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## UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH BULLETIN

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# GRAMMAR AND USAGE in TEXTBOOKS ON ENGLISH

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#### NOTE

This study was undertaken at the suggestion of the late professor Sterling A. Leonard, whose own work *The Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage, 1700-1800*, though written at an earlier date, had just left the press in 1929. His tragic death in the spring of 1931 bereft me of his counsel and guidance in the actual writing of the work, but for the general plan and many notes on specific items I am deeply indebted to him. It was originally our intention to find some third person to do for the nineteenth century what he had done for the eighteenth, and what this study attempts for the twentieth. If that study is eventually forthcoming, we shall have a clear picture of the doctrine of correctness and its influence on English language and teaching from its inception to the present day.

In the writing of this study I have had the invaluable help and guidance of Professor W. E. Leonard, who generously assumed the task of adviser, and for whose careful reading and constructive comments I am exceedingly grateful. In similar fashion I am indebted to Professor W. F. Twaddell and Miss Esther Keck, for the reading of the manuscript and for the clarification of several obscure points. And for counsel, encouragement, and material aid in every step of this task, I acknowledge gratefully my debt to S. M. P.

R. C. P.

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Ye knowe ek, that in forme of speche is chaunge  
Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho  
That hadden pris, now wonder nice and straunge  
Us thinketh hem; and yit they spake hem so,  
And spedde as wel in love as men now do.

Chaucer, *Troilus*, II, 22.

## CHAPTER I

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### PURPOSE

To liberal-minded English teachers there have long been apparent numerous and striking discrepancies between the rules and cautions governing usage to be found in the textbooks on grammar and composition on the one hand, and the regularly observed customs of language on the other. The interpretation given to these accumulated contradictions varies in accordance with the language philosophy of the observer. To the purist these differences are indications of the decay of Modern English, by which far too many corruptions are permitted a degree of tolerance dangerous to the integrity of the language. Such a one urges, therefore, a renewed enforcement of the rules and a multiplication of cautions to 'correct' the errant tongue. To the liberalist, however, these discrepancies are signs of change and growth in language, by which rules and restrictions, even those at one time accurately descriptive of English usage are now obsolescent or contrary to current use. It is evident, therefore, that the purist and liberalist must of necessity be diametrically opposed, and that this opposition must result in great confusion and uncertainty regarding 'correct' usage in the present day. To show that such a confusion does exist, and that it has an unfortunate influence upon the teaching of English in the schools, is one of the purposes of this study.

It is furthermore a purpose of this study to trace out the origin and development of the traditional rules and statements concerning usage and to show by means of clear-cut contrasts how they are at variance with the facts of past and present usage. For this conception of the problem and the method of approaching it the writer is greatly indebted to several previous studies which are directly contributory to the present undertaking. Less than a decade ago Professor C. C. Fries published two papers on the future tense<sup>1</sup> which for thorough scholarship and freshness of

<sup>1</sup> Fries, "Periphrastic Future in Modern English," *P.M.L.A.*, December 1925; and "The Expression of the Future," *Language*, Vol. III, No. 2, June 1927.

viewpoint mark a new era in the objective study of English usage. A third paper by the same author subjected to severe criticism the rules of the textbook on grammar, though without much reference to specific matters.<sup>2</sup> The origin of the prescriptive tradition was discussed by Dr. Bryan in his "Notes on the Founders of Prescriptive English Grammar,"<sup>3</sup> a monograph which led directly to Professor S. A. Leonard's monumental work, "Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage, 1700-1800," of which a full description and more detailed acknowledgment is given in Chapter II. As Professor Leonard says in a later paper,<sup>4</sup> "All these studies appeared to show that the ideal of grammatical correctness, which, so far as discovered, was first announced in Swift's *Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (1712), was pursued through the eighteenth century with attempts at a rigorous, logical recasting of the language, chiefly on classical analogies. But with minor exceptions very little attention was paid to the actual facts of cultivated usage." This present inquiry, proceeding from the viewpoint just quoted, attempts to follow the progress of the prescriptive idea through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, chiefly to show the still prevalent influence of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tenets upon the discussion of current usage in contemporary textbooks. The thesis of this study, therefore, may be stated thus: Eighteenth-century theories of language resulted in attitudes and specific rules concerning usage which became fixed and arbitrary in nineteenth-century schoolbooks, and which still persist in the textbooks of today in total disregard for the objective facts of English usage.

#### METHOD

The basis of this study consists of a minute analysis of the contents of sixteen textbooks in grammar and composition chosen to meet the following requirements:

1. They must lie within the years 1900 to 1930 inclusive. They must particularly be representative of the trends of the last two decades.
2. They must include the three instructional levels: i.e., elementary, secondary, and college. Although the investigation might well have been limited to the secondary level, at which instruction in grammar and usage is stressed, it was thought better to include the entire range.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, "Rules of the Common School Grammars," P.M.L.A., March 1927.

<sup>2</sup> *Manley Anniversary Studies in English Literature*, University of Chicago Press, 1923, pp. 383-393.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard-Moffett, "Levels in English Usage," *English Journal*, May 1927, pp. 345-359.

3. They must be widely used. Obviously all the texts in this field could not be minutely examined, so that those selected must give evidence of wide sales and important influence.

The books chosen to meet these criteria are listed below in chronological order of publication, with authors, abbreviation used in this study, title, date of publication, publisher, and instructional level.

- 1 and 2. Mary F. Hyde, (Hyde), *Two Book Course in English*, D. C. Heath and Company, 1900, elementary level.
- 3 and 4. Lillian G. Kimball, (Kimball), *Kimball's Elementary English*, American Book Company, 1911, elementary level.
6. W. D. Lewis and J. F. Hosis, (Lewis and Hosis), *Practical English for High Schools*, American Book Company, 1916, secondary level.
7. Merle E. Clippinger, (Clippinger), *Written and Spoken English*, Silver, Burdett and Company, 1917, secondary level.
8. E. B. McFadden and A. C. Ferguson, (McFadden-Ferguson), *Language Series*, Book Three, Rand, McNally and Company, 1919, elementary level.
9. John C. French, (French), *Writing*, Harcourt Brace and Company, 1924, college level.
10. J. M. Thomas, F. A. Manchester, and F. W. Scott, (Thomas, Manchester and Scott), *Composition for College Students*, The Macmillan Company, 1925, college level.
11. C. H. Raymond, (Raymond), *Essentials of English Composition*, The Century Company, 1925, college level.
- 12 and 13. F. N. Scott, and G. A. Southworth, (Scott-Southworth), *Lessons in English*, Books One and Two, Benjamin H. Sanborn and Company, 1925, elementary and junior high school levels.
14. H. C. Pearson and M. F. Kirchwey, (Pearson and Kirchwey), *New Essentials of English*, American Book Company, 1928, secondary level.
- 15 and 16. T. J. Kirby, and M. F. Carpenter, (Kirby-Carpenter), *Pupil Activity English Series*, Books Seven and

Eight, Harcourt Brace and Company, 1930, junior high school level.

It will be evident from the foregoing statements that the books chosen fulfilled the criteria for selection. In chronological order they appeared in 1900, 1911, 1916, 1917, 1919, 1924, 1925, 1928, and 1930, affording an excellent sampling of the present century and especially of the last two decades. They represent the three instructional levels: there are five in the elementary field, eight in the secondary field, and three in the college field. There is ample evidence of their widespread use both from publishers' statements and from indirect sources.<sup>5</sup> It may therefore be asserted with some justice that although these books represent but a few of the hundreds of texts in English grammar and composition which were published between 1900 and 1930, they are among the most important in point of sales and influence, and offer a fair sampling of the texts in the three school levels for the purposes of this investigation.

The analysis of each text was made by means of a careful reading, in the course of which each rule, note, or illustration subject to question in the light of current usage was extracted on a separate card, indexed, and filed. When this task was completed over a thousand extracts were available for classification and study. These were then divided into three major groups: problems primarily concerned with grammar, problems primarily concerned with syntax, and problems primarily concerned with usage. The specific items were further classified and arranged as they appear in Chapters IV, V, and VI of this study. As the basis for the selection of materials for each group is discussed in the introduction to the appropriate chapter, it is not repeated here.

Each specific item was then studied separately in an attempt to provide answers to the following questions:

1. When and how did the rule or restriction originate?
2. Was there opposition to it at the time of its inception?
3. What is the history of the usage it governs?
4. What literary support does the usage have?
5. What support does it receive from earlier and more recent students of language?
6. What is its current acceptability?
7. How do the textbook rules compare with the ascertained facts regarding the usage?

<sup>5</sup> Publishers' statements concerning sales have been omitted.

In making the analysis and in interpreting the findings no attempt was made to compare one text with another. The effort was rather to present a composite picture of the contents of the present-day textbooks with regard to English usage, and to show that as a group they are sadly out of tune with the facts of current usage. It may be stated truly that in all important matters (matters considered important by the textbook writers) what is found in one text is sure to be found in some form or other in all the others. For this reason, in many instances not all the citations to specific texts have been used, as there was no gain in repeating the same rule six to ten times in almost the same words.

The reference materials used in studying specific items are listed fully in the bibliography and are cited for each reference; they need not be mentioned here. It may be noted in passing, however, that in the majority of cases the factual information used to prove the textbook statements in error antedates the publication of the textbooks, mute evidence of the failure of schoolbook grammarians to keep abreast of the very subject they are assumed to be masters of.

#### ORGANIZATION

The body of this study consists of two parts: an historical review of the prescriptive idea from its inception in the eighteenth century to its residuum in the twentieth-century textbooks and other sources of language information, in contrast with the growth of a linguistic science; and an analysis of the contents of current textbooks insofar as they are prescriptive, in contrast with the facts of past and present usage as revealed by dictionaries, historical grammars, monographs on specific items, studies in learned journals, and studies of current usage. Following the general introduction of Chapter I, Chapter II describes the causes and development of the prescriptive idea, carrying it through the nineteenth century. Chapter III presents the current theories of language and usage in English as they appear in textbooks, in non-academic or popular guides and home-study courses, and in the writings of contemporary linguists and other specialists in the English language. The analysis of the prescriptive contents of current textbooks occupies Chapters IV, V, and VI, which deal with Prescriptive Grammar, Prescriptive Syntax, and Prescriptive Usage, respectively. Chapter VII contains a summary of the

findings of the study, and a series of recommendations regarding the writing of textbooks on English grammar and composition for school use. A number of minor items of usage about which some doubt exists, and for which further study is recommended, have been placed in Appendix I. The Bibliography has been limited to works actually consulted in the preparation of this study.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORIES OF CORRECTNESS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

#### THE RISE OF THE PRESCRIPTIVE IDEA

Prior to the seventeenth century interest in the English language was confined largely to enthusiastic verbal experimentation, in coinages, in fantastic transferences of meaning, and in Latinisms. The fundamental grammar of English was fairly regular, but it appears to have been unconsciously accepted, or at least taken for granted in an age of interest in words. "Compared with the language of earlier periods, the language of the Elizabethan period, at least the cultivated formal speech, had gained in uniformity. But there were still no definite rules for guidance."<sup>1</sup> Of the interest in words and their meanings, however, there is abundant evidence. "Probably the greatest single achievement of the English language in the sixteenth century was the assimilation of the flood of words that came in following the Renaissance. This assimilation was not accomplished without difficulty, without occasional throes of verbal indigestion."<sup>2</sup> One evidence of the protest against the abandoned neologism of the period is found in the opprobrious epithet "ink-horn terms" which reflects the hostility felt toward new words in some quarters. Shakespeare several times held these word-pedants up to scorn, nowhere better than in *Holofernes'* criticism of Armado's language.<sup>3</sup> In addition to adding new words, the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries played with word-compounds and phrasal groups with new meanings, fantastic to the last degree in some instances, but contributing, nevertheless, to the amazing flexibility of modern English. With regard to the grammar of the period, we may conclude that it was "that of an intermediary stage in a course of development, of a language little governed as yet by rules. . ."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> McKnight, George H., *Modern English in the Making*, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup> *Love's Labours Lost*, Act V., Scene 1.

<sup>4</sup> McKnight, George H., *op. cit.*, p. 204.

The verbal exuberance of the Elizabethan era was followed by a natural reaction toward restraint. From the beginning of the seventeenth century there grew a decided feeling that English was uncouth and disorderly, suffering greatly in comparison with the classical languages of the schools. This feeling was accompanied by an eager zeal to curb and submit to rule the vagaries of the language then in use. The causes of this movement, and the forms it took, are admirably presented by McKnight.<sup>5</sup> It is sufficient for our purpose here to point out that the crystalization of form and the philosophical concepts of language which mark the eighteenth century had their beginnings in the classical reaction of the seventeenth century.

From a few scattered protests against the disorderly condition of English, and a handful of schemes for its regimentation, the middle of the eighteenth century witnessed an enormous increase in writings on English, and the establishment of theories of grammar and correctness which remain to a great extent unchanged today. "Whereas fewer than fifty writings on grammar, rhetoric, criticism, and linguistic theory have been listed for the first half of the eighteenth century, and still fewer for all the period before 1600 [an error for 1700?], the publications in the period 1750-1800 exceeded 200 titles."<sup>6</sup> Nearly all of these works were concerned with questions of propriety and correctness in the use of English. The task of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting this body of writing, "to find out if possible why such prescriptions became prevalent and popular, and especially, upon what assumptions about language, and the English language in particular, they are based," has been ably performed by the late Professor S. A. Leonard, from whose work<sup>7</sup> much of the material used in this section has been gathered.

In presenting the conflicting theories of correctness in the eighteenth century, Professor Leonard states:

But the eighteenth-century grammarians and rhetoricians were mainly clergymen, retired gentlemen, and amateur philosophers like the elder Shandy, with an immense distaste for Locke's dangerous and subversive doctrines. Though more or less conversant with classical texts, they had little or no conception of the history and relations of the classical or other languages, and of course no equipment for carrying on linguistic research or even for making valid observations of contemporary usage.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter XI.

<sup>6</sup> Leonard, S. A., *Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage, 1700-1800*, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

One or two like Dr. Johnson and Horne Tooke made forays of some brilliance and did some useful work, but none consolidated any position. Frequently they quoted with approval the Horatian dictum about usage, or an equivalent but always they destroyed its entire force in application. As we shall see in the following chapter, their fundamental difficulty was in philosophy. They built in general upon the neo-Platonic notion of a divinely instituted language, perfectly mirroring actuality but debased by man, and they labored to restore its pristine perfection.

The prevailing view of language in the eighteenth century was that English could and must be subjected to a process of classical regularizing. Where actual usage was observed and recorded—even when the theory was promulgated that usage is supreme—this was, in general, done only to denounce and reform the actual idiom.<sup>8</sup>

It is clear from the foregoing summary that in the eighteenth century, while there were materials available for the formation of a linguistically sound theory of correctness, the reforming and prescribing forces, backed up by philosophical aspects of language, universal and analogical grammar, and *ipse dixit* pronouncements, so far outnumbered the defenders of historical grammar and current practice that the latter were scarcely heard. Yet in the philosophy of Locke, the grammar of Dr. Priestley, and the dictionaries of Johnson and Webster may be found in embryonic state all the tenets upon which modern linguistic science rests. Despite this fact, the prescriptive statements of reformers were received, approved, and formulated into rules; the rules were gathered into textbooks, and were copied from book to book throughout the nineteenth century and to a considerable extent in the twentieth. In the meanwhile the English language itself continued its organic growth, only slightly influenced by the rules prescribed for it, until today many of the rules bear no more than a faint resemblance to the language customs they are supposed to describe. But before going further with this thought, which is the central theme of this investigation, it is imperative to examine briefly the eighteenth-century theories of language upon which the prescriptive statements were based.

Referring once more to the work of Professor Leonard<sup>9</sup> we find the following theories of language current in the eighteenth century:

1. Language as an entity requiring conformity to its nature, since it is a mirror of actuality. "Those parts of speech unite of themselves in gram-

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 14.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 231, 232. The quotations are taken from the several chapter headings.

mar, whose original archetypes unite of themselves in nature" (Harris, *Hermes*, 1751).

2. The authority of the grammarian's or of the critic's *ipse dixit*. "A multitude of errors committed by writers, evidently from their misapprehending the import of words, are cited as authorities by Johnson, instead of being noticed with censure . . . thousands of instances . . . of misapplication of terms . . . are clearly ascribed to the negligence and mistakes of that lexicographer." (Noah Webster, *Letter to Doctor Ramsey*, 1809).
3. The abatement of universal grammar and universal reason, which retained in effect that of the Latin analogy. "UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR; *that Grammar*, which without regarding the several idioms of particular Languages, *only respects those principles, that are essential to them all.*" (Harris, *Hermes*).
4. The conflicting ideals of (a) analogy of forms in the language itself and (b) the need of differences in form for all possible differences in relations of ideas. "In doubtful cases regard ought to be had in our decisions to the analogy of the language." (Campbell, *Canon the Second, Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 1776).
5. The authority of absolute logic-precision in matters of syntax and of word-choice. "It is inelegant to vary the construction of Members of the same Period." (Buchanan, *Regular English Syntax*).
6. The etymology of words and the history of the language as determiners of usage. ". . . though he is for justifying this, and the like phrases, by having recourse to the Saxon; which I should apprehend there is not occasion to do any more than to the Hebrew . . . or to the Latin." (Anselm Bayly, *Plain and Complete Grammar*, 1772).
7. The authority of good custom defined as national (pure, not foreign or provincial), reputable (proper as opposed to vulgar), present, and further circumscribed by numerous canons of exception, such as beauty and the various principles described in Numbers 3-6 above. "No custom can prevail against right reason and the law of nature . . . The will of the people is the foundation of custom. But if it be not grounded upon reason but error, it is not the will of the people." (Taylor, *Elements of Civil Law*, quoted by Horne Tooke).

The eighteenth century, as may be seen from the foregoing analysis of its philosophy of language, regarded English as a useful but inferior sort of instrument, sadly degenerated from its perfect 'archetype' and filled with impurities and improprieties offensive to one trained in the beauty of classical style. It therefore set about, quite naturally, to delete from the language those imperfections which marred its pristine glory, leaning heavily upon analogy with Latin and Greek for models and authority. But at this point a serious difficulty was encountered. There were some

English constructions which were then undoubtedly correct, and had been good usage for past centuries, for which no analogy whatever could be found in the classics. Could it be possible that custom might establish unique forms in English? Priestley thought so, and firmly asserted, "It must be allowed that the custom of speaking is the original, and only just standard of any language. We see, in all grammars, that this is sufficient to establish a rule, even contrary to the strongest analogies of the language with itself."<sup>10</sup> To this position he holds consistently in his grammar. His contemporaries, however, though forced to concede grudgingly the authority of custom, ignored it almost completely in their writings: "many of the writers on language in the eighteenth century professed to follow custom or usage or acknowledged its determining influence in one or more particulars. But none save Priestley made the appeal to usage with anything approaching consistency. As Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* amazingly illustrates, the appeal to usage in the eighteenth century resulted in a complete repudiation of usage."<sup>11</sup> To Campbell's name must be added that of Bishop Lowth, for he among all the eighteenth-century grammarians most profoundly affected the practice of the nineteenth century. Speaking of the defective verbs and the irregular comparison of adjectives like *good* and *bad*, Lowth says, "They are in general words of most frequent and vulgar use, in which the Caprice of Custom is apt to get the better of analogy."<sup>12</sup>

It is evident, in summarizing the activities of the eighteenth-century critics of English, that despite Dr. Priestley's insistence upon custom as the chief arbiter in questions of usage, he was unheeded, and the grammarians of that century gave themselves over to the task of purifying and regularizing the language. Inevitably it followed that the dicta of the pedants should become the rules of the school grammars; it now remains to trace the influence of these rules on the teaching of grammar in the nineteenth century.

#### THE PRESCRIPTIVE IDEA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Before pursuing the thread of the prescriptive idea through the nineteenth century, two very definite limitations of this present inquiry must be acknowledged. In the first place, inasmuch as

<sup>10</sup> Priestley, J., *Rudiments of English Grammar*, pp. ix-x.

<sup>11</sup> Leonard, S. A., *op. cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted from Leonard, S. A., *op. cit.*, p. 141.

the interest of our inquiry is centered upon contemporary textbooks in the United States, the study of the nineteenth-century school grammars has likewise been limited to the United States, omitting entirely similar developments in England and other parts of the British Empire. Moreover, the outline of the nineteenth-century attitudes toward usage here presented is in itself extremely sketchy, developed only to the point of casting some light on the problem in the twentieth century. The subject is worthy of careful and painstaking investigation to culminate in a volume as comprehensive and definitive as that of Professor Leonard's for the eighteenth-century. It is sincerely to be hoped that such a work may soon appear.

With regard to the teaching of grammar in the nineteenth-century, however, we are more fortunate. The introduction and development of instruction in English grammar in the United States has been fully and accurately presented by Professor R. L. Lyman in his monograph, *English Grammar in American Schools before 1850*. In this work Professor Lyman traces the influences and causes which brought about the shift from Latin to English grammar in the older schools, and the founding of new schools for instruction in the vernacular. He says in summary, "We are safe in saying not only that the American colonists inherited from England the grammar school and college, but that they endeavored to go beyond the mother country in teaching the vernacular. Vernacular instruction is indissolubly associated with the Reformation, out of which the first New England colonies sprang."<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, with the shift to English grammar from the Latin there was little change in the theory or practice of teaching. The memorization and formal application of rules still obtained; the change was one of subject matter only. The establishment of this fact is significantly pertinent to the present inquiry, inasmuch as the formal use of rules leads to the multiplication, perpetuation, and glorification of rules themselves. The method, in short, was lethal to any sort of scientific observation of the language itself. Professor Lyman adds:

In the Latin school the backbone of the course had been grammar; the term grammar, the methods of teaching grammar were ingrained. Latin grammar had stood for the next step above reading and writing the vernacular. When, therefore, the advocates of a practical English training found English grammar in Dilworth and other texts, what was more

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

natural than that they would seize upon it as a suitable substitute for the next step above reading and writing and spelling? English they found reduced to the same accident as Latin; textbooks informed them on title pages that grammar was the art of speaking and writing the English language correctly, and this was their laudable desire for their children; here is a suitable setting in the vernacular program for grammar as the basic study. This conviction made its way into legal sanction for English and English grammar in the last decade of the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

At first the colonies (soon to become the new states) turned to England for textbooks in the new subject. There is evidence of some twelve English grammars having been imported for use, only three of which attained great popularity: Dilworth's *Brief but Comprehensive English Grammar* (referred to above); Lowth's *Short Introduction to English Grammar*; and an anonymous *British Grammar*. Concerning the influence of Lowth's book, Lyman says, "The text, considered strictly as a grammar, of most extensive use and influence in the colonies was Lowth's. . . . Harvard used Lowth as early as 1774 and as late as 1841. . . . Lowth's greatest significance is that most of his rules have been copied verbatim by Lindley Murray and again from him by many compilers of lesser note."<sup>15</sup>

Even the slight evidence here presented is sufficient to show the direct heritage of eighteenth-century purism and pedantry in nineteenth-century American schools. The links in the chain are clear. Latin grammar, as taught in the colonial schools, was the study of rules; the substitution of English grammar for Latin meant the necessity for rules of English grammar. The eighteenth-century reformers supplied these, chief among whom was Lowth, whose own book enjoyed great popularity in the United States and was used at Harvard as late as 1841. Next came Lindley Murray, the phenomenal sale of whose book is attested below, who borrowed his rules from Lowth. He was copied in turn by countless compilers whose books were in use to the close of the nineteenth century. Surely the hand of the eighteenth-century grammarian lay heavily upon the grammar of the nineteenth!

