

Ensure you don't end up like a headless chicken... or spoil your grammar

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Thank goodness that in the 22 years we've lived in our house, we've never had a burst geyser and its resulting flood.

I can think of few worse domestic catastrophes than that, because the hundreds of litres of water not only ruin ceilings, carpets, furniture and appliances (if you're very unlucky) but they also take away all, or most, of your family's hot water.

And that is only the beginning of the nightmare: then follow the insurance claims and the replacement of all the damaged and destroyed items... all amid the pervading stink of wetness and rot.

Most of all, though, when such a disaster happens, it takes most of us by complete surprise, throwing even the most organised of householders into a complete tizz.

So, I must say I looked at the latest ad for iWyze insurance with a sense of recognition and empathy – even though we haven't been through that as a family.

We see a normal mom and two kids (actually Normal to the Max, in their perfect little outfits). Suddenly, they look up to see the ceiling breaking apart and a tsunami of water deluging the house.

Just as quickly, mom is seized by panic, not knowing what to do – running around like the proverbial headless chicken. So, that's how's she shown – complete with cute string of pearls around her headless neck – running hither and thither.

The kids look on stunned or bemused... as they always do. Fortunately, the magnitude of domestic crises like these is often lost on kids who look at the panicking adults and wonder why they're mad. (Oh yes, you lot, your time will come – and a lot sooner than you think. And your kids will be laughing at you...)

As quickly as she panicked, mom regains her composure. Headless chicken is gone and as she returns to normal, we see the promise: "iWyze takes control when you can't."

It's nice to know that your insurance company does more than just pay out on claims – it helps take away the stress too... presumably by organising people to sort it all out.

Good message, simply but well conveyed. So, an Orchid to iWyze, which is part of the Old Mutual group.

Clear communication is an important part of life – in some places it is more important than others. For example, not knowing the difference between 6,000 and 160,000 or mis-hearing 95 instead of 195 when you're a pilot in a cockpit can mean the difference between landing safely and featuring in an episode of *Air Crash Investigation*.

What never ceases to amaze me – and more so, since I began my new life as a marketer, editor and writer for hire – is how casually many South African brands take verbal and written communication.

I have been helping in re-working website copy, as well as in editing various pieces of material for clients, and it astonishes me not so much how bad sentences were put together in the first place, but how that bad usage passed by a couple of sets of eyes. And bear in mind I am talking about simple use of English – not academic treatises.

One brand owner I spoke to wants me to keep an eye on his creative agency's work on a radio campaign – not only for grammatical and language accuracy but to ensure his marketing messages are correctly conveyed.

Unlike many brand custodians, he does demand high standards and does monitor outputs, which is something becoming increasingly rare, from what I can see.

If your message is badly written, it not only lends your brand an air of incompetence but it can also result in potential customers either getting an incorrect message or none at all.

I was reminded of this listening to a radio ad currently flitting for Mahindra Fourways. It urges listeners to "spoil yourself to..." one of their new models.

Spoil yourself to? Seriously?

Your spoil yourself with something or you treat yourself to something.

I am shocked that the copywriter wrote the phrase, but even more shocked that at least two other people would have had to approve it – a creative agency senior and then someone from Mahindra Fourways. The fact that no-one noticed that sort of basic English construct would worry me – as I have said many times before – about what else the dealership doesn't know.

So, Mahindra Fourways, you get the Onion.

Talking about mangled language and lack of supervision, here are two more examples. The first is from Dana Wassman, of a notice in her local KFC. Words fail me – as they clearly also did for the KFC management at that store:



The second is a pic I shot last week:



'Vehilce'? Really? When your branding is out in public, you need to make sure that you don't embarrass yourself. Maybe they need a "Please report bad spelling" sign...

Seen any other grammar disasters? Let me know – orchidsandonions4@gmail.com

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ABOUT BRENDAN SEERY

Brendan Seery has been in the news business for most of his life, covering coups, wars, famines - and some funny stories - across Africa. Brendan Seery's *Orchids and Onions* column ran each week in the *Saturday Star* in Johannesburg and the *Weekend Argus* in Cape Town.

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