

SteelWize

BY THOMAS J. SCHLAFLY

You may walk the walk, but can you talk the talk?

IT HAS COME TIME to speak of language in the steel industry. The topic has been building for many years, and since no one else has tended to this task, I will do my best.

I went to my first AWS committee meeting many years ago and found the participants—all very well-established and respected individuals—arguing for 15 minutes about whether a sentence in question should use “and” or “or” as the conjunction. At the time, I could not believe that they were debating over something so seemingly trivial.

Nowadays, I can definitely say I believe it! Lest you think it is peculiar to AWS committees, I can say that AISC committees can do similar things. I’m sure we are not alone.

Many words are chosen with great care. Others just seem to slip in. As frustrating as it is to argue the “ands” and the “ors,” on one level or another, we do recognize that it can make a difference. Yet it is not long after a new code or specification is published that you (I will return to this word in a moment) make it very clear that we have not made it very clear. With that understanding and with the intent to do our very best to help you, we continue to argue and sometimes clarify. In the interest of clarity, we often have ruined the language (or at least the fun).

I am old, though this is the first time in my career I’ve been willing to admit it. Perhaps that is why I like to say “tubes” not “HSS.” With apologies to Mr. Omer Blodgett, who has waged a relentless campaign to improve language in welding circles, I like to say “rat holes” too, not “weld access holes.” While we’re at it, I am not that fond of “full-pen welds,” but the term works well for me. “Complete-joint-penetration groove welds” takes a lot longer to say, but they are not any stronger.

I think we who prefer the slang terms have to admit that a knowledge and usage of colloquial phrasing doesn’t really make anyone smarter. Rather, it just helps to make one feel like an insider. Inside of what is a good question...

Long ago, in my younger days, I heard one wasn’t “in” until he or she called that vertical piece in a building frame a “f---ing colyoom.” (I have two daughters now and am working harder than ever to keep them “out.”) I am hoping they recognize my plight and learn to avoid what I have taught them all too well through some of my more colorful explanations. Like the time I tried to teach daughter number one how to use a clutch. You’ll know how much they learned when I tell you that we were on clutch number three for the same lesson with daughter number two.

I think there are a few terms we need

to work on. While helping a colleague who was writing an article for MSC magazine the other day, I used the word “fabricator” and it was quickly pointed out to me that I meant to say “erector.” That was true, but I was trying to cover both the fabricator and the erector with one word. In fact, I now think we need to invent such a word.

We know the “contractor” is another person, so that won’t suffice. We could use “steel contractor” but that sounds so “legal” that I think we need something better. We need a “fabector” or an “erecticator.” Could we use “steel puncher?” Back when I was a fabricator, I had a cousin who sold radio advertising and said he sold air; I responded that I punched steel. Why not use “feson” (which means a Ferric person, carries with it a little Latin for atmosphere, and is politically correct, to boot)?

While we are working on that, we know we need a better word for assembling a steel frame. I understand there is “machismo” involved here but there are times the current terminology does not seem appropriate, and a less “male-oriented” term would certainly help reduce some of the spam we get. It would keep us from straying into dark territory in Google searches, too.

There also are terms the general population uses that we might improve upon while we are pondering this topic. I do enjoy at times the freedom of the word “you.” Does it mean one, or two, or everybody but me? I had a friend who was in a relationship in which I had trouble telling whether he would invite his companion (or “expansion”) or not. But if I said, “You are invited,” I could dump these momentous decisions on him with nary an extra word. It was glorious for me, and all I had to do was make sure there was room for an extra seat at the table if it was needed.

One has to admit, though, that there are occasions in which distinguishing the singular “you” from the plural might have advantages—i.e., when you are not a coward like me and you want control. (Like I said, I’m old and I don’t care about control any more. I want to be left alone and not told to do things, like write SteelWize articles!) There are words we might use for those occasions but Mom always asked me to speak for polite company, and we need to make a decision here anyway.

I understand in Pittsburgh there is a word “yins.” (I originally spelled this differently but was corrected. One certainly would not want to misspell yins!) In Cleveland, which is my hometown, I have heard “youse.” (I don’t think we invented it, I just heard it there first.) You know we have to include a word that will make any viable male fall in love with any female from the Carolinas. (Was that sexist? Well like I said, I’m old. And please rest assured that the Carolinas are in my list of my favorite places.) Hence the appeal of the word “y’all.”



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Those terms, of course, do not really designate the plural, though they do share an inclusive form. Perhaps you have all heard this before, but I heard it from a respected engineer from Texas (or was that Pennsylvania?) that the plural of y'all is "all y'all." I do not think I will vote for that one. But I do think you should let us know what utterance you (or yins, youse, or y'all) think we should use for the plural of "you." If you have an opinion, email it to chief editor Scott Melnick at melnick@aisc.org. (I don't want these e-mails; I'm too busy helping my colleagues out with SteelWise articles to answer them.)

I have tried throughout my career to get useful terminology into the codes. In horror at the notion that there might be a need for people running around job sites with anemometers after they read about wind-speed limits on gas-shielded welding processes, I suggested at an AWS committee meeting once that we use the Beaufort scale, which was invented by Admiral Francis Beaufort in 1805, and used to gauge wind speed in the Royal Navy starting in 1830. It relates wind speed to observable conditions.

At Beaufort 1, wind motion is visible in smoke; at Beaufort 2, wind is felt on exposed skin. By the time you are at Beaufort 12 (a hurricane), you'll see some broken windows and structural damage. By the way, I recommend that you not weld in a Beaufort 12 wind—with any process!

The committee did not vote the idea out of consideration for inclusion in the code, but I could tell from their tone that I would be eating alone that night. So, the Beaufort scale disappeared like the

sails of a clipper ship going over the horizon on its way to the far reaches of the Empire.

In closing, I have to let you know that the epitome of lingo occurred for me one day in Indiana, where I heard someone say, "We need to pea whistle that column into place and stash that yo-yo fast, or we'll be whistle bit." I'd explain it in full, if I thought I could, but that crew took right to it.

Rest assured we will continue to work to clarify the codes and specifications in an attempt to improve them for your benefit. You let us know where we miss. And yes, I will say "complete-joint-penetration groove weld," complete with the properly placed hyphens, one hundred times as punishment for these thoughts.

Later, all y'all!

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