There were three influences at the turn of the century which greatly enhanced the value and appreciation of fixed rules in English. One was the great amount of public speaking engaged in at the time, a natural concomitant of the furious political

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 77.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 35.

activity. Public speech called for polished style; polished style rested on rules; the grammars furnished the rules. The second influence was the absorption of large numbers of non-English-speaking people, who in learning English tended to blend its grammar with their own as well as to retain words and idioms merely transliterated into English. To curb this corruptive influence the schools felt the need of a fixed standard in English, eagerly turning to the rules of the grammar-books as a providential authority. The third influence was a feeling of social, literary, and educational insecurity. Among a pioneer people, occupied with the task of producing the material necessities of life in a virgin territory, it is natural to incline toward established authority in cultural matters. This cultural dependence of the American colonies is clearly seen in the arts, in literature, and in their attitude toward standards in language usage.

With Webster's *Plain and Comprehensive Grammar* of 1784 a shower of textbooks in grammar began to fall on the American schools. Seventeen other books appeared before 1795.<sup>16</sup> In that year Lindley Murray's *English Grammar, Adapted to the Different Classes of Learners* made its appearance. This book, together with his *Abridgment* (1797), *An English Grammar, in Two Volumes* (1814) and *English Exercises* (1802) reached a total of over 120 editions of 10,000 copies each, so that more than 1,000,000 copies of his books were sold in America before 1850. Adding this total to those of his imitators the grand total is something over 2,000,000 copies. Since Murray copied extensively from Lowth, here is abundant evidence of the establishment of eighteenth-century prescriptive grammar in the school-books of the United States from 1795 to 1850 and beyond.

In the first decades of the new century four more texts appeared which gained enormous popularity, gradually superseding Webster and Murray. These were Samuel Kirkham's *English Grammar in Familiar Lectures* (1825), Gould Brown's *Grammatical Institutes* (1825), Peter Bullion's *Principles of English Grammar* (1834), and Roswell Smith's two grammars of 1829 and 1831. "Smith's grammars were used more than all others combined in Massachusetts during these decades. Bullion, Brown, Smith, and Kirkham divided the grammatical field of New York about evenly among them."<sup>17</sup> Toward the close of the first half

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>17</sup> Lyman, R. L., *op. cit.*, p. 133, footnote.

of the century three more texts appeared which had considerable influence. William H. Wells published his *School Grammar* in 1846, Samuel S. Greene's *The Analysis of Sentences*, came the next year, and in 1851 Gould Brown brought out his colossal *Grammar of Grammars*. This latter work was the epitome of the eighteenth-century tradition. In its more than a thousand pages of fine print the student found rules to memorize, exercises to parse, and quotations from standard authors to 'correct.' Brown says himself that this is the traditional method, "I mean, especially the ancient positive method, which aims directly at the inculcation of principles."<sup>18</sup> The *Grammar of Grammars* marked the pinnacle and decline of the traditional conception of language and grammar. Tendencies already visible in earlier grammars became more and more pronounced, so that by the third quarter of the century a new theory of grammar had largely superseded the old, bringing with it a new attitude toward language itself. Yet with the change in theory much of the specific matter remained unchanged, appearing in text after text even to the present day, carried along by the weight of tradition.

Let us now examine what these earlier texts had to say about usage. The student is at once struck by the contradictions in these texts between the *theory* of usage, which is usually sound, and the actual practice, which is quite the reverse. Thus we find Webster saying, "The better way is to explain every language just as it is, and frame a grammar of each language upon its own idioms."<sup>19</sup> This is excellent, but see what this "grammar" must be: "Grammar as a science, treats of the natural connection between ideas, and words which are signs of ideas, and develops the principles which are common to all languages. These principles are not arbitrary (debatable?), nor subject to change, but fixed and permanent, being founded on facts and distinctions established by nature."<sup>20</sup> This is a far cry from explaining "every language as it is, . . . upon its own idioms"; it is a clear reflection of the eighteenth-century theories of Universal Grammar and Language the Mirror of Nature. In still further contradiction of usage as the standard, he says, "There are many grammatical errors in the writers of the 16th and 17th centuries, which Lowth, Priestley, Blair and Campbell have enumerated in their respective works, and

<sup>18</sup> Brown, Gould, *Grammar of Grammars*, p. 86.

<sup>19</sup> Webster, Noah, *Philosophical and Practical Grammar*, edition of 1807, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

many of them are copied into Murray's grammar."<sup>21</sup> Yet Webster's work as a whole shows a far more liberal attitude toward usage than those of his contemporaries or successors.

The contradiction between theory and practice is even stronger in Murray. For the authority of usage he says, "The practice of the best and most correct writers, or a great majority of them, corroborated by general usage, forms, during its continuance, the standard of language."<sup>22</sup> In this statement he is echoing Campbell, whose own amazing departure from theory in practice has been noted earlier. Murray adds further, "It is not the business of grammar . . . to give law to the fashions which regulate our speech. On the contrary, from its conformity to these, and from that alone, it derives all its authority and value. . . . The use here spoken of . . . is properly *reputable custom*, . . . whatever modes of speech are authorized as good by the writings of a great number, if not the majority, of celebrated authors."<sup>23</sup> Yet Murray 'corrects' the grammar of the King James Bible and copies Lowth's illustrations of bad grammar in the 16th and 17th century writers.

✓ Samuel Kirkham's more consistent in his theory and practice, in spite of the fact that he grudgingly admits the authority of custom. But one feels clearly that he is distressed by the imperfections of English, imperfections which he will do his utmost to counteract, even while unwillingly giving way occasionally to custom. He says, "In the grammar of a perfect language, no rules should be admitted, but such as are founded on fixed principles, arising out of the genius of that language and the nature of things; but our language being *im*-perfect, it becomes necessary, in a practical treatise, like this, to adopt some rules to direct us in the use of speech as regulated by *custom*. If we had a permanent and surer standard than capricious custom to regulate us in the transmission of thought, great inconvenience would be avoided. They, however, who introduce usages which depart from the analogy and philosophy of a language, are conspicuous among the number of those who form that language. . . . We are, therefore, . . . compelled . . . to take the language as it *is*, and not as it *should be*, and bow to custom."<sup>24</sup> Here we have the prescriptive idea at its best. Kirkham sighs over the 'imperfection' of

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>22</sup> Murray, Lindley, *English Grammar Adapted to the Different Classes of Learners*, edition of 1802, p. 145.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Two Volume edition of 1817, p. 358.

<sup>24</sup> Kirkham, Samuel, *English Grammar in Familiar Lectures*, Eleventh Edition 1830, p. 18.

English, he regrets the force of 'capricious custom' which causes 'great inconvenience,' and he deplors the fact that influential writers sometimes depart from the analogy and philosophy of the language. Hence the language is not what it 'should be,' and he is 'compelled . . . to bow to custom.' Even his bow is but a slight nod to certain unanalogical idioms which are indisputably established; he pays no attention at all to present custom, particularly that of the United States. He knows what 'should be' and prescribes for it.

Peter Bullion, though apparently repudiating the prescriptive idea, actually advances little beyond Kirkham's position except in the softening of the terms. He says: "No grammarian can of his own authority alter the phraseology of any expression, or assign to a word a signification different from that which has been allotted to it by established usage. He must take the language as it *is*, not as he would wish it *to be*. He may, indeed, recommend this or that mode of expression, as more agreeable to analogy, but it must remain with the public whether or not his advice be adopted.

"Prior to the publication of Lowth's excellent little grammar, the grammatical study of our own language, formed no part of the ordinary method of instruction, and consequently the writings of the best authors were frequently inaccurate. Subsequent to that period, however, attention has been paid to this important subject, and the change that has taken place both in our written and oral language, has evidenced the decided advantages resulting from such a plan."<sup>25</sup>

Since Bullion grants the grammarian the power of recommending modes of expression "more agreeable to analogy," he reveals, despite his defence of usage, a desire to "improve" the imperfections of English, an attitude further apparent in his observation that "the writings of the best authors were frequently inaccurate," a sad condition now much improved by the "change" brought about by the efforts of the grammarians. He makes a distinct contribution, however, in acknowledging the power of the "public," rather than a select group of conservative writers, in establishing language custom.

Roswell Smith calls his book an *English Grammar on the Productive System*, in the preface to which he points out his adaptation of the new educational movements in Europe to the

<sup>25</sup> Bullion, Peter, *Principles of English Grammar*, Edition of 1844, pp. 189, 190.

teaching of grammar. But his title is sadly misleading, for the book itself is no more than a copy of Murray, both in its statements on usage and its examples of 'false syntax.' In Wells and Greene, on the other hand, there is apparently a new spirit which clearly forecasts the change in language attitude appearing in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In Wells, as in his predecessors, what he says is better than what he does, yet his evident effort to study usage by collecting great numbers of instances is highly commendable. He says, "It is hoped that instructors will find the present work adapted to teach 'the art of speaking and writing'. . . . The definitions and rules of different grammarians were carefully compared with each other, and tested by constant reference to the usage of standard authors. . . . In pursuing this investigation the author collected between three and four hundred different treatises on English grammar, and noted above eighteen thousand illustrative examples in the productions of the best English writers."<sup>26</sup> In spite of this scientific investigation and careful examination of usage, which in some instances resulted in excellent discussions of divided usage, Wells did not hesitate to correct the syntax of Milton, Gay, Parnell, Gibbon, Scott, Johnson, Addison, and others.

In Greene's *Grammar* the advance is much more striking, both in theory and in practice. He omits the usual discussion of grammar as Universal and Particular, he fails to copy Campbell's doctrines of usage, and (most significant) he offers no quotations from authors for correction. On the other hand he stresses *doing* as necessary to learning, and in this anticipates the 'functional' grammars of the early twentieth century. He says, ". . . it is believed that children perceive grammatical . . . relations more easily from what they have to perform, than from what they have to commit to memory."<sup>27</sup> Quite consistently he stresses the sentence as the foundation of English grammar, building up from the sentence and its parts a comprehensive view of grammar.

Although Gould Brown's first grammar was published in 1823, discussion of it has been deferred in order to include at the same time his monumental *Grammar of Grammars* of 1851. In the twenty-eight years interval there is no change in his point of view; the latter work is merely an enormous elaboration of the principles expressed in the former. No injustice is done, therefore, in plac-

<sup>26</sup> Wells, W. H., *Grammar*, Edition of 1846, preface.

<sup>27</sup> Greene, Samuel S., *First Lessons in Grammar*, 1848, preface.

ing side by side excerpts from the two works to exhibit Gould Brown's position.

The author of the *Institutes* reveals himself as a static grammarian; he sees language as a fixed entity, perfect in theory, but still hampered by impurities which it is the duty of the grammarian to eradicate. He says, "Hence the need that an able and discreet grammarian should now and then appear, who with skillful hand can effect those corrections which a change of fashion or the ignorance of authors may have made necessary";<sup>28</sup> that he is such a grammarian he has no doubt. Usage he finds dangerous; it is by no means a safe guide to correctness. "I concur not, therefore, with Dr. Campbell, who, to make out a strong case, extravagantly says, 'It is never from an attention to etymology, which would frequently mislead us, but from custom, the only infallible guide in this matter, that the meanings of words in present use must be learnt.' . . . It is folly to state for truth what is so obviously wrong. Etymology and custom are seldom at odds; and where they are so, the latter can hardly be deemed infallible."<sup>29</sup>

Usage is not a safe guide, but the rules of a master grammarian may be relied upon, memorized, and applied ever afterwards. His plan of teaching is in perfect accord with this theory. "The only successful method of teaching grammar is to cause the principal definitions and rules to be committed thoroughly to memory, that they may ever afterwards be readily applied."<sup>30</sup> In this way English will become fixed, regular, and pure. The idea of future change and growth does not occur to Brown. The grammarian, he says, "presumes to be a *judge of authorship*, and a *teacher of teachers*."<sup>31</sup> Such a grammarian will find that though authors claim the authority of good use, "No few have departed from it, even while they were pretending to record its dictates . . . Nay, while new blunders have been committed in every new book, old ones have been allowed to stand as by prescriptive right; and positions that were never true, and sentences that were never good English, have been published and republished under different names, until in our language, grammar has become the most un-

<sup>28</sup> Brown, Gould, *Grammar of Grammars*, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Brown, Gould, *Institutes*, preface.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, Gould, *Grammar of Grammars*, p. 10.

grammatical of all studies."<sup>82</sup> From this dreadful condition Brown arrives as the Messiah to lead the way to a correct and perfect grammar. Nor does he spare his predecessors and contemporaries. Webster has dared to set up custom over authority: "What marvel, then, that all his multifarious grammars of the English language are despised?"<sup>83</sup> Murray was a "*professed compiler*; who had so mean an opinion of what his theme required, as to deny it even the common courtesies of compilation!"<sup>84</sup> His successors wrote "works of little or no merit. . . . It is comical to see what they say in their prefaces." Upon Kirkham he bestows a galling pity: "It is cruel in any man to look narrowly into the faults of an author who peddles a school-book for bread. . . . Far be it from me to notice any such character, except with kindness and charity."<sup>85</sup> The title to Greene's book is a "libel and a lie"; Smith's grammar "is a grammatical chaos." Having thus cleared the way, Brown modestly concludes, "A grammar should speak for itself. . . . The merit of casting up a highway in a rugged land, is proportionate not merely to the utility of the achievement but to the magnitude of the obstacles to be overcome . . . the author . . . has voluntarily pursued the study, with an assiduity which no man will ever imitate for the sake of pecuniary recompense."<sup>86</sup>

The influence of Brown, great as it was, was not destined to flourish unchallenged. His position in 1851 was indeed reactionary; already Smith, with his insistence on the sentence as the foundation of grammar and his scheme for the inductive teaching of grammar, was pointing the way that grammar instruction was to go. Brown knew of these changes and derided them. He was in the wrong, however; the same spirit in education which was substituting the field trip for the botany book, the laboratory for the chemistry book, and the observatory for the formal astronomy book was to turn the attention of students to the language itself and away from the formal rules of grammar. The change itself was exceedingly slow, and is by no means completed yet, for notwithstanding the improvements in the teaching of grammar, with resultant changes in the theories of language and usage, the

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>84</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

force of tradition was strong, causing rule after rule to be copied from book to book, frequently in amusing contradiction with the expressed theory of language and usage in the author's preface. Thus we find in the grammars of the latter part of the nineteenth century, with a few notable exceptions, a continuous struggle between scientific theories of usage based on observed custom and the traditional rules of English. This struggle still persists, and since the nature of the contradictions can be profitably examined in the textbooks of the twentieth-century, discussion of it is reserved for the next chapter. Moreover, the vast expansion of the United States after the Civil War, and the tremendous increase in common schools, with a resultant flood of textbooks, tended to restrict the influence of any one book both in area and duration, so much so as to render the examination of a few random samples unprofitable. Far more illuminating are the books and articles on English usage which began to appear in the latter half of the century.

#### NINETEENTH-CENTURY INTEREST IN USAGE

It has been seen in the discussion up to this point that although the doctrine of usage as the principal or sole arbiter of correctness in language was voiced in the eighteenth century and repeated in theory in the nineteenth, no writer of importance other than Priestley really trusted usage enough to employ it in practice. In fact, the disparity between theory and practice in the matter is the chief fact brought to light in the foregoing investigation. Toward the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the authority of usage was again recognized and defended, sporadically at first by a voice here and there, but growing eventually into a definite language attitude vigorously supported, and as vigorously opposed. So violent, indeed, was the discussion, that scholars, presumably gentlemen of good taste, indulged in verbal battles of a bitter and personal nature, heaping abuse upon each other with a rancor not found in modern scholarly controversy. These personal aspects of the struggle, interesting as they are, cannot be treated here; our concern must be with the essential ideas of the respective combatants.

As early as 1847 "R. G. Latham, one of the most famous linguistic scholars in England, said that of language 'whatever

is, is right."<sup>37</sup> This point of view, contemporary with the extreme authoritarianism of Brown, was repugnant to the leading grammarians of the time, and was bitterly opposed. Marsh, a distinguished American scholar, while in the main holding to an organic conception of language, nevertheless attacked Latham for his theory, pointing out that change in language is a sign of corruption; it is the duty of the grammarian "to retard the decay of our tongue." In fact, he urges the solemn duty of the grammarian to uphold the purity of our speech. "Language being a living organic thing, is, by the very condition of its vital existence, by the law of life itself, necessarily always in a progressive or at least a fluctuating state. To fix it, therefore . . . is impossible. . . . But . . . something can and should be done to check its propensity to wandering growth."<sup>38</sup> This extract is of peculiar interest because it illustrates the dilemma of the earnest scholar trying to support at once an impersonal, objective attitude toward language and a personal, subjective attitude of 'improving' or at least checking the 'corruption' of English. This dilemma is felt all through the latter part of the century, and still exists today for those who feel a moral obligation toward a particular kind of language. There are numerous examples of it from current textbooks in the following chapters.

A year later Dean Alford, an English cleric, brought out his *A Plea for the Queen's English* which despite its title is on the whole a very liberal work in which the author does not hesitate to make custom his canon of correctness. He says, "The English language has become more idiomatic than most others . . . and the tendency is still going on among us to set aside accurate grammatical construction, and to speak rather according to idiom than according to rule."<sup>39</sup> To this he adds the excellent epigram, "Grammarians and rhetoricians may set bounds to language; but usage will break over in spite of them."<sup>40</sup> Dean Alford's influence was very great, owing both to his prominent position, and the publicity which his detractors gave him. Chief among these was an American appropriately named George Washington Moon, who in a work called *The Dean's English* made a direct and personal attack on the usage of the Dean himself. Moon makes no

<sup>37</sup> Hall, J. Leslie, *English Usage*, p. 15.

<sup>38</sup> Marsh, George, *Lectures on the English Language*, 1859, p. 675.

<sup>39</sup> Alford, *The Queen's English*, p. 68.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

specific statements of theory, but the whole tenor of his work is an appeal to authoritative 'correctness' against the freedom resting on custom exercised by the Dean. Moon's attitude and the significance of his work can be had at a glance from a line in his preface. He says, "The Dean himself . . . was but a castaway in matters of grammar."

Much more serious and influential was the reactionary volume of R. G. White appearing in 1870. In this we find all the old theories revived: logic, reason, analogy, natural and universal grammar, and strong opposition to custom. White says,

Speech, the product of reason, tends more and more to conform itself to reason; and when grammar, which is the formulation of usage, is opposed to reason, there arises, sooner or later, a conflict between logic, or the law of reason, and grammar, the law of precedent, in which the former is always victorious . . . Usage . . . is not . . . the absolute law of language. . . . There is a misuse of words which can be justified by no authority, however great, by no usage, however general.<sup>41</sup>

In accord with this theory there follows a most amazing list of examples and prescriptions. Not only are ancient and accepted idioms of English condemned as unanalogical and contrary to reason, but ancient and obsolete uses are lauded as greatly preferable to the current forms. Almost every example is bad, betraying either the most profound linguistic ignorance, or an astounding assumption of *ipse dixit* authority. This work is prescriptive usage at its highest point; it has served ever since as the awful example of what a little knowledge can do.

White, as may be conjectured, was not without opponents. Chief among these was Fitzedward Hall, who, in two works appearing in 1872 and 1873 respectively, attacked White's theories and examples by piling up example after example of literary usage, and revealing with considerable glee the all-too-apparent errors in scholarship of which White had been guilty. Hall answers White's definitions of correctness and authority thus:

Now, by usage of speech we mean the forms of it which are customarily employed; and by grammar and lexicography, orderly records thereof. Although, then, speech tended "more and more to conform itself to reason" grammar could never be opposed to reason; since, as speech changes, itself changes. . . . The case standing thus, how it is that Mr. White wishes to revive English which has become obsolete, and how

<sup>41</sup> White, *Words and Their Uses*, pp. 23, 24.

it is that he is so sorely grieved by the English of his contemporaries, may well perplex us.<sup>42</sup>

Hall himself, though the chief critic of White's extreme position, would not subscribe fully to Latham's "in language, whatever is, is right." And although he makes the comparison, no doubt with White in mind, that "A modern in toga and sandals would be absurd enough; but a rigid purist is incomparably more absurd," yet he is inclined to a modified acceptance of usage as the arbiter of correctness. He says, "I do not hold . . . that 'usage is the one criterion of proper speech.' The general consent of the best writers and speakers among our contemporaries should be accepted for our guidance in matters of syntax and idiom."<sup>43</sup> Further on he repeats the same idea: "By accepted usage in speech we understand that which is practiced, or approved, consentiently and advertently by the best writers and speakers of any given time."<sup>44</sup> In this he presents a point of view shared by most of the conservative writers on language and usage of today. That it is subject to certain difficulties in application is revealed in the ensuing chapters.

A few years earlier, in 1867, Whitney's *Language, and the Study of Language*, a series of lectures, was published. Whitney was a brilliant and accurate scholar, sound in his linguistic theory and liberal in his interpretations. It is a matter of surprise to the linguistic student of today that his sound judgments had so slight an effect on subsequent practice in schoolbook writing. On the other hand, that his work was ignored is a witness to the retarding power of tradition, or the ignorance of textbook writers, or both. There is scarcely any position taken today in the scientific approach to the study of language which is not anticipated or actually proposed in Whitney's lectures. In dismissing the eighteenth-century theories of "natural grammar" or "Universal grammar" he says, "Inner and essential connection between idea and word . . . there is none, in any language upon earth."<sup>45</sup> This statement utterly destroys White's appeal to "reason" or that "misuse of words which can be justified by no authority, however great, by no usage, however general." Discarding all authority in language but that of custom, he says conclusively, "Men's usage

<sup>42</sup> Hall, Fitzedward, *Recent Exemplifications of False Philology*, pp. 66, 68.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, *Modern English*, p. xii.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>45</sup> Whitney, *Language*, p. 32.

makes language."<sup>46</sup> In further development of this decision, he says, "The maxim *usus norma loquandi* 'usage is the rule of speech,' is of supreme and uncontrolled validity in every part and parcel of every human tongue, and each individual can make his fellows talk and write as he does just in proportion to the influence which they are disposed to concede to him."<sup>47</sup> To this idea he devotes considerable time, showing the influences of geographical factors, industry, dialects, slang, and writers on the shaping and changing of the language. Moreover, in turning his attention to the schools by writing a simplified school grammar he makes the very profound comment which is still to be learned by most school-grammarians, "That the leading-object of the study of English grammar is to teach the correct use of English is, in my view, an error, and one which is gradually being removed, giving way to the sounder opinion that grammar is the reflective study of language. . . ."<sup>48</sup> To assure himself that Whitney's prophecy is not fulfilled, the reader needs only to turn to any school grammar at hand to find that "the chief purpose in treating the grammar situations is to eliminate errors from pupils' speech and writing. . . ."<sup>49</sup>

Another careful student of language was T. R. Lounsbury, whose work runs up into the present century. His *History of the English Language*, appearing in 1879, shows a more traditional spirit than is found in his later work, yet the following extract dispels all doubts as to the soundness of his views on language:

. . . the history of language, when looked at from the purely grammatical point of view, is the little less than the history of corruptions. . . . But it is equally true that these grammatical changes, or corruptions . . . have had no injurious effects upon the development of the language. . . . It is, at the present time, a fashion to talk of our speech as being in some way less pure and vigorous than it was in the days of Alfred. . . . But the test of any tongue is not the grammatical or linguistic resources which it may be supposed to possess; it is the use which it makes of the resources it does possess . . . for it is a lesson which many learn with difficulty, and some never learn at all, that purism is not purity.<sup>50</sup>

The acknowledgement of the authority of custom, though not explicit, is nevertheless clearly seen in the foregoing passage; it

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>48</sup> Whitney, *Essentials of English Grammar*, preface.

<sup>49</sup> Kirby and Carpenter, p. x.

<sup>50</sup> Lounsbury, *History of the English Language*, pp. 351-353.

is even more evident in Lounsbury's later works, particularly in the *Standard of Usage in English*.

