

Semantics

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Perhaps you're familiar with the saying, "You say TOE-MAY-TOE, I say "TAH-MAH-TOE." It's often used as a sentence to imply that while we may pronounce or refer to things differently, at their core they are often the very same thing.

But are they? As a self-confessed "word nerd," and someone who admires the beauty with which some precious few brilliant people can spin words (oh, how I long to be one of them) I can't help but notice when semantics are at play, and just the other day I spotted a doozy.

Not surprisingly it was from our good friend Mr. Ford.

I haven't written much about Ford lately, what with all the shenanigans happening right here in Caledon to keep me busy, but this comment made me feel at once both a grudging respect for his speechwriting team and an overwhelming urge to scream.

What has me all fired up? In making an announcement about toll roads, specifically the removal of tolls from Highway 407 East, discerning readers might have caught the fine print, but I'm guessing many did not. Placing a heavy emphasis on the "fact" that "daily commuters will save \$7,200 each year," Ford followed his announcement with this little nugget: "That means that there isn't a single publicly-owned tolled highway anywhere in Ontario " and under our government, there never will be again."

Woohoo! That's good news, right? No more tolled highways, anywhere in Ontario! So, what's the big deal?

At first glance you might be thinking, "awesome, no more tolls!" but the devil is always in the details and that's where we have our good friend "semantics" to help us out.

There are, in fact, still tolled highways in Ontario " one of them, a pretty big one, running just south of Caledon and which could easily absorb the kind of traffic Mr. Ford expects the building of the 413 to alleviate.

That particular road, also known as the 407 (but not "East") is not "publicly-owned," thus making it ineligible for Ford's grandiose statement. That's because one of Ford's Conservative predecessors sold it to a private consortium who have been, and continue to, make millions off those of us so frustrated with traffic mayhem that we will pay for the privilege of using it.

So, in short, there are still toll roads and it is still going to cost you money to use them. Saying there isn't a "single publicly-owned tolled highway" might be true, but it's also misleading, much like many announcements that come from the government.

And why all the focus to the east of late? This is the second announcement in recent months concerning the removal of tolls for our friends east of the Don Valley Parkway. Are these proclamations meant to redirect our attention away from the billion-dollar boondoggle proposal of building a tunnel under the 401 or building out a short, entirely unnecessary 52 km stretch of highway that wouldn't be needed if only Ford would remove tolls and open up the 407?

Perhaps "misdirection" and "semantics" mean one and the same thing?

Actually, "semantics" might not even be the correct reference here meaning as it does, "the interpretation of words, signs, and sentence structure " [which] largely determines our reading comprehension, how we understand others, and even what decisions we make as a result of our interpretations." However, I do think it nicely encapsulates my point that in a world where everything seems subject to interpretation, careful readers will realize we are being misled, while the many who just glance at the headlines are being fooled.

When it comes to the traffic nightmare that is Ontario, we can't afford not to pay attention.

Despite the best efforts of some of our own Caledon Councillors, and the amazing commitment of the CCRSA to force change through a dedicated, well-researched and organized information campaign, traffic remains frighteningly perilous throughout Peel Region. No one at the provincial government yet appears to be paying any meaningful attention to our plight, least of all Minister of Transportation Prabmeet Sakaria who continues to stand up in the legislature maintaining that we have "some of the safest roads in all of North America."

Numerous statistics and our own hyper-local experiences particularly on Highway 50 and Highway 10 would beg to differ ? but I guess that too is just semantics? Much like the use of the word "infill" instead of "dump" when we're talking about the issue of land use changes impacting an old, abandoned quarry on Shaws Creek Road that, coincidentally, will also have a significant impact on traffic safety locally.

You say "Toe-may-toe," I say, "tah-mah-toe."

*Grudgingly, I must note one other recent announcement that IS good news, even if long overdue. Provincial funding of \$16.1 million is finally flowing for the widening of Mayfield Road from two lanes to six west of Highway 10. Given Caledon's projected growth and that which has already taken place in Mayfield West, we agree with Councillor Early's recent Facebook post that "once completed this project will improve road capacity, reduce congestion and improve traffic flow." Better late than never!