to puzzle or alienate everybody whose attention and sympathy we need, including decision-takers and policy-makers in government and the UN system, and we play into the hands of those forces that really do need to be confronted and thwarted. We also make ourselves seem ludicrous: to say that 'food' needs regulation is obvious nonsense, and makes those who say this seem like nutty fuss-pots.

It's all about Big Food

When I make this point, as I do in print and (again and again) at conferences, the response often is 'but everybody knows we really mean the giant food product manufacturers' (or 'Big Food', or 'the transnationals' or 'conflicted industry', or 'that part of industry whose products, consumed in typical quantities, are harmful to personal and public health'). Well excuse me, I don't agree, I think that few people do understand this. Besides, to circle back to where this column started, it is always best to say what you really do mean, in a way that makes super-clear that industry as such, and the food industry as a whole, is not the issue. So, try 'the manufacturers of ultra-processed products and their allied and associated organisations'(15). Or, for short, define and say 'Big Food', as is now at last happening (16).

Let's make and follow a rule, of making the sharpest and clearest distinction between the products consumed by the glamorous model and the current president of the USA (pictures above), and the produce created by farmers who work on their land (picture below). If all this column does, is to get this message received, understood and acted upon, please, my own labours will be rewarded. Thank you!



But the food industry also includes producers of good fresh food, like peasant agriculturalists and family and co-operative farmers in all parts of the world

So what now

This long column gives just six examples of bad language. This is not so much writing that is vague, mangled, obscure, dull, cryptic, or any combination of these failings. Rather, it is in particular, language that is wrong in the sense of being misleading, and that is often meant to be misleading, just as George Orwell exposed. The examples given here are words and terms of types often dreamed up by very clever people, from Thomas Jefferson to public affairs agencies hired by transnational corporations, with the purpose of gaining power. 'America' may be the best example, but 'the free market' and 'lifestyle' run it close.

So, what to do? 'Evil once perceived is half-way to its solution'. Often I quote this optimistic statement of Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865). Her novels and stories depict the lives of impoverished and immiserated communities in newly industrialised Manchester, whose dreadful living conditions prompted local mill director Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), to compile and write his tract *The Condition of the Working Class in England* at the age of 24-25.

Engels also paid attention to language. In a famous passage, he comments on the occasions when English juries made verdicts of 'death by starvation'. He goes on to make a statement that resonates now throughout many countries of the global South and even, now, elsewhere. He says: 'But indirectly, far more than directly, many have died of starvation, where long-continued want of proper nourishment has called forth fatal illness, when it has produced such debility that causes which might otherwise have remained inoperative brought on severe illness and death. The English working-men call this "social murder", and accuse our whole society of perpetrating this crime perpetually. Are they wrong?' (18).

Next steps

The first step is for us all to become much more aware of the ideology embedded in language used in writing about public health and nutrition. Often I see terms like 'developing countries' and 'the free market' used by people committed to protection and improvement of public health, who seem not to be aware that the language they are using is betraying the sense and force of what they are trying to communicate.

The next steps certainly need to include a lexicon with explanations of how words and terms have come into being and for what reasons, as I have attempted here, the equivalent for public health and nutrition of the great lexicographer Eric Partridge's *Usage and Abusage* (17). But the main task for us, as always, is to do what we can to contribute to a new world in which the main values are those of equity, decency and honesty, so that it is natural for people to think, speak and write straight.

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Status

Conflicting or competing interests: Nothing serious, I hope. This column is reviewed by Fabio Gomes and Claudio Schuftan. It is written in remembrance of my father John Cannon, who by his life, and with his library (some with me now) taught and showed me love of language and care for its significance. Thanks also as mentioned in the text, to Barrie Margetts and Agneta Yngve for the space in *Public Health Nutrition* between 2003-2009, and to Mark Wahlqvist and Ricardo Uauy, IUNS presidents 2001-2009, for their commitment and encouragement. I still think there should be an IUNS task force on language, provided I convene it and pick the members. Readers may make use of the material in this column if acknowledgement is given to the Association. Please cite as: Cannon G. Food and nutrition, health and well-being. What I believe: 7. Ideology. Watch our language. *World Nutrition*, June 2013, 4,6, 416-434. Obtainable at www.wphna.org.

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