With the brief mention of two other works this section closes. In 1889 W. B. Hodgson brought out a little volume called *Errors in the Use of English*, a collection of quotations from authors who had lapsed. His censures are not very severe, however, and in some points he is surprisingly liberal. Under the title *Some Questions of Good English*, R. O. Williams in 1897 answered a number of propositions made by Fitzedward Hall, chiefly found in articles in the current periodicals. Williams is reactionary, opposing even the conservative view of Hall. Concerning some particulars he says, "Several of the aberrances . . . are, it is true, of almost universal currency in the United States; but yet, as having no good warrant in reason, and as being shunned by our most approved stylists, they ought, doubtless, to be discouraged."<sup>51</sup> Here is "reason" popping up again as the arbiter of correctness, after Whitney, Lounsbury, Hall and others. We shall find it again in the twentieth century.

#### CONCLUSION

It has been the aim of this chapter to show, in merest outline, the origin, growth, and hey-day of the prescriptive idea; of the reliance upon authorities furnished by the philosophers and *ipse dixit* pedants of the eighteenth century for theories of correctness; and of the rise of a scientific objective view of language which tried and rejected all criteria of correctness in favor of custom, which it announced to be sole arbiter of usage. The practice of the early nineteenth century was found to be in contradiction with its expressed theories, the latter being, however, but echoes of Campbell's canons of usage, repeated from book to book without affecting the ideas of the writers. With the growth of a science of linguistics, interest centered upon usage itself, leading to wordy and violent controversies in which the terms 'good' and 'bad' English became prominent. This controversy is seen undiminished at the close of the century. But from it two clear positions evolve, which may be identified and carried over into the discussion of the twentieth-century. The one is represented by White and his followers, who hold that language contains a certain innate or,

<sup>51</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 112.

'natural' fitness or correctness' which neither authority nor custom can gain-say. The other side is represented by Whitney and other linguists, who see language as an objective phenomenon, controlled by, or rather dependent upon, the usage of all who speak it. There is, of course, no compromise between these two positions. Textbook writers, anxious to uphold the tradition, but also eager to display a scientific attitude are thereby led into errors, infelicities, and downright absurdities, of which they could not possibly be guilty in writing for any other field of knowledge. The reader is referred to subsequent chapters for the proof of these assertions.

## CHAPTER III

## CURRENT THEORIES OF CORRECTNESS

## THE STANDARD OF CORRECTNESS IN TEXTBOOKS

In a leading article for the *Chicago Tribune* for September 4, 1927, Mr. H. L. Mencken writes,

Why the science of philology should be backward in the United States I don't know, but backward it is. . . . In most departments of English in American Universities there are no philologists at all, but only dull drudges who devote themselves idiotically to hunting for typographical errors in the early editions of Chaucer or writing school texts. These drudges are responsible for the current theory that the rules of a living language are to be formulated by calling conferences of pedagogues, none of whom knows how to write. They belabor the poor boys and girls in the public schools with the nonsensical doctrine that *ain't* is an evil word, and with distinctions between *will* and *shall* that disappeared from the speech of the United States generations ago. The material that pours into their ears every day makes no impression on them. . . . The books turned out by these vapid pedants are dreadful, indeed.

This observation, even when allowance is made for the characteristic vigor of the author, is not far from the truth. As far as can be determined by a careful scrutiny of the current textbooks, their authors are not trained in philology or linguistic science; in some instances they do not know, or show no signs of knowing, essential facts in the history and development of English.<sup>1</sup> It is true, as the extracts to follow reveal, that they cleave to a traditional and authoritarian theory of correctness and are deaf to the language which even they and their colleagues use. It is also true that they set up distinctions and refinements of speech and idiom for students to labor over, which have in most instances faded out years ago or never actually existed. These specific matters are dealt with at length in Chapters IV, V, and VI. The purpose of this chapter, however, is to find out what textbook authors

<sup>1</sup> Brilliant bits of philology like this may be found: "Did you know that *god* and *good* are the same word changed in pronunciation?"

actually say about correctness in usage, and to compare their views with those of other "authorities," and with the views of philologists and linguists.

All the quotations which follow have come from the sixteen textbooks analyzed for this investigation, but in order to avoid invidious comparison between texts now in current use, exact reference to any one book has been omitted. The interested student may find similar statements in almost any English grammar- or composition-book on his table.

One of the most interesting evidences of eighteenth-century survival is contained in the statement that "The rules of grammar are based on principles which are much the same in all languages, and which may be applied to one expression after another." Here, in essence, is the doctrine of universal grammar. Of course it was not rigorously followed in writing the text, or the book would never have found print, but it indicates the grammatical theory of the writer, and may explain, in part, his attitude toward specific matters in the body of the book. The same author writes in his preface. "This book . . . gives much space to rules for correctness."

Quite naturally we expect to find Campbell's trilogy of good usage; that usage must be national, reputable, and present; and we are not disappointed. It appears in one form or another in the more advanced texts, and is present implicitly in them all. One states it negatively, "Words and phrases that are not considered good by most well-educated people are called barbarisms. They are often divided into three groups: Those that are not reputable, those that are not national, and those that are not in present use." It appears more often in the positive form, like the following, "In general a word meets the demands of formal expression, or, as we more often say, good usage, when it has not lapsed with age, when it is employed . . . by the majority of standard authors, when it is understood throughout the nation; or, in other words, when it is present, reputable, and national use." Limited as this view of correctness in usage is, the authors themselves go far beyond it in excluding useful forms. Almost all the items in the next three chapters, though condemned in the textbooks, will be found to have present, reputable, and national standing. Like their nineteenth-century predecessors, the present-day writers of

schoolbooks are setting up a standard of usage which they proceed to repudiate in specific instances. One even quotes Emerson as saying, "Life lies behind us as the quarry from whence we get tiles and copestones for the masonry of today. This is the way to learn grammar. Colleges and books only copy the language which the field and work-yard have made." But there is little evidence in this or any other text of the "language which the field and work-yard" have recently made. On the contrary, there is ample evidence that the college and the book, like rich children of lowly parents, repudiate the very flesh and blood of which they are made.

No matter with what words or in what form the various statements of correctness in usage may appear, when reduced to their lowest terms they amount to this: ". . . the laws of language are derived from the usage of the best writers and speakers." It is not unfair to say that this is the standard of correctness in usage expressed or implied in all the current textbooks on English. Yet as a canon of correctness it is worthless. To begin with, there is no agreement among standard authors. Every disputed usage, save perhaps the most ignorant of illiteracies, can be found in one or more standard authors. It has previously been pointed out that Murray and Brown in the preceding century solemnly declared allegiance to the same standard, but proceeded with no sense of inconsistency to 'correct' the usage of Shakespeare, Jonson, the King James Bible, Milton, and others. If the authors who make the standard of correctness are themselves open to correction, what has become of the standard? In the second place, while this standard may fulfill the requirements of reputable and national usage, it tends to ignore completely *present* usage. If there is doubt as to the orthodoxy in matters of usage of former writers, whose works have withstood the test of time, who can be sure about 'standard' authors in the present? Moreover, if standard authors are those who violate none of the rules and prescriptions of the textbooks, the modern literary Diogenes will have a long and fruitless search.

The standard of 'best writers' leads, also, to the fallacy of a fixed and unchangeable standard of usage. As one text puts it, "Long established usage has set up rules concerning the correctness, or incorrectness, of certain expressions in the English lan-

guage. Such rules are no less strict than the rules set up by Grammar and Rhetoric." The use of capitals for the last two nouns represents without doubt the writer's feeling of reverence for grammar and rhetoric. He seeks to make usage a similar fixed and revered entity, a sort of "faith once for all delivered to the saints." What room is there for organic growth or change in such a statement?

Out of this conception of good usage derived from a composite authority of 'good writers' grow two significant fallacies which greatly influence present-day language attitudes. One is the fallacy of confusing a purely literary standard with good usage. As one writer says, ". . . formal expression, or, as we more often say, good usage. . . ." This is an unequivocal lumping together of formal expression and good usage, as though they were one and the same thing. It automatically defines as "bad usage" any English expressions not regularly a part of formal style. Yet the uses of the formal style are relatively few even for cultivated speakers and writers; certainly more than half of their language use is on the informal or colloquial level. Therefore, if the formal style serves for less than half the language needs of cultivated adults, how much less it is needed by children in school! The school books, however, are all built around the theory that the only good English is formal literary English; that one standard only prevails, meticulously observed by all cultivated persons. Such a theory is obviously far removed from fact, yet the writers of textbooks, and their professional colleagues, who daily do violence to such a theory, see no inconsistency between the theory they expound in book and classroom, and their own widely differing practice. And, as is illustrated in the succeeding chapters, they frequently fail to observe their own rules in the writing of books on grammar and composition. Despite their rules, the power of the language itself is too much for them.

The second serious fallacy is the feeling of responsibility for the purity of the language. When good usage is considered to be a fixed standard, departure from it (as it is traditionally conceived) becomes not only error but moral obliquity. The student who goes wrong must be "set right"; the professional colleague who persists in error must be made to feel the weight of his sin and the heinous nature of his treachery. It is in this spirit that one

professor writes in defense of the subjunctive mood: "Both its own inherent merits and the dictates of a worthy patriotism demand for it a fairer treatment than that which it receives from many English grammarians." A grammatical form is 'unfairly' treated by grammarians, an ill which may be remedied by an appeal to the 'dictates of a worthy patriotism' and its 'inherent merits.' The subjunctive mood, in this writer's opinion, is seriously neglected by writers of grammars; with no reference whatever to current usage he appeals to his colleagues on the grounds of 'patriotism' to reinstate it because of its 'inherent merits.' The feeling of obligation to 'preserve' the language leads intelligent scholars to such absurdities as this.

The doctrine of absolute correctness also leads to striking contradictions in the statements found in the same book. One author writes, "Localisms, or provincialisms, are expressions that are peculiar to a particular part of a country. If a localism is recognized as good in the locality where it is used, we should not hesitate to use it in that locality." On the very next page, however, in listing some of these expressions which have very wide acceptability, he says, "The following list contains barbarisms from various parts of our country. . . . If you have been using some of these expressions, determine never to use them again, for they are shunned by cultured people." The list includes *fix*, (to repair), *got* (with have), *gotten*, *providing* (as conjunction), and *proven*. The cultivated people who 'shun' these expressions are very few indeed. Yet were they actually 'shunned,' it seems scarcely conceivable that a writer could so flatly contradict himself as in the two passages quoted.

This example illustrates the fundamental difficulty of the text-writer. Having some smattering of linguistic theory, he attempts to state in his general discussion a scientific and organic theory of language, and often succeeds, like his predecessor of the nineteenth century, in arriving at a sound statement concerning usage. But when he gets to specific illustrations his courage fails him, or the weight of tradition is too heavy for him, and he reiterates the rules and prescriptions of his grammatical ancestors, apparently unconscious of the ridiculous and inexcusable contradictions between theory and practice. There is also a third influence added to lack of courage and the weight of tradition; books which

depart too far from tradition will not sell. With regard to this matter it is perhaps not unjust to quote again the comment of Gould Brown. "It is cruel in any man to look narrowly into the faults of an author who peddles a school book for bread. . . . Far be it from me to notice any such character, except with kindness and charity."

The twentieth-century textbooks present, as has been seen, a conflicting and contradictory view of usage. Many of the eighteenth-century theories still survive, though modified and softened, and blended into the two essential attitudes of the nineteenth century, that English needs correction and improvement, and that grammar is the science for the correction of language. These theories were found to be still operative in the practical details of the textbooks, though often contradicted by more scientific statements of theory in the introductions and general discussions. As guides to current usage, therefore, the contemporary English textbooks are misleading, if not actually bad. Until their authors are trained in linguistic science, have become observers of English as it is, and are willing to fearlessly cast off unsound traditional theories and precepts, there will be no school-texts in grammar and composition which may honestly claim to be consistent with current English usage.

#### THE STANDARD OF CORRECTNESS IN NON-ACADEMIC 'AUTHORITIES'

Interest in correctness in English usage is not confined to the school-room or to college halls. Along with the discussion of politics, automobiles, and bridge, the discussion of right and wrong usage and pronunciation holds a never-failing interest for the general public, and is often accompanied by a degree of warmth comparable only with the pathetic ignorance displayed.<sup>2</sup> This

<sup>2</sup>"The public is extraordinarily interested in all sorts of questions connected with English Philology. . . . You may hear these matters discussed in railway carriages and smoking rooms; you may read long letters about them in the press, adorned sometimes with a display of curious information, collected at random, misunderstood, wrongly interpreted, and used in an absurd way to bolster up preposterous theories. No, the subject-matter of English Philology possesses a strange fascination for the man in the street, but almost everything he thinks and says about it is incredibly and hopelessly wrong. There is no subject which attracts a larger number of cranks and quacks than English Philology. In no subject, probably, is the knowledge of the educated public at a lower ebb. The general ignorance concerning it is so profound that it is very difficult to persuade people that there really is a considerable mass of well-ascertained fact, and a definite body of doctrine on linguistic questions." Wyld, H. C., *English Philology in English Universities*, p. 10.

desire to know, coupled with the social pressure felt by non-conformists in speech, has been capitalized by various individuals and agencies for commercial profit, usually taking the form of handbooks of 'correctness' and home study courses in 'good English.' The advertising pages of all leading periodicals and newspapers carry familiar announcements beginning with "Do you say . . .?" followed by a list of good English idioms held up to scorn, or else offering the reader the opportunity to become a Daniel Webster or a William Jennings Bryan in fifteen minutes a day. All these books and courses are endorsed by 'authorities,' whose chief claim to the title consists usually of financial acumen and proficiency in the writing of advertisements.

One of the most widely advertised 'guides' to good usage, and, if we may believe the publishers, one of the most widely used, is a little book by Ambrose Bierce called *Write It Right*. Although written in the nineteenth century, it was not published until 1909, since which time "its sale has been progressive, and rapidly increasing of recent years. Something like 5,000 volumes have been sold within the past six months. *Write It Right* is used as a textbook in many schools, both secondary and colleges. . . ."<sup>8</sup> This book, a nineteenth-century product in the R. G. White tradition, can be seen from the publisher's account to have wide circulation and significant influence. Yet it is without doubt the most ignorant, bigotted, and misinforming writing on usage since White's work in 1870. Some extracts from its preface and contents will establish this charge beyond a doubt. In the preface the author announces:

The author's main purpose in this book is to teach precision in writing. . . . It is attained by choice of the word that accurately and adequately expresses what the writer has in mind. . . . Few words have more than one literal and serviceable meaning, however many metaphorical, derivative, related, or even unrelated, meanings lexicographers may think it worth while to gather from all sorts and conditions of men, with which to bloat their absurd and misleading dictionaries. This actual and serviceable meaning—not always determined by derivation, and seldom by popular usage—is the one affirmed, according to his light, by the author of this little manual of solecisms.

Since usage and etymology are ruled out of court, and the radiation and transference of meaning in words is declared absurd,

<sup>8</sup> From a letter by the publisher to the present writer, dated December 3, 1931.

there remain but two possible standards of correctness: the natural or inherent fitness of words, as upheld by White, or the *ipse dixit* authority of Bierce himself. The latter is conspicuously dominant.

Another widely advertised, and widely distributed manual is offered to the public by the syndicated newspapers. It is called *The Word Book*, and contains sections on pronunciation, spelling, and usage. It is endorsed, moreover, by what appears to be excellent and reputable authority. The fly-lead announcement states: "To aid people in the correct use of words, the Haskin Information service asked the Funk and Wagnalls Company, Publishers of the *New Standard Dictionary*, to compile this booklet of words most frequently misused, misspelled, and mispronounced. The same leading world authorities who compiled and corrected the dictionary are authorities for the usages in this book." Yet these "leading world authorities" do not hesitate to condemn a large number of good English idioms in excellent repute and wide usage. Some of the condemned uses are:

above	as in	"The above statement."
aggravate	" "	"She is easily aggravated."
and	" "	"Come and visit me."
apt	" "	"He is apt to fall down."
can	" "	"Can I speak to you?"
each other	" "	"The people greeted each other."
got	" "	"I haven't got time."
have got	" "	"I've got to see you."
if	" "	"Ask him if he is going."
myself	" "	"He found Mary and myself."
neither		with a plural verb
one's	" "	"One cannot see one's own faults."
only	" "	"I only saw him yesterday."
proven	" "	"He has proven himself correct."
providing	" "	"I shall go providing you come with me."
slow		as an adverb.
was	" "	"If he was able to walk."
ways	" "	"My office is a long ways off."

These are some of the more striking examples of false guidance. Many of the items are corrections of vulgarisms or gross illiteracies which of course are properly included. There are two criticisms to be directed against this manual. One has already been illustrated; namely, the inclusion of perfectly good usages of wide currency as incorrect. The second is that in the mixture of gross

vulgarisms, illiteracies, and questioned usage, there is no distinction made concerning the levels of usage, or the fitness of words to the occasion. It is clearly implied that all the usages are proscribed always; here again is the familiar fallacy of the literary dialect, and an extremely narrow conception of it, being confused with good usage. No figures as to the distribution of this booklet are available, but since it is advertised in all syndicated newspapers throughout the country, and may be obtained in exchange for a few stamps, the circulation must be enormous.

Having looked into two of the widely distributed "Guides" to good usage, it remains to examine one of the home-study courses in 'correct' English for adults. The director of one such course says,

Careless speech is due in part to ignorance, but much of it is the result of association and inattention. In many cases certain errors are so familiar that we do not realize they are errors until some purist points them out. The ear of the cultured would be shocked at "he done it," or "I ain't" but the same ear might be so accustomed to other incorrect phrases that it would detect no error in such expressions as "those sort of people," "where will I meet you?" "that data is wrong," "loan me a dollar," . . . "friends for dinner," and so on.<sup>4</sup>

The key to the attitude taken by this writer is found in the word 'purist,' here used in the complimentary sense. Correct usage is a matter of fundamental and inherent right and wrong; a cultivated person accustomed to hearing and using a certain expression through a life-time in good society is nevertheless committing error in using the expression if it is inherently wrong. Custom and reputability have no authority in usage; abstract 'correctness' is the only safe guide. It is according to this theory, then, that the author condemns *has got* (compulsion), *have got* (possession), not a *bit* of water, *through* (finished), *tomorrow is* Wednesday, our rent has been *raised*, and many other good expressions.

In an article criticising this course, (though without naming it) Professor S. A. Leonard writes,

Now the important thing about this advertisement is that every line of it quoted above evidences an abysmal ignorance of the facts of cultivated English usage, in spite of the fact that the advertisers begin by insisting on the importance of such knowledge. . . . In short, the authors of the advertisement quoted could hardly have made more mistakes in as many

<sup>4</sup> Advertisement in the *Christian Science Monitor*, October 14, 1926.

lines if they had set deliberately to work at misrepresenting all the ascertained facts of usage.<sup>5</sup>

The reader's attention is called to the special trick employed by advertisers of this and similar courses. The examples printed to arouse interest in the course are rarely or never matters of real illiteracy or violations of good taste, nor are they examples of the muddy syntax of which even cultivated persons are frequently guilty. Quite to the contrary, they are nearly always matters of divided usage of three classes: usage regionally acceptable but not entirely national, usages fully established in lighter discourse but less frequent in literature, and usages idiomatically established, but contrary to analogy or traditional grammar. It is because cultivated people use these expressions naturally and unconsciously, but without reflection on their origin or authority, that the commercial purists make issue of them. In this manner are ignorance and bigotry foisted upon a willing but uncritical public, which annually pays many thousands of dollars for the propagation of misinformation.

Thus far it has been established by contemporary evidence that the theories of language of the eighteenth century, and the attitudes toward language and grammar which grew out of them in the nineteenth century, still have a considerable hold upon the language theory and practice of the present century, both in the schools and colleges, and in non-academic agencies. It is time now for a view of contrasting attitudes, as presented by linguists, historic grammarians, and other progressive students of language.

#### THEORIES OF LANGUAGE AND CORRECTNESS IN CONTEMPORARY WRITERS ON ENGLISH LINGUISTICS

The tone and spirit of contemporary students of language in discussing theories of language and usage is admirably summed up in the words of George O. Curme, retiring president of the Modern Language Association, December, 1931: "English grammar is simply the English way of saying things."<sup>6</sup> This definition cuts straight through the traditional cant to the very heart of the language itself, denying all authority but that of custom as currently observed. To make such a definition possible as a public

<sup>6</sup> From the presidential address, *P.M.L.A.*, Vol. XLVI, p. 1420.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard, S. A., "Educational Quackery" *Saturday Review of Literature*, March 23, 1929.

and official statement, two highly significant developments in the study of language had to take place. One was the historical and comparative study of language, already spoken of, which, in tracing out the relationships between languages and establishing their common origins, incidentally contributed attitudes and techniques for the study of a single language on objective and scientific procedures. The second development originated in the field of psychology, in which language was studied as a form of human behavior, the product of social needs, originating, developing, and changing as the needs changed, and only truly valid as it continued to meet the current needs. The influence of these two fields of investigation in language will be very evident in the quotations which follow, selected from a wide group of contemporary writers. It will be of great value to the student to compare these statements on the nature and function of language with those of the eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

Speech is a human activity that varies without assignable limit as we pass from social group to social group, because it is a purely historical heritage of the group, the product of long-continued social usage.<sup>8</sup>

Language exists only in so far as it is actually used. . . . What significant changes take place in it must exist, to begin with, as individual variations. . . . The drift of a language is constituted by the unconscious selection on the part of its speakers of these individual variations that are cumulative in some special direction. This direction may be inferred, in the main, from the past history of the language.<sup>9</sup>

The essence of language is human activity . . . the speaker and the hearer, and their relations to one another, should never be lost sight of if we want to understand the nature of language and of that part of language which is dealt with in grammar. But in former times this was often overlooked, and words and forms were often treated as if they were things or natural objects with an existence of their own.<sup>10</sup>

Language is conventional, and words mean what the speaker intends and the hearer understands.<sup>11</sup>

. . . If English is to be a continually progressive creation, then it must escape from the tyranny of the reason and must regain some of the freedom of impulse and emotion which must have been present in the primitive creative origins of language.<sup>12</sup>

Grammar, in the sense which we usually give to the word, that is to say, not a mere neutral registration of what our speech-forms are, but a regu-

<sup>7</sup> See pages 19, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Sapir, *Language*, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Sapir, *Language*, pp. 165, 166.

<sup>10</sup> Jespersen, *Philosophy of Grammar*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Greenough and Kittredge, *Words*, p. 312.

<sup>12</sup> Krapp, *The Knowledge of English*, p. 543.

lative ideal of what, according to the laws of logic and analogy they ought to be,—grammar in this sense is the natural enemy of idiom, and continually preys upon it. . . . Owing to the efforts of these grammarians, a number of English idiomatic usages have been stigmatized as incorrect, and driven from standard speech.<sup>13</sup>

English grammar is often said to be the science which tells how to speak and write the English language correctly. But this definition is manifestly too narrow. It assumes that any English which is not correct has no grammar.<sup>14</sup>

In these statements on the nature of language and English in particular, drawn from six writers of three nations, there is no reference to language as an entity, or the mirror of nature; no reference to analogy, or classical tradition, or logic; no reliance upon the opinion of grammarians or the *ipse dixit*, pronouncements of critics. The other two theories of the eighteenth century, historical etymology and good usage, so often repudiated in former times, have been elevated to a position of prime importance, though expanded in meaning beyond the concepts of the eighteenth century. In the discussion of the theories of correctness which follows these two last concepts receive fuller treatment. The contemporary theory of language, then, is that of a living, growing organism, having its origin in the need of mankind to communicate thoughts and ideas, and having validity only insofar as it continues to serve this need. Any reference to an internal, inherent, or absolute authority for language forms is conspicuously absent.

The purpose of the eighteenth-century criticism of English was to purify, regiment, and fix the language. The appeal to etymology and custom as arbiters of usage was, therefore, not nearly so much an investigation of the phenomena of language as an effort to find authority for the establishment of a "correct" form. In this fact lies the reason for such wholesale repudiation of custom as is found in Campbell and others. But the contemporary linguist approaches his task with no such *a priori* notions. Like his colleague, the biologist or the chemist, he approaches his material objectively and with an open mind, determined to learn by observation what English is now, by historical research what it was at any given time, and by reference to linguistics, psychology, and sociology the reasons for its origin, development, and change. These attitudes will be found clearly expressed or implied in the following extracts on good or "correct" English.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, L. P. "English Idioms," *S.P.E. Tract No. XII*, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> Krapp, *The Knowledge of English*, p. 228.

Good English cannot be known merely by definition, it must be known also by experience. English which satisfies a notion of what English ought to be but does not satisfy the vital linguistic moment in which it actively appears cannot be called good . . . the only sound test of the goodness of a linguistic action is to be found within the action itself.<sup>15</sup> Good English varies according to the occasion, just as our dress varies according to the occasion. . . . Loose colloquial English . . . is frequently as appropriate as a loose-fitting garment in moments of relaxation. The lesser grammarians, who so generally present only one form of English, not only show their bad taste, but do a great deal of harm in that they import erroneous ideas of language.<sup>16</sup>

To be good, English must not only meet the practical demands of utility, it must also satisfy the inner sense of goodness of the speaker or writer.<sup>17</sup> The only basis for correctness in grammar must be usage. . . . Where this usage is practically unanimous there is no appeal, but where it is divided no one form or construction is the sole correct one. In case of divided usage a reasonable guiding principle of decision would be to choose that form or construction which is in accord with the tendencies or patterns of English as these can be seen from the history of the language.<sup>18</sup> The other possible idea of good English for an American . . . is that his English shall be true, both to its great inheritance and to the taste and sense and blood and rhythm of life, that are his own.<sup>19</sup>

Two striking points of comparison with the eighteenth-century theories of good English may be seen in the foregoing citations. First, that any reference to a purified, regulated, or fixed language is conspicuously lacking; all definitions of good English rest upon an assumption of relative values in which 'good' is known from 'bad' purely on the basis of immediate satisfaction as a means of communication. Second, that although custom is taken indisputably for the guide to usage, the arbitrament of reputable, national, and present factors in the determination of custom is abandoned for a more organic concept; that is, immediate satisfaction to the hearer and speaker, or writer and reader. Good English is, therefore, as one writer puts it, "comfortable" English; a form of speech meeting the expressional and social needs of the speaker and writer on the one hand, and the comprehensional and social standards of the hearer and reader on the other. Such a viewpoint, sound as it is linguistically, psychologically, and socially, has yet to find its way into a textbook.

<sup>15</sup> Krapp, *The Knowledge of English*, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Curme, *George, Syntax*, p. vi.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>18</sup> Fries, *Teaching of the English Language*, p. 43.

<sup>19</sup> Canby, H. S., "Correctness," *Saturday Review of Literature*, Vol. V, p. 137.

Closely correlated with the theories of good English in the present day, as expressed by students of language, are the statements and recommendations of these same scholars with regard to the teaching of English. After all, the teaching of English in the schools has no purpose other than the preparing of students to speak and write adequately in the vernacular, with sufficient fluency to meet the normal needs of expression, and sufficient accuracy to insure social acceptability. But as we have seen in the first section of this chapter the current textbooks still cleave to the theory that the purpose of the teaching of English and especially grammar is to establish "correctness," by which is meant conformity to traditional and authoritarian standards. It is small wonder, then, that the comments of the linguistic students on present English teaching are censorious, reflecting considerable dissatisfaction with the theory and practice of contemporary English teaching.

Linguistic students favor a radical change in the teaching of the English language, a shifting of the emphasis upon blind uniformity to an intelligent and sympathetic understanding of the language processes as they explain the current phenomena of English. Such was Whitney's earnest hope, when he said in 1877, "That the leading object of the study of English grammar is to teach the correct use of English, is, in my view, an error, and one which is gradually being removed, giving way to the sounder opinion that grammar is the reflective study of language. . . ." <sup>20</sup> Whitney was too optimistic; the passing of fifty-five years has failed to remove this error from the schoolbooks.

It has been the purpose of this chapter to present in contrast the theories of language and usage as they appear in the school textbooks and in other influential sources of information with the theories of language and usage held by specialists in the field of language. There should linger no doubt as to the width of the disparity between them; it may be asserted with conviction that insofar as theories of language and usage are concerned, the current textbooks as a group represent a language attitude fifty years behind that of the linguists. The following three chapters are devoted to an analysis of the specific items of grammar, syntax, and usage as they appear in the texts, to establish the fact that in practice as well as in theory the books are hopelessly outmoded.

<sup>20</sup> Whitney, *Essentials of English Grammar*, preface.

ception of the adjective, they are not inflected) are matters of syntax or usage, and are treated in appropriate chapters.

## CHAPTER IV

## PRESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR

The materials dealt with in this chapter constitute items of actual morphology, distinguished from syntax, which is discussed in Chapter V, and miscellaneous usage, presented in Chapter VI. It is exceedingly difficult in a language as analytic as the English to determine exactly where structure ends and syntax begins, and for that reason the basis of selection for items in this chapter is somewhat arbitrary. Only those grammatical matters which seem necessarily a part of a formal presentation of the English grammatical system find a place in this section. For example, the use of the *shall* and *will* in a particular sentence may appear at first glance to be a question of syntax, but when it is recalled that nearly all complete grammar books present the paradigm of the simple future tense as:

I shall (sing)  
 thou wilt (sing)  
 he will (sing)  
 we shall (sing)  
 you will (sing)  
 they will (sing)

with no alternative forms except the more common second singular *you will sing*, then the use of *will* as a first person auxiliary becomes definitely a matter of morphology. On the other hand, the use of *so* as an intensifying adverb in no way alters the grammatical category of the word but simply involves word order in the sentence, and is rightly considered a problem of syntax.

As may be conjectured from the arbitrary use of the word grammar in this chapter, the parts of speech most affected are those of major importance in speech and writing; namely, the verb, the adverb, the noun, and the pronoun. Such problems as arise in connection with the other parts of speech (since, with the ex-

## THE VERB

*Present tense.*

Every one of the sixteen textbooks analyzed for this study lists the present tense, active voice, indicative mode of the verb as follows:

I sing  
 you sing  
 he sings  
 we sing  
 you sing  
 they sing

No mention is made in any text of the fact that these forms as listed do not represent the ordinary present tense of actual usage, but rather constitute a sort of potential or habitual predication, from which the element of time is almost entirely lost. "I sing" is equivalent to saying "I am able to sing," or "I usually sing." The regular and common present tense form to express action in the present is "I am singing." If a parent should inquire what his son was doing at the moment with the question, "What is Tommy doing?" the answer "He plays" would be so unusual as to excite comment. "He is playing" is without doubt the expected answer. Textbooks and formal grammars have not accepted this common usage at all, still naming the form in *ing* with the present tense of the verb *to be* as the present progressive, a conventional name with little or no real meaning. As a matter of fact the expression "I am singing" may be either a statement of immediate action, or a clear future, as in the sentence, "I am singing there tomorrow."

The timeless quality of the simple present tense forms is readily recognized from a different angle, nevertheless, as the following quotations illustrate:

General truths and present facts should be expressed in the present tense, whatever the tense of the principal verb may be.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Brooks, p. 270.

Universal truths, or general propositions into which time relations do not enter, should usually be expressed in the present tense.<sup>2</sup>

The second statement is tempered with the word "usually" inspired no doubt by a realization of the fact that universal truths are not invariably expressed in the present tense. "If for such statements the present tense is generally used, it is in order to affirm that they are valid now. But other tenses may occasionally be used: We have the so-called 'gnomic preterit' as in Shakespeare's 'Men were deceivers ever'—what has hitherto been true, is so still and will remain so to the end of time."<sup>3</sup>

In unstudied speech the feeling for agreement in tenses seems to overbalance the feeling for the timelessness of the present tense in expressing general truths. Hence when one says "I knew that Washington was the capital of the United States" there is no time quality felt in the word *was* since the word *knew* receives all the stress. In its unaccented form it constitutes what Professor Jespersen calls the 'gnomic preterit,' meaning that "what has hitherto been true is so still and will remain so to the end of time," or at least for an indefinite period. The statement concerning the expression of general truths might well be, therefore, "present facts and general truths are frequently expressed in the present tense because it is felt to be timeless. The past tense is also sometimes used, in agreement with a preceding past tense, when the idea of time is entirely absent from the second verb."

The school grammars of the future must distinguish clearly the uses of the present tense with time value and the uses without time value. Not until they do so will their treatment of the present tense be in accord with current usage.

#### Past tense.

The textbooks quite generally list the usual past tense forms of the verb, but none of them mention the following fairly common alternatives for expressing action habitual in the past:

- The participles *accustomed* and *wont* with the infinitive.
- The verb *used* with the infinitive.
- The auxiliary *would*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Raymond, p. 203

<sup>3</sup> Jespersen, *Philosophy of Grammar*, p. 259. See also p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Lambert, "Solidary Modification: Modes of Predication," *American Speech*, Vol. 4, p. 29.

The forms might profitably be included in any discussion of predication in past time, for although they cannot be strictly classified as past tense forms, they occupy an important place in ordinary speech.

In the inflection of irregular verbs, the leveled forms of the past tense, i.e., those in more or less preponderant use at the present time, are generally listed without alternative, despite the not infrequent occurrence of *we sung*, *the ship sunk*, and others. One author, however, perhaps with qualms of historical conscience, lists the following alternative forms for the past tense:

began, begun  
shrank, shrunk  
sang, sung  
sank, sunk  
swam, swum<sup>5</sup>

Another lists a single alternative form:

Swung, or swang<sup>6</sup>

That this particular verb should be singled out is particularly astonishing in view of the fact that "Swang" has practically no history as a form, and is strongly condemned by handbooks and guides to good usage.

Concerning these verbs the *New English Dictionary* says:

*Sink*: The use of *sunk* as the p. t. has been extremely common. Johnson (1755) says "pret. *I sunk*, anciently *sank*."

*Sing*. *Sung* was the usual form of the p. t. in the 17th and 18th centuries, and is given by Smart in 1836 with the remark "*Sang* . . . is less in use." Recent usage, however, has mainly been in favor of *sang*.

*Swing*. p. t. *swung*, rarely *swang*.

*Swim*. In Middle English p. t. sing. *swamme*; plur. *swummen*. standard p. t. *swam*.

*Shrink*. The p. t. originally had vowel change—*I shrank*, *we shrunke*(n), but as early as the 14th century the properly plural form is found with a singular subject and *shrank*, *shrunke*, become frequent in the 15th century. *Shrunk* is the normal p. t. in the 18th century and still survives.

*Begin*. As in other verbs having grammatical vowel change in the p. t. there was an early tendency to level the forms . . . which has resulted in the establishment of *began* as the standard form; but an alternative from the old plural *begun* has also come down to the present day.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond, 1925, p. 218.

<sup>6</sup> Kirby and Carpenter, Book Seven, p. 177.

The discussion of the word *drunk* in the *New English Dictionary* is more full: "The past tense had originally vowel change (I drank, we drunk) but leveled out to (I, we drank). From the 16th to the 19th centuries *drunk* as a past tense again appeared." This remark applies to England and to some extent to colonial America. Later on in the history of the United States the word *drunk* even as a past participle became so objectionable that the past tense form *drank* was pressed into service. Today *have drank* is old-fashioned rather than illiterate.

One of the textbook authors<sup>7</sup> lists the principal parts of the verb *sink* as *sink, sank, sunk*, with no alternative in the past tense. But on another page of the same text<sup>8</sup> occurs the quotation, "Down *sunk* the bell with a gurgling sound." (Southey). Although the quotation is used here as an illustration of an entirely different matter, the bright-eyed student might well ask why Mr. Southey's grammar differs from that of the textbook.<sup>9</sup>

Contemporary textbooks may perhaps be forgiven for the failure to note these alternative past tense forms, but there seems to be no justifiable reason for making issues of them in exercises. It would seem advisable in presenting the past tense forms of irregular verbs to give briefly and untechnically a little of their history, together with the alternate forms of the common verbs. The form now preponderant may be clearly indicated as a preferred form without doing violence to the history of the word.

#### *Future tense.*

The future tense receives a good share of attention in contemporary textbooks since the authors no doubt feel that all contemporary speech usage and a fair amount of current writing usage is in direct violation of the traditional rules for the future. That the rules may be wrong and current usage right apparently has not occurred to the textbook writers. The following statements and rules are typical of the treatment of the future tense in the textbooks examined.

*Shall* and *will* are used with the infinitive of a verb, to form the future tense. *Shall* is an auxiliary of the future in the first person, and *will* in the second and third persons.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond, p. 127.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>9</sup> The form *sunk* is particularly interesting in this context because it is used as a singular. The past tense forms in early Middle English were singular, *sank*; plural, *sunk*. In Mr. Southey's usage the plural form had become preponderant: in our own day the singular form is preferred.

To make a promise or to express the determination of the speaker, *will* is used in the first person and *shall* in the second and third persons.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of the rules for the future tense, printed in traditional form in the heart of the text, one of the textbooks has for its first sentence, "We *will* begin our study of grammar and composition. . ."<sup>11</sup>

Fifteen of the sixteen textbooks forming the basis of this investigation, covering a period of years from 1900 to 1930, present without exception the traditional rules for the formation of the future tense. It is all the more remarkable, then, that the most recent book should break away entirely from the tradition and omit the future tense from all discussion. In a very modest section entitled "tense" a brief discussion of the time values of verb forms is offered. The table subjoined presents examples of the various tenses, the future as follows:

Future: I will do, I will see, I will hear, I will know.<sup>12</sup>

Not only is the future tense passed by as an item not worthy of discussion, but the very examples violate the rules of earlier textbooks. Can such rashness be justified? Compare now the statements of linguists and students of the historical aspects of language concerning the expression of the future.

a) Johannis Wallis, in his grammar of English, (1615) written in Latin, was the first to state the rule for the use of *shall* in the first person, and *will* in the second and third persons. This discovery was made by Professor Fries.

Whenever the subject of the verb is represented as in control of the situation, *will* is used in all three persons. *Shall* . . . is used in all three persons to represent that some other force, not the subject of the verb, is in control.

Since *shall* is rather uncommon, it is, when stressed or emphasized, frequently heard in the first person for determination.<sup>13</sup>

b) The common school grammars of modern English usually give as the one means of indicating future time the combination of *shall* and *will* with the infinitive form of the verb and name it the *future tense*. Some give two forms of the future tense: one for *simple futurity* and another for *determination*. As a matter of fact, however, the use of the auxiliaries *shall* and *will* with the infinitive is but one of several important methods of expressing the future and certainly does not deserve the title "the future tense."

<sup>10</sup> Hyde, Book Two, 1900, p. 131.

<sup>11</sup> McFadden and Ferguson, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Kirby and Carpenter, Book Eight, p. 312.

<sup>13</sup> Leonard, S. A., "Shall and Will," *American Speech*, Vol. IV, p. 497.

Some other combinations having a claim to be included in an English future tense are:

- (a) The verb *to be* + prepositional infinitive.  
(He *is to go* with the committee.)
- (b) The verb *to be about* + prepositional infinitive.  
(The man *is about to dive* from the bridge.)
- (c) The verb *to be* + *going* + prepositional infinitive.  
(They *are going to go* by automobile.)

Then too, the *present form* of the verb frequently refers to future time both in subordinate clauses and in independent sentences, when some other word than the verb, or the context in general, indicates the time idea. (If it rains, I cannot go.) (He returns from his trip tomorrow.)

On the other hand, the use of *shall* and *will* to express determination (sometimes called "the emphatic future" or "the colored future" or "the modal future") is no more entitled to be included in the name "future tense" than many other combinations of verbs, which, because of their meaning, look to the future for fulfillment:

I desire to go	I mean to go
I want to go	I have to go
I need to go	I may go
I intend to go	I must go
I expect to go	I can go
I ought to go	I might go
I've got to go	I should go

The suggestion, then, which I should offer as the means of accounting for the facts which we find concerning the expression of the future is this. The grounds upon which the future is usually predicted are desire, hope, intention, resolve, determination, compulsion, necessity, or possibility. Any locutions which express any of these ideas related to the future may be taken up and developed as future tense signs. The course of development is in the direction of their losing their full word meanings and thus also losing their limitation to the particular meanings suggested by their origin. They tend to become future tense signs but with colorings which range from an almost pure future sense to distinctly modal ideas.<sup>14</sup>

c) I shall here give a survey of the principal ways in which languages have come to possess expressions for future time.

(1) The present tense is used in the future sense.

(2) Volition. Both E. *will* and Dan. *vil* to a certain degree retain traces of the original meaning of real volition, and therefore E. *will* go cannot be given as a pure "future tense," though it approaches that function, as seen especially when it is applied to natural phenomena as *it will certainly rain tonight*. There is also an increasing tendency to use (*will*) in the first person instead of *shall*, as in *I'm afraid I'll die soon* (especially

<sup>14</sup> Fries, "The Expression of the Future," *Language*, Vol. III, No. 2, June 1927.

in Sc. and Amr.) which makes *will* even more the common auxiliary of the future.

(3) Thought, intention. O. N. *mun*. This cannot easily be kept apart from volition.

(4) Obligation. This is the original meaning of O. E. *sceal*, now shall. In English the meaning of obligation is restricted to the first person in assertions and to the second person in questions, although in some classes of subordinate clauses it is used in all three persons.

(5) Motion. Verbs meaning "go" and "come" are frequently used to indicate futurity. E. *I am going to write*.

(6) Possibility. E. *May* frequently denotes a somewhat vague futurity: *this may end in disaster*.<sup>15</sup>

d) John Fell, in his *Essay Towards an English Grammar*, 1784, apparently came closer than anybody in either the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries to describing the true status of *shall* and *will*: "*Will*, as an auxiliary term, is a mere sign of futurity, set before the infinitive mode . . . *shall*, even as an auxiliary sign always denotes something more than mere futurity, and constantly implies either obligation, possibility, contingency, or something conditional, and very often several of these together."<sup>16</sup>

#### *Shall and Will in questions.*

Associated with the rules for *shall* and *will* in declarative sentences of future time there are parallel rules for the use of these words in questions. In his study of the use of *shall* and *will* in dramatic literature, Professor Fries finds the actual usage of these auxiliaries not entirely consistent with the traditional rules. He says of *shall* and *will* in questions:

From these figures two conclusions seem evident:

1. The usual statement that *will* is *impossible* in questions of the first person is inaccurate, although it is true that *will* is seldom used in this situation. About three per cent of the instances in the first person appear with *will* . . . .

2. The common statement regarding second person questions, for example that in the *New English Dictionary*, that in the second person "in categorical questions" *shall* is "normal" is, according to these figures, plainly inadequate. Of the 512 questions in the second person but 7 or 1.3 per cent use *shall*; all the rest employ *will*. Certainly *Shall you?* with its 7 cases out of 512 second person questions is no more "normal" than *Will I?* having 12 instances out of a total of 407 first person questions. . . .

One ought also to add here that there are a number of examples of *Will you?* in which the context seems to exclude from the word *will* the idea of "wish" or "resolve."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Jespersen, *Philosophy of Grammar*, pp. 160, 161.

<sup>16</sup> Leonard, S. A., *Doctrine of Correctness*, pp. 73, 74.

<sup>17</sup> Fries, "The Periphrastic Future with *Shall* and *Will* in Modern English," *P.M.L.A.*, Vol. XL, No. 2, pp. 1001-1003.

With this convincing evidence from Professor Fries' study it seems reasonable to expect the schoolbook rules for *shall* and *will* in questions to be greatly modified, perhaps to read, "In asking a question, *shall* is more generally used in the first person, although *will* is possible; in the second and third persons *will* is predominant.

More evidence as to the preponderance of *will* over *shall* in everyday usage is furnished by a recent bulletin of the Bell Telephone System entitled *The Words and Sounds of Telephone Conversations*. In 79,390 spoken words, taken from conversations between two men, two women, or man and woman, a total of 1,900 conversations, the word *will* as an auxiliary was used 1,305 times in 402 conversations, while the word *shall* as an auxiliary was used but 6 times in 6 conversations.<sup>18</sup> That *shall* is exceedingly rare in common conversation seems established. That its use in literature, at least in dramatic literature, is not as common as is ordinarily supposed has been shown by Professor Fries. Upon what grounds, then, does a textbook author write, "Don't allow *will* to crowd *shall* out of your vocabulary"?<sup>19</sup>

#### *Should and Would.*

The textbooks agree with scarcely a dissenting voice that the rules applying to *shall* and *will* apply equally to *should* and *would*. Counting the two-book series as one work, all but two of the texts examined assert that *should* and *would* are governed by the same rules as *shall* and *will*. The two books failing to include this rule simply omit reference to *should* and *would*.

The rules for *should* and *would* imply therefore that in simple declarative statements *should* is invariably used with the first person, and *would* with the second and third persons. In questions also, *should* is required in the first person, and either *should* or *would* in the second and third persons, depending upon the form expected in reply.

In addition to the auxiliary uses of *should* there are special modal uses not applicable to *shall*. These are, (1) "In a conditional clause, the auxiliary is *should* for all persons except to indicate definite volition on the part of the subject of the clause." (2) "*Should* is frequently used like *ought* to express moral obligation."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> French, Carter, and Koenig, *The Words and Sounds of Telephone Conversations*, Bell Telephone System, Monograph B.—491, June, 1930.

<sup>19</sup> French, 1924, p. 346.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas, Manchester, and Scott, p. 550.

From this variety of uses, if the rules truly record the facts of usage, one expects to find the word *should* quite the equal of *would* with reference to frequency. Such, however, is not the case. The Bell Telephone System study reveals the facts that in a total of 1,900 conversations the word *would* occurs 379 times in 207 conversations (plus *wouldn't* 97 times in 79 conversations) while *should* was found but 50 times in 43 conversations.<sup>21</sup> It is only fair to assume from such figures that in ordinary colloquial usage *would* has assumed many of the functions of *should*, although not to the extent that *will* has replaced *shall*.

The use of *shall* and *will* as future auxiliaries, and to a lesser extent the use of *should* and *would*, have long engaged the attention of textbook writers. Much space has been devoted to a discussion of their 'correct' use and many pages of exercises follow the discussions. In view of the evidence now available concerning these forms both from the standpoint of their history and their contemporary usage it seems advisable for textbooks in the elementary and junior high school levels to follow the example of Messrs. Kirby and Carpenter<sup>22</sup> and omit any discussion of 'correct' usage for *shall*, *will*, *should*, or *would*. Textbooks designed for the senior high school and college should either omit all reference to 'correctness' or else give the whole story: traditions, rules, facts of past usage, and facts of present usage. Only by so doing can they pretend to any approximation to current usage.

#### *Subjunctive Mood.*

The disappearance of the distinctive forms of the subjunctive from modern English writing and speech is by no means a recent discovery. Priestly writes in 1769, "Grammatical as this conjunctive (subjunctive) form of verbs is said to be, by all who write upon the subject, it must, we think, be acknowledged, that it sometimes gives the appearance of stiffness, and harshness to a sentence."<sup>23</sup> Webster in 1798 says, ". . . by the construction in our language, no subjunctive mode is necessary—in most cases it is improper—and what is the strongest of all arguments, *it is not used in the spoken language*, which is the only true foundation of grammar."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 14, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Kirby and Carpenter, Book Eight, p. 312.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted from Leonard, S. A., *Doctrine of Correctness*, p. 203.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

Of our own time, Professor Krapp writes in 1909, "The most important contemporary change is that which is affecting the subjunctive mood. Practically, the only construction in Modern English in which the subjunctive is in living, natural, use, is in the condition contrary to fact. . . . It seems likely, therefore, with the continuance of the present tendencies, that the subjunctive as a distinctive inflectional form will disappear, except, perhaps, in the one construction noted. Even here, however, the indicative form is used in a surprisingly large number of instances in good modern authors."<sup>25</sup>

In similar vein is the statement of a modern educator: "The colloquial use of *if he was* is not at all uncommon among even the masters of language, and its use in the literature of great writers is so frequently seen that no one is justified in calling its use 'bad grammar.'"<sup>26</sup>

Many teachers, particularly instructors in college composition, insist that the subjunctive form in the conditional sentence contrary to fact is the only permissible one. Their contention is vigorously worded in an article appearing in the *Anglo-Saxon*. This writer says, "It may not be out of place to call attention . . . to the unwise practice of certain well-educated writers and speakers who make a habit of using the indicative instead of the subjunctive in the 'if' clause of a conditional sentence contrary to fact ('unreal condition'); in saying 'If he was here, we would now begin the lesson' instead of, 'If he were here, we would now begin the lesson'. Some of these writers even go so far as to assert that the former sentence is equally correct and just as good English as the latter. But such a claim is without adequate basis. The use of 'was' in the first sentence can make claim justly to only that inferior type of 'correctness' which an illogical and inexact expression sometimes obtains through the frequency of its use by careless or uninformed writers and speakers."<sup>27</sup>

This is the extreme position, which the writer sums up by saying, "The subjunctive mood, so far from being on the verge of disappearance, functions today with as much force and vitality as it ever did in any previous period of English history."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Krapp, *Modern English*, pp. 289, 290.

<sup>26</sup> Cross, *Fundamentals in English*, p. 328.

<sup>27</sup> Setzler, "Is the Subjunctive Disappearing?" *Anglo-Saxon*, Nov. 1927, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Loc. cit.*

This latter statement is probably true as far as the use of the subjunctive in America is concerned, but not in the sense that the writer intended. Never very firmly established (Webster said: *It is not used in the spoken language*) despite the efforts of a century of schoolmasters, the distinctive subjunctive forms are today a literary grace by no means universally employed. The "unwise" writers who incur Mr. Setzler's ire include nearly all the masters of English literature, observant grammarians from the eighteenth century, and such contemporary linguists as Otto Jespersen, H. C. Wyld, George Curme, and G. P. Krapp. His "careless or uninformed" speakers include Franklin K. Lane, Henry Cabot Lodge, Theodore Roosevelt, and Calvin Coolidge, to mention only a few whose actual usage has been studied.<sup>29</sup>

On the whole contemporary textbooks are inclined toward a liberal view of the subjunctive uses. What they fail to make clear is the fact that except for the use of *were* in conditions contrary to fact, all other uses of the subjunctive are extremely literary in tone and sometimes almost archaic.

The most common subjunctive forms are found in the use of *were* for *was* in such expressions as *If I were*, *If you were*, *If he were*, etc. and in the use of a third person singular without the ending *s*; as, *God forbid! Long live the king!*<sup>30</sup>

The last two uses from the statement above—*God forbid! Long live the king!*—are not truly subjunctive forms in modern English, but are really survivals of an ancient pattern now entirely lost from the language. Professor Jespersen points out the absurdity of saying, "Soon come the train," to express a wish. ". . . the sentence 'Long live the king' must therefore be analyzed as consisting of a formula 'Long live' which is living though the type is dead, + a subject which is variable."<sup>31</sup>

Concerning the subjunctive mood in general, Jespersen says, "As a matter of fact, the history of English and Danish shows how the once flourishing subjunctive has withered more and more, until it now can be compared with those rudimentary organs whose use is problematic or very subordinate indeed."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Bevier, "American Use of the Subjunctive," *American Speech*, Vol. VI, p. 207.

<sup>30</sup> Pearson and Kirchwey, 1928, pp. 493, 494.

<sup>31</sup> Jespersen, *Philosophy of Grammar*, p. 20.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

. . . in English in more than 99 per cent of the cases, . . . the old preterit subjunctive is identical with the indicative, except in the singular of the one verb *be*, where *was* and *were* are still distinct. It is easy to understand, therefore, that the instinctive feeling for the difference between these two forms cannot be vivid enough to prevent the use of *was* where *were* would have been required some centuries ago. Since about 1700 *was* has been increasingly frequent in these positions. . . . In literary language there has recently been a reaction in favor of *were*, which is preferred by most teachers; but in colloquial speech *were* is comparatively rare, except in the phrase "If I were you," and it is worth remarking that *was* is decidedly more emphatic than *were*, and thus may be said to mark the impossibility better than the old subjunctive form.<sup>83</sup>

An American observer notes "Five of the greatest grammarians and about fifty authors from Baxter to the present show that *was* in the unreal condition and in the clause of 'wishing' is making inroads upon the territory of *were*. Whether we like it or not, such are the facts."<sup>84</sup>

It seems in accord with the facts to conclude that the subjunctive forms of verbs other than the verb *to be* constitute extremely formal literary usage verging on the archaic. With regard to the verb *to be* it may be concluded that the present tense "if he be" is a highly literary form, commonly supplanted by "If he is." In the past tense the form "If he were" is far more common in writing and cultivated speech although "If he was" is to all intents an equivalent form which may be considered standard English. The use of the subjunctive today becomes, therefore, more largely a question of taste than of "correctness."<sup>85</sup>

#### THE ADVERB

The only question of grammatical form arising in connection with the modern English adverb is that of the adverbs formed without *-ly* as *hard*, *loud*, *soft*, *fast*, *slow*, sometimes called the "flat" adverbs. That some of these words are properly adverbs is not denied by any of the textbooks examined, but they disagree materially as to which ones of the list may be so accepted. Only one attempts any explanation of the reason for these forms, as follows: "A few (adverbs) formed by dropping an Old English inflectional *-e* have no ending: soon, fast."<sup>86</sup>

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 266, 267.

<sup>84</sup> Hall, J. Leslie, *English Usage*, pp. 312, 313.

<sup>85</sup> French, 1924, p. 288.

The determination of whether or not *loud*, *soft*, *fast*, *slow*, are adverbs in a particular sentence is a question of syntax, but when one or more are categorically denied adverbial use the problem belongs properly to grammar. The words *loud*, and *slow* are specifically excepted from the lists of adverbs by three authors, and form, therefore, the examples for this discussion.

The following example of incorrect grammar is cited by one author. "The bell, ringing *loud*, was heard by all."<sup>86</sup> One cannot fail to note with interest that two of the writers cited just above include *loud* in their lists of adverbs, one in fact using it as the only example. The word *slow*, on the other hand, receives only silence or objection, no author defending it, although it is the most commonly used of these adverbs. The advent of the automobile, necessitating the caution "drive *slow*," has placed this usage before the eyes of everyone. It is discouraging to note that the most recent of the textbooks used in this analysis devotes the most space to destroying *slow* as an adverb, giving half a page to a graphic representation of this supposed fault. It is this sort of wholesale denial of current usage backed up by the history of the word and the authority of the *New English Dictionary* that destroys the value of textbooks as guides to contemporary speech.

Another author resorts to a doubtful argument to distinguish between the adjective and adverb. In the sentence, "He rolled the cigarette *tight*," the word *tight* is an adjective because "The state of the cigarette when rolled was that of tightness."<sup>87</sup> But in the command "Hold on tight!" one suspects that if the holder were "tight," he might fail to obey the command. This illustration is cited not so much to defend the use of *tight* as an adverb as to point out the speciousness of the argument.

Returning now to the main question, what rule, if any, governs the choice of the alternative adverb forms *loud*, *loudly*, *soft*, *softly*, *slow*, *slowly*, and the rest? The problem is by no means a recent one, as is shown by the fact that Dr. Samuel Johnson "lists words like *slow* as adjectives only,"<sup>88</sup> in direct defiance of the contrary usage of Milton and others. The real solution is suggested by Leonard in his canons for the determination of usage. "Euphony seems rarely to have been appealed to for resolution of

<sup>86</sup> McFadden and Ferguson, p. 308.

<sup>87</sup> Raymond, p. 197.

<sup>88</sup> Leonard, S. A., *Doctrine of Correctness*, p. 70.

problems like the use of *slow* or *slowly*, *feel bad* or *badly*, and the like, which probably are actually settled to fit sentence cadence."<sup>39</sup> For textbook purposes the matter might be stated thus: Some adverbs have two forms, one identical with the adjective of similar meaning, as *loud*, *soft*, *quick*, *slow*, and the other formed with *-ly*, as *loudly*, *softly*, *quickly*, *slowly*. Either form is grammatically correct, but the sound of the adverb in the sentence determines to some extent which form to select. Hence in imperative sentences, "Come quick," "Drive slow," and "Speak soft," the shorter form is quite generally used; in declarative sentences, "We walked slowly," "They spoke softly," the longer form is more frequently used. In any type of sentence the sound of the adverb in the sentence is the determining factor.

This section cannot better conclude than with a line from a poem of Arthur Hugh Clough, who says,

In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly.<sup>40</sup>

What could more clearly exhibit the parallel forms of the adverb, side by side in a parallel construction, the position of both forms being determined solely by euphony!

#### THE NOUN

The grammar of the English noun has become so simple through the inflectional losses of the ages that little remains to cause difficulty or difference. The plural forms of a few foreign or uncommon words, the question of popular, or "ungrammatical" gender, and the use of some possessive forms constitute the items for consideration in this section.

#### *Number.*

How are the plural forms of foreign nouns made? Must they follow the grammar of their native languages or may they be naturalized into English? The answers to these questions once provided the grammar-books with several pages of materials. The attitude of the past quarter century as revealed by the textbooks examined for this study, shows a decidedly liberal attitude toward the naturalization of commonly used foreign words.

<sup>39</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 155.

<sup>40</sup> Clough, *Poems*, 1869, Vol. II, p. 497.

In this instance the statements of the grammarians concur with the facts of current usage. The plural form of a foreign word is determined solely by its *use* in English. Hence *memorandums*, *curriculumms*, *genuses*, and *indexes* may exist peaceably side by side with *memoranda*, *curricula*, *genera*, and *indices*. If other foreign words become as much "at home" in our language as these, they too may have English plurals. But if the foreign plural of a popular foreign word also becomes popular, as in the case of *alumnus*, *alumni*, *datum*, *data*, the foreign plural is established, logic and consistency notwithstanding.

The word *data* is of peculiar interest because it is apparently becoming popularized with a new use and meaning. Originally a foreign plural of a foreign noun, it is rapidly changing into a collective noun in the singular number, so that the expression "This data is" instead of "These data are" is by no means uncommon. The word thus used means *information*, *collection of facts*, or *results of investigation*. If such a word is needed, and it seems to be so needed, no one can object to a singular "data" who regularly uses the singular "news" from a former plural "news," or a singular "links" (a golf links) from a former plural "links."

Are the words *mathematics*, *physics*, *politics*, *athletics* singular or plural? Those textbook writers who treat of the matter at all favor the singular.

- a) Some nouns plural in form are now generally used as singulars; as,—*economics*, *physics*, *mathematics*, *politics*.<sup>41</sup>
- b) Some nouns have no plural form. This is true of *measles*, *news*, *mathematics*. Consult the dictionary for *athletics*, and *politics*.<sup>42</sup>

A comparison of the rule for the number of the word *mathematics* in references (a) and (b) above reveals the paradox that *mathematics* is a plural used as a singular, and it is also a singular that has no plural. It is small wonder that school children are perplexed by matters in which the authorities placed before them differ so widely.

Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary*, Edition of 1929, says of these words: "When denoting a scientific treatise, or its subject matter, forms in *-ics* are construed in the singular; as, *mathematics*, *physics*; but those denoting matters of practice, as *gymnastics*, *tactics*, are oftener construed as plurals."

<sup>41</sup> Hyde, p. 37.

<sup>42</sup> Kimball, Book Two, 1911, p. 53.

The foregoing definition fails to afford much help in the case of *politics* which may be considered either a scientific treatise and its subject matter or a matter of practice. As a matter of practice the word is regularly used in the plural, though there is equal authority for its use in the singular. J. Lesslie Hall quotes Emerson: "The politics *are* base," and Chesterton: "Politics in *its* historic aspect would seem to have had a great fascination for him, etc." Hall sums up the discussion of the words in *-ics* as follows: "The tendency in words in *-ics* is to take the singular regimen; such has been the case with *mathematics, ethics, physics, optics*; but *athletics* and *politics* seem to prefer the plural. An impartial study of *politics* from Queen Anne's day to the present shows that it is prevailing plural, plural in more than three-fourths of the passages in which it is found. Further reading, however, might change the figures to some extent."<sup>43</sup>

#### Gender.

The following description of English gender is common to the texts treating of the subject. "The distinction between words to denote sex is called *gender*. A noun that denotes a male is of the *masculine* gender; a noun that denotes a female is of the *feminine* gender; a noun that may denote either a male or a female is of the *common* gender; a noun that denotes a thing neither male nor female is of the *neuter* gender."<sup>44</sup>

These rules are true enough as far as they go, but they fail to recognize a popular or "ungrammatical" use of gender which is so common as to be part of the idiom of almost every speaker of English. This phenomenon is the regular use of "she" or "her" to refer to inanimate objects. A few examples serve to recall how common the usage is.

1. Automobile owner working on his car: "I've got *her* going!"
2. "Here *she* comes!" speaking of a train or ship.
3. "*She's* a grand old country," speaking of a nation or political division.

Svartengren has made a study of this phenomenon in English, saying, "The use of the feminine for inanimate objects is native—masculine in character—and quite widespread. The *she* seems to be regularly used with three classes of nouns:

I. Concrete things made or worked upon by man.

II. Actions, abstract ideas.

III. Nature, and natural objects not worked upon by man.<sup>45</sup>

Professor Curme also notes that "We are inclined to make *church, university, state*, and especially *ship* feminine. With a good deal of persistency we say of a ship: '*She* behaves well, *she* minds her rudder, *she* swims like a duck. . . .'"<sup>46</sup> While this use of the feminine gender is not a point to be labored, it scarcely seems right to neglect it utterly in all textbooks describing the grammar of English. Somewhere in the sections on gender there should be mention of so widespread and common a use of the feminine forms.

#### The Possessive Case.

"Names of inanimate objects should rarely be put in the possessive case, for it is confusing to think of inanimate objects as possessing—having ownership in—anything. Instead of the possessive forms, make use of a phrase, generally with *of*."<sup>47</sup>

The rule for the use of the noun in the possessive case, limiting its function to living things in prose, and personified objects in verse, is quite commonly found in the school grammars. It is quite clearly stated in the grammar of Kittredge and Farley where it appears thus, "In older English, and in poetry, the possessive case of nouns is freely used, but in modern prose it is rare unless the possessor is a living being."<sup>48</sup>

It goes without saying that the genitive in *s* is the older form in English. In the *Beowulf* we find *Hares hyrste* (Hair's ornaments); *non daeges* (day's noon); *heofenes haðor* (heaven's receptacle); and in the *Voyages of Othere and Wulfstan* the phrase *ðaes landes sceawunge* (for the land's spying out); and *aeldes geðeodes man* (each tribe's man). From Chaucer come also *my hertes lady*, *lyves light*, *worldes richesse* and many others.

In more recent times it is true that the *of* construction has largely replaced the older *s* genitive, but not to the point of utter exclusion. There seems to be no justification either in the history of the form or in current usage for the rule that "the possessive case is properly used only with names of living beings," or for the

<sup>43</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *English Usage*, pp. 199-202.

<sup>44</sup> Hyde, Book Two, p. 42.

<sup>45</sup> Svartengren, "Feminine Gender in Anglo-American," *American Speech*, Vol. III, p. 83.

<sup>46</sup> Curme, *Syntax*, p. 556.

<sup>47</sup> Raymond, p. 192.

<sup>48</sup> Kittredge and Farley, *Advanced English Grammar*, p. 45.

series of exercises in grammar books in which such useful forms as "the house's roof," "the clock's hands," "the room's length" are offered for correction. As a matter of fact certain established patterns such as "a hair's breadth," "an arm's length," "a stone's throw" cannot be transposed to the *of* construction without doing violence to the meaning, since the phrases "the breadth of a hair," "the length of an arm," and "the throw of a stone" will not serve in the place of the possessive constructions.

Hall presents a table showing 700 passages containing the possessive used with things without life, from 87 authorities from John Mandeville to H. W. Mabie. Commenting on this table, he says, "It would be impossible to exhaust this subject; the number of passages could be increased indefinitely. It is almost impossible to read any good book by a reputable writer without seeing this interdicted locution at frequent intervals; the rule is not based upon the literature."<sup>49</sup>

With such overwhelming evidence from the literature of the past, together with the corroborative examples in the current periodicals of the better sort, it seems advisable to substitute a more moderate statement concerning the possessive case with inanimate objects than that which now obtains in the grammars. It might be worded: "Possession is indicated in two ways in English: (1) by the use of the possessive case, and (2) by the use of the *of* phrase. The possessive case is more generally used with proper nouns and the names of living or personified objects, though there are many examples in standard literature of the possessive case used with inanimate objects. The *of* phrase, however, is more commonly used with inanimate objects to show possession. In cases of doubt select the form most consistent with euphony."

#### THE PRONOUN

##### *I—me.*

There was a time in the history of the English language when an honest grammarian would have been compelled to report, concerning pronoun usage, a social distinction becoming more and more felt in the use of the second person singular pronouns.

<sup>49</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *English Usage*, pp. 204-206. Two examples from current reading come to mind. Warwick Deeping in *Sorrel and Son* says, "They closed it (the door) carefully, as though the room's emptiness . . ." From a magazine comes, "A . . . conference of three pints of Bourbon and one half box of cigar's duration."

The hypothetical grammarian would have written, "Thou dost well"—common or uncultivated usage; "you do well"—cultivated, polite usage. Since that time the more formal usage has prevailed until the original second person singular has been relegated to the language of poetry, religion, and secret societies. As a result "you do well," addressed to one person, is "bad" grammar but good usage; "thou dost well" is good grammar but obsolete usage.

To what extent, then, can the appeal to correct grammar be urged against the increasingly common usage "It is me"? Custom, which made *you* a singular pronoun in correct usage, is just as surely establishing the combination *it is me*, grammar and logic notwithstanding. The textbooks, however, recognize neither the process nor the result.

The failure of the school texts to make some allowance for common usage is the more surprising in view of the long history of *it is me* and the quantities of print that it has evoked in attack and defence. Priestly writing in 1762, says, "All our grammarians say, that the nominative case of pronouns ought to follow the verb substantive (*is*, and the like) as well as precede it; yet many familiar forms of speech, and the example of some of our best writers, would lead us to make a contrary rule; or, at least, would leave us at liberty to adopt which we liked best: *Are these the houses? Yes, they are them. Who is there? It is me. It is him. It is not me you are in love with. Addison. It cannot be me. Swift. To that which once was thee. Prior. There is but one man that she can have, and that is me. Clarissa.*"<sup>50</sup>

Professor Krapp, in his "Guide" conveys a tone of doubt and uncertainty regarding the position of *it is me*. After listing some examples he says, "Nevertheless the preponderance of theoretical opinion is not on the side either of *me*, or of *her*, *him*, etc., as nominatives. . . . By the historical rules of grammar such constructions are incorrect. But this test in itself is not decisive, for many uses now in good standing are historically incorrect. The question is whether these particular uses have established themselves as correct beyond debate. The answer to this question must obviously be in the negative. . . ."<sup>51</sup>

The Leonard-Moffett study, however, reveals a far more widespread acceptance of *it is me* than Professor Krapp's article

<sup>50</sup> Quoted from Leonard, S. A., *Doctrine of Correctness*, p. 186.

<sup>51</sup> Krapp, *Comprehensive Guide to Good English*, p. 382.

would indicate. The linguists rated at 2.1 on a scale of 4 points, in which point 2 represents "cultivated informal English." It must be added, though, that other groups of judges were more conservative, as the following table shows:

On a scale of 4 points in which 1 represents "Literary or formal English" and "Uncultivated English," the average rating of *it is me* for

23 Authors	was 3.2
24 Editors	3.2
24 Business men	3.6
68 Members of the M.L.A.	2.4
50 Members of the English Council	2.9
12 Teachers of Speech	2.5

Here, as in many other instances, the students of language were more liberal in accepting the usage than were other educated groups<sup>52</sup>

Commenting upon the findings of this study, an editorial in the *Evening Standard* (London) says:

There are two ways of defending it (it is me). One is to point out that "me" here is not the accusative "me," but the equivalent, and probably a survival, of the French "moi." Just as the French do not say "C'est je" or, in answer to a question, simply "Je!" so we—unless we are ultra-particular—do not say "it's I" or simply "I!". We say "it's me," or "Me!" and we do it for the same reasons and the same justification.

The other way of defending it is to remark that language preceded grammarians, and still takes precedence of them. The business of the grammarian is to observe, perhaps to explain, accomplished facts. But the facts themselves are outside his power. . . . Either, or both, of these defences may be right. The history of linguistics shows that languages will grow in spite of all attempts to restrain them. What seems to be the solecism of today is the accepted idiom of tomorrow.<sup>53</sup>

Havelock Ellis joins forces with the defenders of *it is me*.

But there are other points at which some, even good critics (that lets you out!) may be tempted to accept the commendation of the literary grammarians. It is sufficient to mention one: the nominative use of the pronoun "Me." Yet surely, anyone who considers social practice as well as psychological necessity should not fail to see that we must recognize a double use of "me" in English. The French, who in such matters seem to have possessed a finer social and psychological tact, have realized that "je" cannot be the sole nominative of the first person and have supplemented it by "moi" ("mi" from "mihi"). The Frenchman, when asked who is there,

<sup>52</sup> Leonard-Moffett, "Levels in English Usage," *English Journal*, May 1927, p. 353.  
<sup>53</sup> *Evening Standard*, London, October 8, 1927.

does not reply "Je!" but the would-be purist in English is supposed to be reduced to replying "I!" Royal Cleopatra asks the Messenger: "Is she as tall as me?" The would-be purist no doubt transmutes this as he reads into "Is she as tall as I?" We need not envy him.<sup>54</sup>

Mr. Ellis strikes at the heart of the controversy in his use of the terms "social practice" and "psychological necessity." These are the bases of correct usage, though perhaps in reverse order. "Psychological necessity" establishes a "social practice" in language, which will triumph over logic and the laws of grammar despite the howls of purists and the rods of schoolmasters. Many such "psychological necessities" are now "correct" grammar; many more will be as their need is felt.

The honest textbook writer of the future must face the facts. He must bow to social custom. In his discussion of the first person singular pronoun after the verb *to be* he must say: "In formal literary, and solemn style the pronoun *I* is used; in cultivated colloquial usage custom has also established the pronoun *me*. The tone and purpose of the speech or writing must in all cases determine the choice of the pronoun."

*It is him, her.*

Although extremely common in the less cultivated levels of current English, and occurring sporadically in standard literature, (as in "somebody leaner and darker than him" in Lord Dunsany's *The Blessing of Pan*, Putnam, 1928), the pronouns *him* and *her* in nominative constructions have far less standing and support than does *me* in similar constructions. This fact is an interesting illustration of the validating force of custom. Logically, if *it is me* is accepted, *it is him* or *her* must be similarly accepted, as they are parallel constructions. But custom, not logic, rules, discriminating clearly between the acceptable *it is me* and the excluded *it is her, him*. It is possible, too, that the customary telephone reply, "This is he (she) speaking," has had an influence in preserving the nominative forms.

The *New English Dictionary* acknowledges this usage historically as follows: "*him*. For the nominative especially after *than, as* and in predicate after *be*. Common in colloquial language from the end of the 16th century. Dialectically the use of *him* for *he* extends to all constructions in which French uses *lui* for *il*. It

<sup>54</sup> Ellis, Havelock; *The Dance of Life*, Chapter IV.

has been used thus by Chaucer, Shakespeare, Van Brugh, Johnson, Tucker, and Burke, to name only a few."

The judges of the Leonard-Moffett study found the usage "I am older than *him*" far less acceptable than "it is *me*." The latter usage was ranked 25th in a list of 102 items arranged in order to acceptability, while "I am older than *him*" was ranked 87th.

Professor Krapp says of the nominative uses of *her*, *him*, *them*: "Though widely current, these uses do not have the sanction of authority, and are usually designated as incorrect by grammarians and other critics of speech. . . . It is possible that in time general use will make these constructions so customary that they will be accepted as correct, but that time has not yet arrived."<sup>55</sup>

The foregoing statement summarizes the uses of *her*, *him*, *them* adequately. These forms are common, but not in written English nor cultivated speech. The chief fact to stress is that they do not have the standing of "it is *me*," and that the establishment of the latter in current acceptable English does not constitute support for them in any way. Each usage must be judged on its own merits.

#### *Who and Whom.*

Such sentences as "Who did they punish?", "Who did you give it to?", "Who are you going to invite?", are quite generally condemned in current textbooks as examples of bad grammar and incorrect usage. Such wholesale condemnation is by no means representative of current usage, as any careful observer of cultivated speech and informal writing can readily testify. In the initial position in questions *who* is far more prevalent than *whom* even though it may be grammatically the object of a following verb or preposition. On the contrary when the pronoun immediately follows the verb or preposition cultivated usage requires the objective form as in "For whom was it sent?", "You saw whom?". The use of the nominative in the initial position seems to be the result of certain inherent language habits, one of which is the feeling for a nominative form at the beginning of a sentence and another the reluctance to make a grammatical decision before the context requires it.<sup>56</sup> One observer reports: ". . . all cultivated

<sup>55</sup> Krapp, *Comprehensive Guide to Good English*, p. 298.

<sup>56</sup> This latter habit is interestingly revealed in *The Blessing of Pan* by Lord Dunsany. The speaker makes an inquiry, "Who?" said the Vicar. "Whom do you mean?" The repetition of the interrogative pronoun gives time for a grammatical decision—to use the objective form. The first is spontaneous and is grammatically undecided, or nominative.

persons unless they make a heroic and conscious effort invariably say 'Who is it for?' and 'Who did you see?' . . . On the contrary no cultivated person says 'A man *who* I saw'; almost invariably one says 'a man I saw,' or less often, 'a man that I saw.'"<sup>57</sup> In the eighteenth century the use of *who* for *whom* was condemned by Lowth, Buchanan, Hornsey, and Bingham, but was defended by Webster and Priestly.<sup>58</sup> The American grammarian, Webster, strangely enough calls on analogy with Latin grammar for his defence, although he usually avoided classical analogy in his treatment of usage. He says

. . . "*whom* did you speak *to*?" was never used in speaking, as I can find, and if so, is hardly English at all. There is no doubt, in my mind, that the English *who* and the Latin *qui* are the same word with mere variations of dialect. *Who* in the Gothic and Teutonic, has always answered to the nominative *qui*; and dative *cui* which was pronounced like *qui*, and the ablative *quo*.

. . . So that *Who* did he speak *to*? *Who* did you go *with*? were probably as good English, in ancient times, as *cui dixit? Cum quo ivisti?* in Latin. Nay, it is more than probable that *who* was once wholly used in asking questions, even in the objective case; *who* did he marry? until some Latin student began to suspect it bad English, because not agreeable to the Latin rules. At any rate, *whom* do you speak *to*? is a corruption and all the grammars that can be found will not extend the use of the phrase beyond the walls of a college.<sup>59</sup>

The modern linguist is scarcely prepared to agree with Webster that the dative use of *whom* is a corruption, nor to defend wholeheartedly his etymology, sound though it is in part, but his final statement that a usage based upon logic or analogy with Latin grammar "will not extend the use of a phrase beyond the walls of a college" commands respect as the observation of a genuine student of language with an objective viewpoint remarkable in his day. As a matter of fact, *who* has been used as an objective form throughout the history of English. The *New English Dictionary* says, "Common in colloquial use as the object of a verb, or of a preposition following at the end of a clause," and lists examples from Cranmer to Hardy.

The anxiety of textbook writers to correct the faulty *who* leads occasionally to absurdities. Of such a character is the following, "In questions, *whom* comes at the beginning of the sentence, where

<sup>57</sup> Leonard, S. A., "Educational Quackery," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 5:806, March 23, 1929.

<sup>58</sup> Leonard, S. A., *Doctrine of Correctness*, p. 263.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 52.

we ordinarily find the subject."<sup>60</sup> There is no limiting or modifying statement, leading the student naturally to the assumption that every question employing the interrogative pronoun must begin with *whom*. He therefore says, or writes, in good faith "*Whom* are you?" and "*Whom* did you think I was?"

The discussion thus far has dealt with *who* and *whom* as interrogative pronouns. As relative pronouns they give rise to several interesting constructions. The use of *who* as a relative pronoun in an objective construction is far less common in cultivated speech and writing, chiefly because, as Professor Leonard points out (see footnote 57) in freer use the pronoun tends to be omitted entirely, as in "That is the man I saw," or the uninflected *that* is substituted, as in "Garrick was the actor that I referred to." Nevertheless, the use of *who* as an objective relative is by no means rare. A recent letter from the editorial rooms of the Rand McNally and Company, publishers, contains the sentence, "This copy editor, however, is no pedant but an up-to-date broad-minded college woman *who* we can usually trust to go ahead and prepare a manuscript without special supervision." Such a sentence in a letter from a mercantile firm would have small significance, but from an editor in the employ of a prominent publishing house (a person professionally "language-minded") it reveals the fact that even to a professional writer *who* in this sentence awoke no grammatical consciousness, but was natural and spontaneous.

The case of the relative pronoun in such sentences as "There is a man *who* I know will be faithful," is sometimes disputed. *Who* is ordinarily parsed as the subject of the verb *will be* the clause *I know* being considered parenthetical. Some writers, perhaps influenced by the stress on the objective *whom* in the school room, use *whom* in such a sentence, making it objective of the verb *know*. An example occurs in Richard Haliburton's *Royal Road to Romance*, p. 152, "men . . . *whom* I knew would communicate their erstwhile shipmates. . . ." While such usages do occur, they are by no means common enough to challenge seriously the customary nominative *who*.

Except in strictly formal writing the compounds *whoever* and *whosoever* are in current usage quite generally employed as nominative and objective forms. The reason lies in the grammatical

<sup>60</sup> Kirby and Carpenter, Book Eight, p. 32.

uncertainty connected with the usual syntax of these forms, that of object of a preceding verb or preposition, and subject of a succeeding verb. This sentence from Boswell's *Life of Johnson* illustrates the point very well, ". . . you shall meet whoever comes, for me." Is *whoever* in this sentence object of the verb *meet* or subject of the verb *comes*? Of course it is in a sense both, but Boswell undoubtedly felt the subject relation to be the stronger and wrote it so. The nominative gains further support when it is realized that the object of *meet* is really an objective *him*, which is omitted for convenience but may be readily reinstated, as in, "You shall meet *him*, whoever comes," or "I shall punish *him*, whoever speaks." When a preposition immediately precedes, the dilemma is stronger. "This is addressed to whoever is concerned." Here again the phrase *whoever is concerned* is felt to be the entire object of the preposition rather than *whoever* alone, and is consequently made nominative rather than objective. On the other hand, the objective form is sometimes employed in a similar construction, thus: ". . . admired by *whomsoever* shall happen upon these lines." (From *Anthology of Pure Poetry* by George Moore, p. 7.) As a result of these doubtful constructions, the compound relative pronouns tend to be used nominatively even when the grammar is clear, as in "I will go with whoever I like," simply because in nearly all constructions even with a preposition *whoever* is used nominatively. The schoolbooks are quite right in distinguishing the case forms for the compound relative pronouns for strictly literary usage, but to insist that these literary and formal distinctions be made in informal writing and speech as necessary 'correctness' is to do violence to the readily observed facts of current usage. It has been shown, moreover, that even in literary usage the forms are not indisputable.

## CHAPTER V

## PRESCRIPTIVE SYNTAX

It is the purpose of this chapter to demonstrate that the rules of the ordinary school textbooks with regard to syntactical problems are often at variance with the usage of standard literature or the customs of polite society. That these rules are frequently of long standing and carry the weight of some authority is not disputed; it is rather the contention of this chapter that they are "prescriptive" in the sense that they represent what their authors feel should be, in contradiction to what actually is in literary and current usage. As is the case in the preceding chapter on Prescriptive Grammar, no attempt is made to present a complete survey of English syntax, but instead to select from the textbooks certain clear and concrete issues unequivocally presented by their authors which may be dealt with objectively. It follows, therefore, that the items dealt with in this chapter cannot be grouped very conveniently into categories except that different problems affecting a particular part of speech may be placed under one heading. While the general terms "concord," "word order," etc., would cover a number of the specific items, there would remain too many miscellaneous ungrouped items to make such a scheme of organization feasible. For that reason each general item has been listed separately without regard for the order usually observed in works on syntax.

## SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Five textbooks among those examined for this study declare flatly that "a verb must agree in number with its subject." As there are no explanatory statements attached to the rule, the student is forced to conclude that every verb in English must agree with the *form* of the subject in number, regardless of the meaning or intention. The examples offered to illustrate the rules all tend to reinforce this conclusion. But the users of English all through its

history have never felt constrained to observe formal concord; they have made their verbs agree with the feeling or intention of the subject no matter what the form. "In the Anglo-Saxon period, we see plural subjects taking the singular verb . . . the writer has recorded four unmistakable cases in *Beowulf*. . . . In Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* we read 'The spyces and the wyn is come anon'. . . . Malory says, 'was chosen . . . the most men of worship.' These are typical of numerous passages in Malory, Latimer, Marlowe, Shakespeare, and many Elizabethan authors."<sup>1</sup>

Milton also used free syntax in subject-predicate agreement; so did Cowley, Swift, Defoe, Hume, Lamb, Thackeray, and indeed almost every writer of note to the middle of the nineteenth century. From that time on, however, the rules of the eighteenth century became rigid in the formalism of the nineteenth, with a resultant closer attention to formal agreement. But examples of freer usage as in Kipling's "The tumult and the shouting dies," if not common, still serve to remind us that formal agreement in the subject-verb relationship may be violated when the sense of the expression is stronger than the feeling for concord. From the literature it appears that concord was settled entirely by the meaning of the passage prior to the eighteenth century, as is witnessed by Shakespeare's very free use; in the eighteenth century regimentation set in, only slightly affecting the writers of that century but greatly influencing the practice of the succeeding century, so that the earlier freedom very largely, though not entirely, disappeared. But many problems were left unsolved by the rules.

In this connection the comment of Jespersen is illuminating:

Those languages which have kept the old rule of concord in secondary words are very often thereby involved in difficulties, and grammars have to give more or less intricate rules which are not always observed in ordinary life . . . even by the "best writers." A few English quotations (taken from M.E.G. II, Ch. VI) will show the nature of such difficulties with verbs:

not one in ten of them *write* it so badly  
 ten *is* one and nine  
 none *has* more keenly felt them  
 neither of your friends *are* safe  
 if the death of neither man nor gnat *are* designed  
 one or two of his things *are* still worth your reading

<sup>1</sup> Hall, J. Leslie, *English Usage*, pp. 53, 54.

his meat *was* locusts and wild honey  
both death and I *am* found eternal

All these sentences are taken from well-known writers, the last, for instance from Milton.<sup>2</sup>

It is with these points of possible difficulty that we now deal, assorting them into distinct categories for greater convenience and clarity. The classification is not exhaustive inasmuch as the items listed are only those subject to definite rules in the school texts.

1. The verb with the compound subject. Textbook rule: "Two or more singular subjects connected by *and* require a plural verb."<sup>3</sup> While it is generally true in modern usage that a compound subject joined by *and* is followed by a plural verb, there are notable exceptions which cannot be ignored. For example, when a compound subject refers to one person, as in "My old friend and adviser *is* sick," the verb is always singular because the subject, though plural in form, is actually singular. Likewise when a series of subjects is arranged in climactic order the verb tends to agree with the last subject because of its emphasis, as in "Your families, your homes, your country *calls* you to serve!" When a compound subject follows the verb, the verb is very often in the singular, as in "there *is* wealth and glory for the man who will do this." This usage is more common after *there is*, *there exists*, etc., as Curme remarks: "Survivals still occasionally occur also in literary language after *there is*, *there exists*, etc., i.e., in certain set expressions where the mind is not on the alert";<sup>4</sup> although the explanation probably lies more in the accepted pattern of *there is* plus a plural subject than in any lack of alertness of mind. Since the *there is* combination is followed in the great majority of sentences by a singular subject it has become a standard way of introducing a subject, whether singular or plural, another example of the victory of usage over logical grammar. So well entrenched is this that the over-meticulous plural verb is uncomfortably conspicuous in the sentence, as in: "But what interests Sutter beyond all else *are* the stories brought him by travelers," (Henry L. Stewart, *Harpers*, January 1926). Needless to say, the verb *is* would pass without notice in this sentence.

Several years ago a most amusing and at the same time significant controversy arose out of a sentence used by the Burling-

<sup>2</sup> Jespersen, *Philosophy of Grammar*, p. 209.  
<sup>3</sup> Pearson and Kirchwey, *op. cit.* p. 153.  
<sup>4</sup> Curme, *Syntax*, p. 55.

ton Railroad in an advertisement. The sentence ran, "For within this tremendous area *is* produced: Two-thirds the oats, more than half the corn, more than half the barley, half the wheat, half the hogs, nearly half the cattle, nearly half the gold, wool and cotton."<sup>5</sup> The question of whether *is* or *are* was correct in this sentence aroused national interest. Upon appeal the *Literary Digest* and Professor Phelps of Yale voted for *are*; Professor R. K. Root of Princeton and Bliss Perry of Harvard voted for *is*. The press took up the discussion with editorials, news stories, and features. The question was of course not settled and never will be until either rule or usage becomes absolute.

In all the examples cited the number of the verb is clearly a matter of agreement with the *feeling* for number in the subject. Instead of the iron-clad rule "Two or more singular subjects connected by *and* require a plural verb," the rule should be stated: Two or more subjects joined by *and* when felt to be plural are followed by a plural verb; when the subject, though plural in form, is felt to be a single entity, the singular verb may be used; when the compound subject follows the verb, the verb is frequently in the singular, especially in the patterns *there is*, *there exists*.

2. Singular subjects formed with *or*, *nor*. Textbook rule: "When two singular subjects are connected by *or* or *nor*, the subject is singular and the singular form of the verb should be used."<sup>6</sup> In such a sentence as "The president or the secretary is expected to do this work," the singular nature of the subject is preserved and the verb accordingly agrees. But in the sentence "Frank or Jim *have* come on alternate weeks to my at homes," the subject is really plural in idea though singular in form. Hence with *or* or *nor* connecting two subjects there is greater freedom observed in the verb agreement, despite the fact that strict logic demands the singular. This fact is especially true in questions, in which the singular verb though logically correct is so unusual as to be conspicuous. For example, "*Is* Frank or Jim here?" "*Has* father or mother come in yet?" In these sentences the singular verb is distressingly odd where the plural would pass unnoticed. Curme points out also the tendency to use the plural verb with negative

<sup>5</sup> From a pamphlet entitled *Burlington Blues* issued by the Burlington Railroad, December 20, 1926.

<sup>6</sup> Pearson and Kirchwey, *op. cit.*, p. 153

statements having a compound subject: "After *neither . . . nor* we still often find the plural verb after singular subjects since there has long been a tendency to give formal expression to the plural idea which always lies in the negative form of statement."<sup>7</sup> He offers a number of examples, a few of which follow. "Neither search nor labor *are* necessary" (Johnson); "Neither he nor his lady *were* at home" (George Washington); "Neither painting nor fighting *feed* men" (Ruskin).<sup>8</sup>

It is quite evident that the rule "When two singular subjects are joined by *or* or *nor*, the subject is singular and the singular form of the verb should be used" needs considerable revision. Any rule formulated for this case must point out (1) that two singular subjects joined by *or* or *nor* when felt to be singular and alternative are followed by a singular verb; (2) that when they are felt to be plural or grouped, are followed by a plural verb; (3) that in questions the plural verb is almost always used; and (4) that in negative statements the plural verb is very common. All of these uses, unconsciously employed by the rule-makers themselves, never enter the schoolbooks.

3. The singular subject with plural modification. Textbook rule: "A verb agrees in number with its subject, regardless as to whether or not a noun or nouns intervene between the verb and its subject."<sup>9</sup> If this rule were changed to read, "A verb agrees with the intended number of its subject, even though the form differ," it would be much closer to the truth. When a singular noun (singular in form) is followed by a modifier, especially a partitive group (which) conveys the idea of plurality . . . the verb is in the plural, even though the governing noun is singular. . . ."<sup>10</sup> We frequently see such sentences as "A great heap of books *are* on my table"; "The entire list of candidates *were* interviewed"; "During 1931, \$876,868.00 worth of books *were* distributed free." From this common free use of the plural idea expressed by a singular noun followed by a partitive modifier, we are not greatly surprised to find H. C. Wyld, the noted English linguist, saying in his *Historical Study of the Mother Tongue*, "Thus in time the aggregate of impressions *result* in a memory picture. . . ."

<sup>7</sup> Curme, *Syntax*, p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Raymond, 1925, p. 199.

<sup>10</sup> Curme, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

4. A singular subject augmented by phrases introduced by *with*, *together with*, *as well as*, *no less than*, etc. Textbook rule: "Parenthetical expressions introduced by words such as *with*, *as well as*, *no less than*, and the like do not affect the number of the verb."<sup>11</sup> Ordinarily in such sentences the augmentation of the subject is so distinctly parenthetical as to be without influence on the number of the subject, so that a singular noun, though augmented, is followed by a singular verb. But occasionally the augmentation is distinctly cumulative, as though the secondary idea were attached by *and*, in which case a plural verb is sometimes employed. Similarly, when the secondary idea stresses plural number, the plural verb often follows. So we find generally: "John, together with some friends, *was* here yesterday"; but "The captain as well as most of his men *were* never seen again"; and "Old Sir John with half-a-dozen men *are* at the door." Further examples: ". . . the count, with my nephew and me, *were* introduced by his son . . ." (Smollett); "Comparative phonetics, as well as experimental phonetics, *are* covered" (Prof. G. W. Gray in *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, November 1931, p. 593). Here again as in the cases previously cited the verb agreement is dependent upon the concept of number in the subject rather than upon the form.

5. Collective nouns. Textbook rule: "A collective noun takes a singular or a plural verb, according as the collection is thought of as a whole or as composed of individuals. The committee *have* disagreed. The common council *was* called to order."<sup>12</sup> In this instance the textbook rules correctly report English usage, which in the case of the collective noun has always formed the verb in agreement with the implied number of the subject. So strongly is this agreement felt, that in colloquial speech and informal writing the noun actually changes number within a single sentence as it is variously considered in its group and individual aspects. Thus in a newspaper article we find, "Most of the throng *which* will attend, if the two student bodies are excepted, *care* little who wins, and *is* attending for the spectacle *it hopes* to see." *Throng* is first considered as a group and is modified by *which*; it is next considered as a collection of individuals who *care little who wins*; then it becomes again a group in the singular with singular verbs and a pronoun in agreement. While this sentence cannot be ad-

<sup>11</sup> Raymond, p. 199.

<sup>12</sup> Brooks, 1911, p. 125.

vanced as a model of English syntax, it is indeed an interesting example of the psychological aspects of grammatical concord. One is tempted to raise the question, Does not a sentence like this contain more subtle shades of meaning than one in which the collective noun is held singular or plural throughout for the sake of grammatical orderliness? If the question can be answered affirmatively, and there is considerable defence for it, we may then accept the shifting concept of number on utilitarian grounds. There is no better defence for any English usage than that it is useful and enhances the meaning or understanding of a sentence. The conservative Curme says, "The point of view sometimes shifts within one and the same sentence, so that the verb is now singular, now plural, although the reference in the different cases is to the same noun," and he cites an example from *Adam Bede*: "There was a grand *band* hired from Rosseter, who, with *their* wonderful wind-instruments and puffed-out cheeks, *were themselves* a delightful show to the small boys."<sup>18</sup>

6. Agreement with nouns of quantity. Textbook rule: "A plural noun denoting one amount, when used as subject, takes a singular verb."<sup>14</sup> The same text offers the exercise "Six weeks (*does* not or *do* not) seem like a very long time in Paris."<sup>15</sup> In this sentence the noun *weeks* may represent one amount and take the verb *does*, or it may represent six units of time and take the plural *do*. The school-child of course does not have the privilege of choice; the rule says 'singular verb,' and he must use a singular verb. On the same page is a still worse example of an ill-considered exercise. In the sentence, "The hat with the plumes (*cost* or *costs*) fourteen dollars" the pupil is told to choose the 'correct' verb. Inasmuch as no reference to tense is made, either verb is correct, though the unfortunate student who selects *cost* (past tense) will be penalized for making *cost* (present tense plural) agree with *plumes*. In general, of course, the noun of quantity though plural in form is considered an entity and is followed by a singular verb, but where the separate parts of the total are considered individually the verb is plural. Thus we find, "Seven-eighths of the world's gold *is* in the United States," but, "Three-

<sup>18</sup> Curme, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> Kimball, *Book Two*, 1911, p. 113.

<sup>15</sup> *Loc. cit.*

fourths of the people *are* starving." The verb as usual agrees with the meaning of the subject, regardless of its form.

Still another example of the faulty exercise is this: "A lot of different kinds of soft drinks (*is, are*) drunk in this country."<sup>16</sup> If the writers expect the pupils to use *is* as a verb in agreement with *lot* considered in the singular, they are running counter to standard usage which accepts *lot* with a partitive modifier as a plural; if they do expect the plural verb *are* then their exercise has no place in a consideration of number since they have provided no discussion of the use of *lot*, *number*, etc., as plurals.

The most preposterous of all textbook rules is the following: "The pronoun *I* requires the plural form of all verbs except *am*, and *was*."<sup>17</sup> This rule is cited as an exception to subject-verb agreement! While it is obvious that the writer intends to show that the third person singular, present tense, of the active verb is the only *distinctly* singular form of the verb, it is inconceivable that anyone would deliberately associate the idea of plurality with singular pronoun *I*. To do so is to destroy utterly the meaning of the word *plural* and to reduce the conscientious pupil to despair. Furthermore it displays an astounding lack of any knowledge of historical grammar on the part of the writer.

The foregoing discussion is a criticism of the inadequacy of the textbook rules for subject-verb agreement with an attempt to establish clearly two facts: First, that the rules as they appear in the textbooks are too rigid to describe past and present usage; and second, that they miss entirely the underlying principle of English concord, that the verb always agrees with the *intent* of the subject regardless of its form. Future texts must base all the rules of concord on this fundamental concept which always has been and probably always will be the actual basis for subject-verb agreement in English.

#### PRONOUN AGREEMENT

The pronouns *everyone*, *everybody*, *anyone*, *anybody*, etc., are regularly listed by all the textbooks as singular pronouns only; they are said to take the singular regimen wherever they are used. "For instance, *everyone*, *everybody*, *everything* seem to refer to

<sup>16</sup> Kirby and Carpenter, *Book Seven*, 1930, p. 181.

<sup>17</sup> Clippinger, 1917, p. 5.

many persons or things; but they do not mean all persons or all things taken together, but *every single, separate person* or *every single, separate thing*. These pronouns are, therefore, singular; they take singular verbs and are regarded as singular when used as antecedents."<sup>18</sup> As far as verb agreement is concerned the rules represent usage, for the singular verb has always been used when adjacent to these indefinite pronouns. But as antecedents of pronouns they have been and still are used as plural words when the sense demands a plural, despite the efforts of rule-makers to control them. In the eighteenth century there was some attempt at reducing these forms to rule with only a modicum of success. "It would not be difficult to demonstrate that the minute attention to agreement, particularly of pronouns, had little effect upon the writers of the period following. Probably quite as many cases of reference of *they* and *their* to words like *person* and *one* and *everybody* could be discovered in an equal number of pages of Jane Austin or Walter Scott and of Addison or Swift."<sup>19</sup> An amusing example of the uncertainty, or at least freedom from rule, prevailing in the eighteenth century is to be found in a letter from John Oldmixon in answer to Swift's letter to the Earl of Oxford, ". . . that everybody loves Flattery as well as himself, and Will take any Thing kindly that is said in their favour."<sup>20</sup>

Professor Krapp limits indefinite pronouns to use in the singular only, saying, "The pronouns each, every, either, neither, any, anyone, everyone, someone, somebody, everybody, nobody, no one, etc., are singular . . . and are referred to by singular pronouns."<sup>21</sup> On the other hand Curme recognizes the plural usage in earlier English, and while pointing out that the singular is preferred today, admits that the plural may also be found. "When a pronoun or possessive adjective refers to a word plural in meaning, but in form being an indefinite pronoun in the singular . . . it was once common to indicate the plural idea by the form of the following pronoun or possessive adjective, but it is now usual to put the pronoun or possessive adjective into the singular in accordance with the singular form of the antecedent: '*Nobody* knows what it is to lose a friend, till *they have* (now *he has*) lost him.' (Fielding). 'If the part deserved any comment, *every* con-

<sup>18</sup> Pearson and Kirchwey, 1928, p. 330.

<sup>19</sup> Leonard, S. A., *Doctrine of Correctness*, p. 225.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>21</sup> Krapp, *Comprehensive Guide to Good English*, p. 644.

sidering *Christian* will make it *themselves* (now *himself*) as *they go*' (now *he goes*). (Defoe). 'I do not mean that I think *anyone* to blame for taking due care of *their* (now *his*) health.' (Addison). Older usage, however, still occasionally occurs: *Every body* is discontented with *their* (instead of *his*) lot in life.' (Beaconsfield). This older literary usage survives in loose colloquial and popular speech: 'Everybody has *their* (instead of *his*) faults.' 'It is the duty of each student to interest *themselves* (instead of *himself*) in athletics.'<sup>22</sup> As an example of occasional use on the literary level today the following sentence from a current issue of *Harper's* is interesting: "He had in his time been almost everybody's bosom friend, and usually *their* secretary."<sup>23</sup>

The Leonard-Moffett study reveals a nice distinction in the singular and plural use of the pronoun with *everyone*, *everybody* in two cases, one quite clearly plural in meaning and the second quite clearly singular. The first sentence, "*Everyone* was here, but *they* all went home early" was placed 39 in a series of 102 items with a composite rating of 2.4 (2.0—cultivated informal English) and a rating by British linguists of 2.3. The second example, "*Everybody* brought *their* own ticket" was placed 70 in the list with a composite rating of 3.0 (half-way between acceptable and uncultivated English). It is evident from these scores by competent judges that there is a distinction in the use of *everyone* and *everybody* resting upon the implied number of the subject, regardless of rules.<sup>24</sup> If one may judge from current articles in the periodicals, present British usage is inclined to be more liberal toward the plural use of the indefinite pronouns than is American usage. ". . . there is good evidence that British usage is still equally unfettered in the matter. The great conservatism of American writers, as usual, has led them to follow this rule more carefully."<sup>25</sup> McKnight observes, "In the use of pronouns following words or word combinations with collective meanings British use often gives a shock to an American's grammatical nerves. '*Their*,' says Richard Grant White, 'is very commonly misused with reference to a singular noun.' 'A misuse of the word *every*,' he says in another place, 'is worth remark,—the using it in a plural sense, which

<sup>22</sup> Curme, *Syntax*, p. 557.

<sup>23</sup> Robertson, W. Graham, *Harper's Magazine*, October, 1931, p. 550.

<sup>24</sup> Leonard-Moffett, "Levels in English Usage," *English Journal*, May, 1927, pp. 353, 354.

<sup>25</sup> Leonard, *Doctrine of Correctness*, p. 225.

is very common. Thus: Every person rose and took their leave.' The kinds of 'misuse' here condemned in American use, in British use are established not only by long tradition but by current practice. The awkward necessity so often met with in American speech of using the double pronoun, 'his or her,' is obviated by the 'misuse' of *their*.<sup>26</sup> This discussion is followed by a long list of examples.

The impartial student is forced to conclude that the rigid rules of the textbooks are not accurate in limiting the indefinite pronouns to singular use only. There are many occasions in English speech and writing in which the plural use is desirable for convenience, if not absolutely necessary. Less frequent but by no means rare examples of actual necessity occur as in "Everyone was waiting when I arrived, and *they* greeted me courteously," and "When the President left, everybody cheered; he lifted his hat in acknowledgment to *them*." In these sentences the singular pronoun would be absurd, and there is no real occasion for revision except to avoid the breach of purely formal agreement.<sup>27</sup> It may be concluded, then, that the indefinite pronouns *everyone*, *everybody*, *either*, *neither*, etc., when singular in meaning are referred to by a singular pronoun; when plural in meaning are referred to by a plural pronoun. It must be added, however, that American usage, far more than British usage, tends to keep these pronouns singular whenever possible.

#### ADVERBIAL MODIFIERS

##### *The position of Only.*

The school textbooks in grammar and composition frown upon the free position of *only* in such sentences as: "If I *only* had five dollars!", "He *only* wanted to speak to me." In spite of the almost universal acceptance of these constructions in colloquial speech and much current writing, the textbooks maintain that unless the word *only* is in immediate juxtaposition to the word it modifies the meaning becomes obscured or ambiguous. Therefore they list such rules and examples as these:

<sup>26</sup> McKnight, "Conservatism in American Speech," *American Speech*, Vol. I, p. 12.  
<sup>27</sup> Professor Leonard tells the story, "I found a remarkable instance of 'correctness' in a child's story of being ducked while in swimming. 'When I came up, everybody was laughing at me, but I was glad to see *him* just the same.' This was written in a seventh-grade English class without anyone's correction or suggestion of the form." *Doctrine of Correctness*, p. 224, footnote.

a) "The adverb *only* should be placed as near as possible to the word it modifies.

Wrong: One can *only* succeed by hard work."<sup>28</sup>

All these rules and examples are based upon the assumption that if the word *only* is separated from the word or phrase it modifies, some appreciable degree of ambiguity or obscurity results. This assumption is unsound, for in common speech the phrase "I *only* had five dollars" is normal and is never misunderstood. In fact, should a speaker desire to limit the subject in such a sentence, he is compelled to stress the pronoun and supply a word like *alone* to be sure his meaning is clear. Similarly in the less specific uses of *only*, as in "If my vacation *only* would come!" or "If *only* John were here!" there is no feeling that the modifier limits the subject. Surely in the last sentence quoted one might expect the position of *only*, immediately preceding the subject, to lead to misunderstanding, but it is safe to assert that in all ordinary uses such a sentence is never misconstrued.

Some textbook writers feel constrained in spite of personal prejudice, to make some acknowledgment of current usage. Such statements as these may therefore be found:

a) Incorrect: I *only* wanted one but I received several. (This position for *only* is almost idiomatic in colloquial use. In writing and in formal speech, say, I wanted only one, or I wanted one only.)<sup>29</sup>

b) English idiom seems to sanction a loose use of *only* whenever the meaning is obvious from the context.<sup>30</sup>

Such extreme caution as is implied in the words "almost idiomatic" and "seems to sanction" illustrates clearly the predicament of textbook grammarians confronted with the facts of usage. More adequate by far is the rule given by a textbook designed for the elementary grades:

c) Adverbial expressions should be so placed in the sentence as to convey just the meaning intended.<sup>31</sup>

Although the examples which follow this rule indicate beyond a doubt a narrow interpretation of it, yet the rule itself is sound and is inclusive enough to satisfy the demands of current usage.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis and Hosc, 1916, p. 76.

<sup>29</sup> French, p. 110.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas, Manchester, and Scott, 1925, p. 163.

<sup>31</sup> Scott-Southworth, Book Two, 1925, p. 222.

Turning now to the opinions of the authorities in usage, we find this statement by J. Lesslie Hall:

The position of *only* has long been a burning question in English. Not to go farther back than fifty years, Dean Alford said in 1864 that the pedants were very strict but the language very liberal! "The adverb *only*" says he, "in many sentences where strictly speaking it ought to follow its verb, and to limit the objects of the verb, is in good English placed before the verb." "I only saw a man," he says, is our ordinary colloquial English; but the pedant should compel us to say, "I saw *only* a man." The question is the same in our day; rhetorical scholars and grammarians make their rule; the great authors, the great majority of them, are utterly oblivious of the rule and care nothing for it.

The best and most helpful statement as to *only* is found in *Mother Tongue (III)* by Gardiner, Kittredge, and Arnold. "Good usage does not fix absolutely the position of *only* with respect to the word it modifies. There is but one safe rule: Shun ambiguity. If this is observed, the pupil may feel secure."<sup>32</sup>

Concerning this usage in the eighteenth century Professor Leonard says,

The rules for placing modifiers were of course dictated by a general purpose of securing greater clarity; but when grammarians came to look about for actual instances, they rarely confined themselves to sentences which might actually cause difficulty or misunderstanding in their context, since such sentences are not really common in experienced writers. Instead, critics took the usual short-cut of pitching upon sentences of a fixed type regardless of their clarity or lack of clarity. Sentences containing adverbs like *only* came in handy.<sup>33</sup>

The only valid objection to the position of *only* in any sentence is that in that sentence its position leads to ambiguity or misunderstanding. Inasmuch as in the great majority of sentences no misunderstanding occurs, the specific rules of the text are based upon a false assumption, and must be greatly revised to represent adequately current usage.

*Not all.*

Quite in the same vein as the objections to the placing of *only* is this comment on the use of *not* with *all*. "Especially care should be taken in using the words *not* and *only*. Such a sentence as *All students are not industrious* is sometimes used when the author intends to say *Not all students are industrious*."<sup>34</sup> The answer is

<sup>32</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *English Usage*, pp. 187, 189.

<sup>33</sup> Leonard, S. A., *The Doctrine of Correctness*, p. 96.

<sup>34</sup> Clippinger, 1917, p. 172.

that the writer knew what he was doing and deliberately used *All students are not industrious* because it is common usage in English and is not misunderstood. In fact, to express the idea of "lack of industry" as a characteristic of "all students" requires an entirely different sentence plan, for "All students are not industrious" would not convey the idea. Sometimes like "All students are lazy" would be necessary.

Professor Leonard has a note concerning this construction in the eighteenth century.

About placing *not*, the eighteenth century was quite free of formula:

Every just observation does not occur to any one Mind (*Reflections*, 1770, Preface, p. 10.)

All subjects do not equally require precision (*Blair, Lectures*, I, p. 176.)

All opinions are not received into the language (*Michaelis*, p. 2.)

These forms were not objected to, and seem perfectly clear.<sup>35</sup>

*Correlatives.*

The rules for the correlatives *not only . . . but also, neither . . . nor, either . . . or*, etc., spring from a purpose identical with that for the rule about *only*; namely, a desire to avoid ambiguity. But as in the case of most rules once liberally interpreted, they have become formal and inviolable in the current textbooks.

"Place correlatives . . . next to corresponding parts of speech. Incorrect: I neither trusted him nor his brother."<sup>36</sup> As in the case of the rules for the position of *only*, these rules for the correlatives originally designed to express a general principle of orderliness have been copied from book to book as rigid commandments with no effort at all to determine the nature of literary and current practice. Hall<sup>37</sup> cites numerous examples from his reading.

Professor Curme<sup>38</sup> cites the use of the correlative conjunctions but adds no restriction on their use. There seems no adequate reason for requiring correlative conjunctions to be used only with parallel constructions; current practice is endorsed by a long literary history in allowing the free use of the correlatives when the construction employed does not obscure the intended meaning.

<sup>35</sup> Leonard, S. A., *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>36</sup> French, p. 110.

<sup>37</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

<sup>38</sup> Curme, *Syntax*, p. 164.

*So and Such as intensifying adverbs.*

The use of the words *so* and *such* as simple intensifying adverbs is strongly condemned by some of the current textbooks for all levels of discourse, and in others is excluded from formal writing. That English teachers in general follow the lead of the textbooks so far as their teaching is concerned is revealed by a ballot on usage answered by approximately 150 teachers of English in the state of Colorado. Concerning the use of *so* as an adverb, but two teachers allowed it to be formally correct usage, 33 acknowledged it to be fully acceptable, 94 felt that it was doubtful, and 12 condemned it utterly as illiterate.<sup>39</sup> The textbooks contain the following typical statements:

- a) With the exception of *and*, there is no more abused word than *so*. Like charity, it covers a multitude of sins. There is perhaps no better place to point out the various meanings of the word and its uses, proper and improper.

*So* as an adverb.

Proper: I was never so angry.

Improper in formal writing: ("feminine intensive")

I was so angry! (*So* is used here in place of *very*, *exceedingly*, etc.)

*Such* is similarly misused. It should be followed by a clause of result introduced by *that*.<sup>40</sup>

The almost universal dissemination of these rules for *so* and *such* is an interesting example of the power of literary tradition to survive in the face of literary and colloquial practice. Many of the selections of standard literature used in the classroom by the same teachers who condemn this usage contain *so* and *such* as simple intensives. Moreover, the *New English Dictionary* acknowledges this usage as follows: "So 14: In affirmative clauses, tending to become a mere intensive without comparative force, and sometimes emphasized in speaking and writing. Used thus by King Alfred, Gower, Dryden, Richardson, Keats, Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, and others."

Concerning the word *so* as an adverb, Russell Thomas<sup>41</sup> shows beyond all doubt that it has been used regularly by writers when a comparison is implied, even though not expressed, as in the quotations:

<sup>39</sup> Pooley, *Handbook of Current English Usage*, Colorado State Teachers College Bulletin, June 1930, p. 27.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas, Manchester, and Scott, 1925, pp. 151, 170.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas, "Language Attitude," *English Journal*, September, 1930, pp. 557 to 560.

Browning, *Pheidippides*:

"Too rash,  
Love in its choice, paid you *so* largely service *so* slack."

Bridges, *The Garden in September*:

"How love *so* young could be *so* sweet."

Moreover, his examples include others from the *Blickling Homilies* to Stuart P. Sherman in which the *so* is a pure intensive, with no comparison implied or expressed, as in:

Tennyson, *Tears, Idle Tears*:

"*So* sad, *so* fresh, the days that are no more."

*Century Magazine*, August, 1929, p. 455: "Survivors of 1865—*So* like to One Another, *So* Different from Other People."

In view of so many clear examples from standard literature, the positive dicta of the textbooks seem a trifle absurd. If one's taste is offended by the use of *so* as an intensive adverb he may avoid its use and deplore it in others, but there is little justification for excluding it from the usage of ordinary English.

## THE DOUBLE NEGATIVE

That two negatives used in a negative predication reverse the meaning and form a positive statement is a curious tradition first enunciated by Lowth in the eighteenth century and still warmly cherished by English teachers. It is all the more surprising that this conception survives with no apparent diminution in strength when one recalls the current prevalence of the phrases "can't hardly" and "can't scarcely" in the daily usage of educated people, including the majority of teachers. Sentences containing these phrases may be frowned upon by the more exacting teacher, but they are never misconstrued to be entirely affirmative; thus, "I can't hardly read this" is never interpreted as meaning, "I read this with great ease." The double negative in most cases may be fairly excluded from writing and speech of the present day on the grounds that it is out of style, currently unacceptable, but surely not on any grounds of logic or paradox. But the textbooks still adhere to the old tradition.

A person soon learns that in English two negatives coming together cancel each other. He is quickly told that to say *I didn't do nothing* does not mean what the person who says it usually means. The *not*, represented by *n't*, and the *nothing* render each other powerless. The sentence really

means that the person did something and that is usually opposite to what the speaker meant. Such expressions are called double negatives.<sup>42</sup>

The next quotation does omit any reference to the 'cancelling' power of two negatives, but still fails to furnish an adequate reason for the prohibition.

When the verb makes a negative assertion, it is unnecessary and incorrect to use the adjective *no* to denote the absence or lack of a quality or thing.<sup>43</sup>

Of this usage Logan Pearsall Smith in his monograph *English Idioms*, says,

Owing to the efforts of . . . grammarians a number of English idiomatic usages have been stigmatized as incorrect, and driven from our standard speech. Of these, perhaps, the most conspicuous is the double negative, which was perfectly correct in the time of Chaucer, lingered on till the age of Shakespeare, and is still current in the speech of the vast majority of English people. Owing, however, to the logical (but most unpsychological) notion that doubling a negative destroys, instead of strengthening it, this idiom, although it was correct in Greek, and has practically reestablished itself in French, is regarded as a gross vulgarism in modern English.<sup>44</sup>

Such expressions as "I didn't get no book" and "I haven't seen nobody" may be considered entirely outside the range of acceptable current English, even though that range be liberally interpreted, but the forms "didn't hardly," "haven't scarcely," "wouldn't hardly" can less certainly be excluded. It is true that a ballot of English teachers in the state of Colorado on this usage revealed an overwhelming opinion that "haven't hardly" is definitely illiterate English. But it is also true that a large number of these teachers use the expression unconsciously in informal speech.<sup>45</sup>

Leonard and Moffett likewise found general disapproval in the example "I haven't hardly any money." On a scale of four points, in which 1 represented literary usage, and 4 illiteracy, the general average of scores was 3.8. British judges ranked it 4.0.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Leonard-Moffett, "Levels in English Usage," *English Journal*, May 1927, p. 355. It would seem, therefore, that "haven't hardly" has at present no standing in written English, in spite of its notably widespread use in speech.

<sup>43</sup> Kirby and Carpenter, *Book Eight*, 1930, p. 276.

<sup>44</sup> Pearson and Kirchwey, 1928, p. 164.

<sup>45</sup> Smith, Logan Pearsall, *English Idioms*, S.P.E., Tract No. XII, London, 1928, p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Pooley, *Handbook of Current English Usage*, Colorado State Teachers College Bulletin, June 1930, p. 39.

### THE SPLIT INFINITIVE

The question as to whether one may "split" an infinitive by placing an adverbial modifier between the "to" and the infinitive form of the verb has been hotly debated for a century. "Apparently, it was both a discovery and an aversion of nineteenth-century grammarians."<sup>47</sup> In spite of the quantities of print on the subject, and the definitive statements of linguists and grammarians, the textbooks still cleave to the nineteenth-century aversion, stating their objections with varying degrees of certainty.

A modifier should not be placed between the parts of an infinitive. Wrong: We wished to thoroughly explore the cave.<sup>48</sup>

Do not insert an adverbial expression between the two parts of an infinitive. An occasional violation of this rule for the purpose of securing emphasis is permissible.<sup>49</sup>

The "occasional violators" of this rule are so numerous and so respectable and the period of their "violations" covers such a long stretch in the history of English that the rule itself becomes little more than pedantic rubbish. The vast number of examples of this usage in standard literature,<sup>50</sup> together with the statements of acknowledged scholars should certainly be sufficient evidence to settle this question for all time.

Otto Jespersen says of the split infinitive:

. . . The linguistic instinct now takes *to* to belong to the preceding verb rather than to the infinitive, a fact which, together with other circumstances, serves to explain the phenomenon usually misnamed "the split infinitive." This name is bad because we have many infinitives without *to* . . . Although examples of an adverb between *to* and the infinitive occur as early as the fourteenth century, they do not become very frequent until the latter half of the nineteenth century. In some cases they decidedly contribute to the clearness of the sentence by showing at once what word is qualified by the adverb.<sup>51</sup>

Developing more fully this explanation of the need for the divided infinitive on the grounds of clarity and emphasis, Professor Curme writes,

<sup>47</sup> Leonard, S. A., *Doctrine of Correctness*, p. 95.

<sup>48</sup> Clippinger, 1917, p. 172.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas, Manchester, and Scott, 1925, p. 535.

<sup>50</sup> The American authors alone include "Franklin, Freneau, Irving, Whittier, Motley, Hawthorne, Lowell, Bret Harte, H. C. Lodge, John Fiske, T. B. Aldrich, Cable, Mabie, Katherine Lee Bates, J. K. Hosmer, A. D. White, W. D. Whitney, Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson." From an article by Wallace Rice, *The Chicago Tribune*, 1928.

<sup>51</sup> Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language*, p. 210.

When the adverb precedes a verb, the verb seems more important to our feeling than the adverb even though the adverb may also be stressed. But when we are not calling attention to the verbal activity so much as to some particular in connection with it, we place the adverb expressing that particular after the verb. It is this feature that has furthered the development of the split infinitive.

J. Lesslie Hall presents an interesting comparison of rule and usage for the split infinitive in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Shall an adverb be put between *to* and the other part of an infinitive? . . . This is a "burning question" and one on which verbalists disagree.

Dean Alford, in 1864, said, "Surely this is a practice entirely unknown to English speakers and writers." At this very moment Dean Alford could have found the split infinitive in the writings of Dickens, Matthew Arnold, Mrs. Gaskell, Browning, George Eliot, of his own day, Burns, Byron, Coleridge, Goldsmith, and others of earlier periods.

We must all admit, then, that the split infinitive is neither an innovation nor a vulgarism, but a rarity in pure literature; that it is very clear and very convenient and has a right to a trial in the language.<sup>53</sup>

The discussion of the uses of the adverb in infinitive constructions can find no better lead than that offered by Professor Curme. When the verbal force of the infinitive is strongly felt, its adverbial modifiers are naturally placed as they would be in a sentence in which the verb is strongly stressed (as in the phrase *strongly stressed* just preceding). When the adverb is the more important feature it tends to follow the verb (as in *it is stressed strongly*). It is only natural and idiomatic, therefore, to find in sentences in which the infinitive has an actual verbal force one or more adverbial modifiers preceding it. The following sentences illustrate the point well: "He stood high in the colony, was extravagant and fond of display, and, his fortune being jeopardized, he hoped to *more than retrieve* it by going into speculations in western lands" (Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West*, Vol. I, Ch. II). "To an active mind it may be easier to bear along all the qualifications of an idea than to *first imperfectly conceive* such an idea" (Herbert Spencer, *Philosophy of Style*). "When I hear gentlemen say that politics ought to let business alone, I feel like inviting them to *first consider* whether business is letting politics alone" (Woodrow Wilson, February 24, 1912).<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Curme, "The Split Infinitive," *American Speech*, Vol. II, p. 341.

<sup>54</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *English Usage*, pp. 266-271.

<sup>54</sup> I am indebted to Professor Curme *loc. cit.*, for these illustrations.

In view of the overwhelming evidence in support of the split infinitive it seems not unreasonable to expect the schoolbooks to refrain from prohibiting it at least, and better still, to give some adequate description of its use. The following is a suggestion: The adverbial modifier of an infinitive may be placed between the parts of the infinitive as in *to steadily labor* or immediately following it, as in *to labor steadily*. When the adverbial modifier is short and is less emphatic than the verbal force of the infinitive, it is usually placed between the *to* and the rest of the infinitive: He worked silently and swiftly, hoping *to speedily end* his patient's discomfort. When the adverbial modifier is long, or is more emphatic than the verbal force of the infinitive, it is usually placed after it: He came to expect *ever more and more* a change in his too even life; I want you to come *quickly*. Many stylists avoid splitting the infinitive as a mark of elegance, but usage has established it beyond any doubt.

The discussion of the split infinitive raises two other interesting questions. Is the *to* a necessary part of the infinitive? May the *to* stand alone in place of a previously expressed infinitive?

Concerning the first question, Whitney says:

The root-infinitive usually has before it the preposition *to*, which is called its sign, and is to be considered and described as a part of it. In the oldest English, this preposition was only used with the infinitive when it had a real prepositional value. . . .

But the *to* is also in a great many cases omitted.

- a. After verbs generally used as auxiliaries: *do, will, shall, may, can, and must*.
- b. After a few other verbs, either usually or optionally: *dare, help, need, 'gin* (for begin); and *please* and *go* in certain uses.
- c. In certain peculiar or elliptical constructions: *had* followed by *lief, rather*; in comparative phrases, like *as well yield at once as struggle vainly*; after *but* following a negative; thus, *she cannot but grieve for him*.
- d. After certain verbs, when preceded by a word having the relation of object to those verbs, but also the logical value of a subject to the infinitive: *see, hear, feel, let, make, bid, help, have*, (in the sense of "make" or "cause"), *know, find*.<sup>55</sup>

With so many uses of the root infinitive without the preposition *to*, we are prepared for the definite statement of the *Century Dictionary* under the discussion of *to* with the infinitive, "The preposi-

<sup>55</sup> Whitney, *Essentials of English Grammar*, 1877, p. 212.

tion is no part of the verb." It is consistent with the idiom of English to find groups of infinitives introduced by a single *to*, as in Shakespeare's "To shake the head, relent, and sigh, and yield," and in the common phrases "To come and go," "to do or die," "to win or lose." With these examples in mind there seems no reasonable objection to such sentences as: "He determined to enter and win the race"; "She refused to eat, talk, or move." The use of the infinitive in compound relationships such as these has led to a still further development in such phrases as "try and do it," "come and see me" which are considered problems of usage rather than syntax and are therefore discussed in the next chapter.<sup>56</sup> Leaving out of consideration for the moment this last use of the infinitive, it may be justly concluded that the preposition *to* may introduce a group of infinitives without being repeated before each one.

On the other hand, may the *to* be used alone to represent an infinitive previously expressed or understood as in the sentence "I ought to go, but I don't want *to* (go)"? Dean Alford said in 1864 "It seems to me, that we ever regard the 'to' of the infinitive as inseparable from the verb." One text also objects to this construction with the words, "In writing, *to* alone should not be used in place of an infinitive: 'Do as I told you *to*.'" <sup>57</sup> It has already been shown that Dean Alford was wrong with regard to the *to* introducing more than one infinitive; in the examples given above the "to" was entirely separable from the verb. It remains to show that he was also wrong with respect to the *to* substituted for the verb. Whitney says "The infinitive or the participle of a repeated verb-phrase is very often omitted and the auxiliary left alone to represent the phrase; . . . In easy colloquial speech even a repeated infinitive is represented by its sign *to* alone."<sup>58</sup>

Professor Jespersen gives the example "Will you come? I should like *to*" and calls this use of the word *to* a *pro-infinitive* on the analogy of the pronoun.<sup>59</sup> In a later amplification he adds "in the same way in colloquial English we may have an isolated *to* standing as a representative of an infinitive with *to*: *I told them to* (— I told them to run.) Psychologically these are cases of aposiopesis ('stop-short sentences' or 'pull-up sentences') . . . the in-

<sup>56</sup> See p. 118.

<sup>57</sup> Scott-Southworth, *Book Two*, 1925, p. 213.

<sup>58</sup> Whitney, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

<sup>59</sup> Jespersen, *Philosophy of Grammar*, p. 82.

finitive is left out as in (Will you play?) *Yes, I will*, or *Yes I am going to* (*I am willing to, anxious to*).<sup>60</sup>

There seems to be no doubt as to the complete independence of the preposition *to* and the root infinitive. Either the root infinitive may stand alone, not only with certain verbs but in groups of infinitives introduced by an initial *to*, or the *to* itself may stand alone as the sign of a previously expressed or implied infinitive. The "inseparability" of which Dean Alford wrote simply does not exist, and certainly cannot be advanced as an argument against the "splitting" of the infinitive.

#### THE DANGLING PARTICIPLE AND GERUND

Writers of textbooks, especially those of high school and college level, agree quite generally that the participial or gerund construction at the beginning of the sentence must be followed closely by the subject of the sentence; that the subject must be expressed, and that the relationship between the verbal modifier and the subject must be clear and unambiguous. Failure to observe these rules of syntax results in a misrelated or "dangling" construction of a particularly heinous nature, always avoided by careful writers and righteously condemned by grammarians. Two examples from textbooks will serve to show the nature of the rules:

a) A participial or a gerund phrase is correctly used, generally speaking, only

(1) When the noun or pronoun which it modifies, or which represents the agent or recipient of the action that it expresses, is explicitly present in the sentence; and

(2) When the parts of the sentence in which it appears are so ordered that the reader unconsciously connects it with the appropriate noun or pronoun.<sup>61</sup>

b) A participle that has no noun or pronoun to modify is called a *loose*, or *dangling, participle*. "Loose" participles show loose and careless thinking. Avoid them and be careful not only to express the noun or the pronoun that the participle modifies, but also to place the participle so near this word that there can be no mistake as to the meaning.<sup>62</sup>

It is granted at the outset of this discussion that the misrelated participle or gerund frequently produces an effect distressing to

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas, Manchester, and Scott, 1925, p. 164.

<sup>62</sup> Pearson and Kirchwey, 1928, p. 394. See also Lewis and Holic, 1916, p. 78; Clippinger, 1917, p. 167; French, 1924, p. 297; Raymond, 1925, p. 103, 106.

the orderly mind; the meaning is not only distorted but is sometimes rendered utterly ludicrous. No student once having read or heard such sentences as, "While engaged in a delicate piece of crocheting, an elephant passed our house," or "Having eaten our lunch, the car pushed its way through the tortuous canyon," would be apt to commit so obvious a fault; these sentences he recognized as "howlers," subject to ridicule.<sup>63</sup> But much less obvious is such a sentence as this: "Having looked at our watches, no time was lost in getting started on our way." The grammarian can insist that "time" is the subject of the verbal phrase "having looked at our watches," but in actual speech does anyone misconstrue such a sentence? In writing, it is true, under cold and deliberate scrutiny this sentence incurs censure, but is it misunderstood? Is it not a certain feeling for syntactical orderliness rather than misunderstanding of the author's meaning which prompts criticism of such a sentence? And furthermore, if the meaning is so clear that the sense of orderliness is lulled by the felicitous expression of the idea, do not even careful writers under such circumstances violate the rules for participial and gerund constructions? The last question can be answered affirmatively from overwhelming evidence.

J. Lesslie Hall says, "This construction is condemned in practically all the textbooks on grammar and rhetoric." After a discussion of the rules as they appear in the textbooks, and a comment on the verdict of Professor Krapp, which is treated more fully below, he continues, "Let us see, then, what a disinterested foreigner says about it. . . . We refer to Mätzner, the eminent grammarian. Of this participle he says, 'Although the participle in general, where it stands absolutely, is not without a substantive or pronoun on which it has to lean, participles standing alone also occur, which lean in part mediately upon a noun, or leave to be supplied a notion already named; but, in part, completely isolated, must have a subject to be conjectured.' This scholar, then, recognizes the participle standing alone."<sup>64</sup> Hall also presents a list from his own reading, showing 189 instances of the isolated participle or gerund in 68 authorities from Latimer to Stevenson. In conclusion he says, "The 'misrelated participle' goes back to the Anglo-Saxon period. It is found both in prose and in poetry. It

<sup>63</sup> Professor W. E. Leonard furnishes another example from one of his freshman themes of an earlier date: "Going up the hill, the statue of Lincoln struck my eye."

<sup>64</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *English Usage*, pp. 167, 168.

comes out clearly in Mandeville and Chaucer. . . . It is seen in the Mystery Plays, Latimer, Shakespeare, and in every decade down to the present day. It is used in polite society and by cultivated speakers without number. Certainly it may be called the 'misapprehended,' the 'persecuted' participle."<sup>65</sup>

Professor Krapp states the general rule, but adds a note indicating that its observance is not universal. "A modifying word or phrase must be used in such a way as to make clear the syntactical relationship of the word or phrase to the part of the sentence which it modifies. Thus a present participle should not be used without a word to which it may be attached, as in *Examining the box, the money was found untouched*. But this rule is not invariably observed even by good writers, as in *Thence, looking up and however far, each fir stands separate against the sky no bigger than an eyelash* (Stevenson, *Silverado Squatters*)."<sup>66</sup> But Professor Krapp himself writes, "Looking back there to the primitive psychology of human speech, what are the evidences with respect to this notion of original simplicity and orderliness?"<sup>67</sup> In this sentence by an eminent scholar the isolated syntax of the participle "looking" is apparently not felt to be improper usage, even though it is used "without a word to which it may be attached."

A more recent study<sup>68</sup> is devoted to a comparison of the rules of contemporary textbook writers with their own usage regarding the misrelated constructions. Quoting rules (for the dangling participle) from a dozen or more texts, the author displays in each case sentences from the same or another work by the same writer in which he has unconsciously used the isolated participle. Similarly, and with even more instances, he shows that the dangling gerund is frequent in the writings of those who oppose it by formal rules. Quite properly he says, "My object in bringing to light some discrepancies between canon and practice is not to reveal that rhetoricians slip occasionally; for to my mind their supposed slips are not slips at all. Rather my object is to show that the very discrepancies prove the rules unwarranted, and that therefore breaches of these rules cannot properly be regarded as errors."<sup>69</sup> And in conclusion, "After carefully weighing all the

<sup>65</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>66</sup> Krapp, *Comprehensive Guide to Good English*, p. 647.

<sup>67</sup> Krapp, *The Knowledge of English*, p. 37.

<sup>68</sup> Steinbach, "The Misrelated Constructions," *American Speech*, Vol. V, pp. 181-197.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

facts, my inference is that the rules forbidding these locutions are decidedly weak."<sup>70</sup>

Professor Curme, on the other hand, sides with the rule-makers. He says "In general, however, although occasionally found in good authors it is felt as slovenly English in spite of its frequency in colloquial speech: '*Being not yet fully grown*, his trousers were too long.' In older English, the dangling participle was more widely used than today. It was employed even by careful writers where it cannot now be used: 'In their meals there is great silence and grautie, *using* wine rather to ease the stomacke then (now *than*) to load it.' (John Lyly, *Euphues and His England*, Works, II, p. 194, A. D. 1580)."<sup>71</sup> There is sufficient evidence to take exception to Professor Curme's statement in three points: first, that the use of the dangling construction is 'occasional' in literature; second, that 'it is felt as slovenly English'; and third, that it was used in the past 'where it cannot now be used.' J. Lesslie Hall has shown that this construction is widely found in literature throughout the history of English; it is easier to find examples of it than to find examples of almost any other disputed usage. He quotes Professor O. F. Emerson as saying, "This is the misrelated participle occasionally found in modern English," but a glance at the table reveals that Professor Emerson himself contributed three of the examples used by Hall.<sup>72</sup> The word 'occasional' cannot be used accurately in describing the frequency of this usage.

To the charge that it is felt to be 'slovenly English' we must answer it is felt so in theory, but not in practice. Mr. Steinbach has shown that the leading college grammarians steadfastly propose rules for the dangling constructions which they themselves do not observe in writing. Moreover, he adds a list of distinguished students of language who have not felt, in their own writings, that they were guilty of 'slovenly English' in employing an isolated participle or gerund. The list includes (with the date of the work in which the example was found): G. P. Marsh, 1862; John Earle, 1890; Barrett Wendel, 1893; T. R. Lounsbury, 1908; George Saintsbury, 1912; W. T. Brewster, 1913; F. H. Vizetelly, 1915; Robert Bridges, 1921; L. P. Smith, 1923.<sup>73</sup> Examples taken

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>71</sup> Curme, *Syntax*, p. 160.

<sup>72</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>73</sup> Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

from the published works of men of such caliber cannot be branded 'slovenly English.'

It is a little more difficult to answer exactly the third proposition, that the dangling constructions cannot be used today as they once were, inasmuch as Professor Curme offers but one example. Moreover in the example he offers, the construction which is no longer acceptable is not the dangling participle, but rather the adjective clause modifying a possessive pronoun "their." No one today may say "At their banquet there was wine, who seldom touch anything but water." We may agree with Professor Curme that the sentence he offers is out of accord with present-day syntax, but not because of the dangling construction. The type of modification used by Lyly is no longer acceptable, and for that reason the dangling modifier "is employed where it cannot now be used." On the other hand, there are abundant examples from current literature to prove that wherever the misrelated participle was used without obscurity in the past it may be used today with equal clarity.<sup>74</sup>

After all, although the textbooks fail to observe the fact, the dangling constructions are a form of ellipsis. Like all other ellipses they are good when the meaning is clear, but bad when the meaning is obscured. When Robert Bridges writes,<sup>75</sup> "In talking with friends the common pleas . . .," he means of course, "In talking with friends, *I learn that* the common plea . . ." or "*I am told that* . . ." No one could possibly mistake his meaning. Rather he is employing a commendable and useful abbreviation in which the construction "In talking with friends" is fully equivalent to "When I am talking to friends, I learn. . . ." The omitted clause is no more necessary here than in "I am as tall as she *is tall*," where the complementary clause is always omitted. No general rule can be advanced to cover all cases; each use must rest upon its fitness and clearness in the sentence.

The textbooks, therefore, must modify their rules considerably. They must point out that although the initial participial or gerund phrase is frequently followed by an expressed subject, the subject can be and frequently is omitted when the meaning is not obscured. They must show by examples when the subject may or may not

<sup>74</sup> As for example, "Musing by night on thee, this fancy came." William Ellery Leonard, *Sonnets on Shakespeare*.

<sup>75</sup> Bridges, "On English Homophones," *Society for Pure English*, Tract II, p. 22.

be omitted. And most of all they must cease to brand the usage in its legitimate functions as 'slovenly English,' 'improper usage,' or as a sign of 'loose and careless thinking.'

#### THE CASE OF THE NOUN OR PRONOUN WITH GERUND

There is considerable uncertainty and doubt at the present time concerning the correct case of the noun or the pronoun preceding a gerund. A recent letter of enquiry puts the problem clearly. Quoting the sentence in question, "I discovered when selling hose of the old construction why cities had to replenish it so often and I laid (*sic!*) awake nights trying to find a remedy to prevent the cracking of the rubber by reason of *it* being necessary to carry the hose flattened," the writer says, "Our proof-reader changed the second 'it' to read 'its,' having the rule in mind that the substantive modifying a gerund should be in the possessive case (Woolley, 1909 edition, p. 18.)"<sup>76</sup> The rule here referred to appears in various forms in the current textbooks.

It is clear from these rules that the textbooks favor the possessive case for the substantive modifying a gerund particularly when it is a pronoun. Oddly enough in the eighteenth century there were vigorous denunciations of the possessive case in this construction, the objective case being preferred.

The first comment on this construction is a severe reprobation by George Harris, the author of the *Observations*: "Another instance in which *s* is used as an Abbreviation without the least pretence for it: . . . Doctrine of a future STATE'S being taught; . . . equity of the Episcopal CHURCH'S being . . ." Lowth . . . spoke of expressions like "the Rule's being observed . . ." and "it's being disregarded" as "anomolies to be rooted out." Priestly admits either possessive or accusative with the gerund. . . . Campbell . . . concludes formally "that the idiom in question ought not to be entirely repudiated." Baker first stated a positive rule . . . ; Webster is equally positive on this point, and we perhaps owe to him the dogma that the possessive must invariably be used in this construction.<sup>77</sup>

In the nineteenth century, although the rule was becoming quite firmly established in favor of the possessive case through the influence of Webster and his followers, Whitney wrote in his grammar,

<sup>76</sup> Quoted from a letter to the author from Low's Letter Service, Chicago, Illinois.  
<sup>77</sup> Leonard, S. A., *Doctrine of Correctness*, pp. 199, 200.

. . . the two constructions, of an objective case qualified by a present participle and of a possessive qualifying an infinitive in *ing*, are to a certain extent interchangeable; and the question sometimes arises as to which should be preferred. There are cases where both are equally proper; but even among good writers (and yet more among careless ones), the one is occasionally found where more approved usage would favor the other: thus,

pardon me blushing  
 the certainty of the old men interrupting him  
 the hope of society is in men caring for other things;  
 Where *my blushing*, *the old man's interrupting him*, and *men's caring* would doubtless be better.<sup>78</sup>

Whitney recognizes the two uses; he admits the possibility of either being (*sic!*) correct in a certain context, and he gives as the only basis for the selection of the customary usage his feeling for what was approved in his day. There is little doubt that *me blushing* is a rare and unusual construction, chiefly objectionable because it attracts attention to itself; the other two examples, *the old man interrupting him* and *men caring* are by no means unusual and have considerable literary backing. Jespersen says,

I . . . here content myself with quoting a few instances of the new construction out of several hundreds which I have collected: "When we talk of this man or that woman being no longer the same person" (Thackeray), "besides the fact of those three being there, the drawbridge is kept up" (A. Hope), "When I think of this being the last time of seeing you" (Miss Austen), "the possibility of such an effect being wrought by such a cause" (Dickens), "he insisted upon the chamber carrying out his policy" (Lecky), "I have not the least objection in life to a rogue being hung" (Thackeray), "no man ever heard of opium leading into delirium tremens" (DeQuincey), "the suffering arises simply from people not understanding this truism" (Ruskin).<sup>79</sup>

This last example from Ruskin is identical in form with Whitney's last example, "The hope of society is in men caring for other things," of which he says "*men's caring* would doubtless be better." It is not unreasonable to conclude that Whitney in making this statement was expressing the nineteenth-century preference for the possessive case without being fully aware of the extent to which the objective case was employed by writers of repute. Jespersen concludes, "These examples will show that the construction is especially useful in those cases where for some

<sup>78</sup> Whitney, *Essentials of English Grammar*, 1877, p. 223.

<sup>79</sup> Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language*, pp. 200, 201.

reason or other it is impossible to use the genitive case, but that it is also found where no such reason could be adduced."<sup>80</sup>

In modern usage there can be recognized four distinct situations in which the choice of the objective or possessive case of the substantive is governed in part by custom, and in part by the exigencies of the construction. That no general rule can cover the uses of the substantive with the gerund should be clear from the enumeration below.

1. The pronoun immediately preceding the gerund. Example: "Do you object to his joining us?" Ordinarily the possessive case is employed in this construction and may be considered standard. J. Lesslie Hall says of this use, "Pronouns . . . are nearly always genitive in reputable authors."<sup>81</sup> Despite this general use of the possessive, there are cases in speech at least in which the objective is used for special emphasis in sentences where the pronoun is the focus point of attention in the phrase. Such cases are, "What do you think of *him* being elected?" "Can you picture *me* jumping rope?" The objective case here is clearly a device for emphasis, for the force of the reference to the person represented by the pronoun would be lost in "his being elected," "my jumping rope." For this case then the statement of a rule should be: The pronoun immediately preceding a gerund is usually in the possessive case, except that in sentences where great emphasis on the pronoun is desired the objective case may be used.

When *this* or *that* precede the gerund as in the sentence "Why do you insist on *this* (or *that*) being done?" the possessive forms would be so odd as to arouse wonder, and are virtually never used. George Harris wrote in 1752 "*This's being done* would mark a man of no education."<sup>82</sup> J. Lesslie Hall also notes these words as "cases in which the possessive is rarely used."<sup>83</sup>

2. The pronoun separated from the gerund by a modifying phrase or clause. Example: "Have you heard of his, the thief's, being captured?" This is a very rare construction and probably is found only in informal speech in cases where the antecedent of the pronoun is not clear from the preceding context. It is governed by the same rule as case number 1.

<sup>80</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>81</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *English Usage*, p. 138.

<sup>82</sup> Leonard, S. A., *op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>83</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

3. The noun immediately preceding the gerund. Example: "I never heard of a woman (or woman's) being offended by flattery." It is about this case that the controversy rages, and may long continue to do so since the literary and current usage is evenly divided. J. Lesslie Hall presents a list of 53 authorities, including 217 cases, from the Rolls of Parliament, 1435-1437; to Sir Henry Taylor, who used the objective case (without 's) of the noun before the gerund. But a similar list of 54 authorities, including 231 cases, from Milton to Huxley shows that the genitive (with 's) is quite as widely used. He concludes with,

Some interesting deductions can be drawn from the foregoing statistics:

- (1) The form without 's is older than the other, as we have already seen from the authorities.
- (2) The two forms are about numerically even (231 to 217) in the literature read.
- (3) Both forms are used by a large number of authors. . . .
- (4) The objective form is much stronger than the other in some of the best recent writers. . . .

Jespersen says that the objective *ing* is two hundred years old; but the table proves that it goes back to 1435-1437, showing itself later in the writings of Sir Thomas More. It comes out pretty strongly in Daniel DeFoe, who, in the tables, has nine objectives and four genitives. A hundred years later Boswell uses the objective pretty frequently, though preferring the genitive.<sup>84</sup>

In the Leonard-Moffett study the sentence "What was the reason for *Bennett making* that disturbance?" was ranked number 35 in a list of 102 items, with a general average rating of 2.5 on a scale of 4 points. The British linguists rated it 2.1, showing as usual greater liberality in points of divided usage.<sup>85</sup>

Professor Krapp says "A noun or a pronoun modifying a gerund is by rule in the possessive case. . . . But this rule frequently fails of observance, both in written and in spoken English. It is most likely to be observed when the word before the gerund names a person. . . ."<sup>86</sup> This last statement of Professor Krapp's is surely open to question, inasmuch as a random collection of examples, like that of Hall for example, contains a fair number of proper nouns as well as common nouns. ". . . it does not appear

<sup>84</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *op. cit.*, pp. 138 to 141.

<sup>85</sup> Leonard-Moffett, "Levels in English Usage," *English Journal*, May, 1927, p. 345.

<sup>86</sup> Krapp, *Comprehensive Guide to Good English*, p. 643.

that *Smith's* is to any extent more general than *barn's* in the model sentences at the head of this section."<sup>87</sup>

It appears then, that a rule for this third case should read: A noun immediately preceding a gerund may take the possessive or the objective case. Both have adequate literary authority, with a tendency toward the objective case appearing in recent writers.

4. The noun separated from the gerund by a modifying phrase or clause. Examples: "Have you heard of old Smith, the police chief, being retired?" "I have been told recently of the lad, who was always a poor rider, taking a serious tumble." That this case applies more to the proper noun than the common noun seems reasonable from the fact that the proper noun more frequently needs an appositional or non-restrictive modifier than does the common noun. J. Lesslie Hall is the only writer who calls attention to this case, saying, "when modifying words, phrases, or clauses intervene between the noun and the *-ing* form . . . in none of these sentences can the 's be used."<sup>88</sup> For the fourth case the rule must apparently be: When the noun is separated from the gerund by a modifying phrase or clause, it always takes the objective case.

In summary, it is clear from the evidence that no single rule such as, "The infinitive in *-ing* takes a possessive noun or pronoun," can adequately describe the substantive with the gerund. We have seen that there are two cases in which the possessive case is generally preferred, although for reasons of emphasis the objective may be used; a third situation in which the objective and possessive cases have equal authority and frequency; and a fourth instance in which the objective is invariably employed. The textbooks must be cognizant of all these situation in order to describe adequately the usage of the substantive with the gerund.

#### THE COMPARISON OF ADJECTIVES

The rather common practice of using the superlative degree of the adjective when speaking of two persons or things (sometimes described as the 'careless' practice) is uniformly condemned by the school and college textbooks in English. "When comparing *two* objects use the comparative degree (never the superlative)."<sup>89</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>89</sup> Raymond, C. H., *Essentials of English Composition*, 1925, p. 198.

The rules of the other texts are similar. Yet despite these rules the use of the superlative is very common in speech and is by no means unknown in writing. Hall says, "Polite conversation teems with this locution; in fact, only the most careful confine themselves to the other. Indeed, it would seem that the comparative degree of adjectives is on the road to extinction except before *than*."<sup>90</sup> While this view may be a trifle extreme, there is sound literary authority as well as current usage to defend the free use of the superlative.

From Professor Leonard we learn that,

No one in the eighteenth century seems to have taken as a serious anomaly the use of the superlative for comparing two persons or things. Priestly says it is "very common" and "very pardonable." Campbell concludes, "We say rightly, This is the weaker of the two, or . . . the weakest of the two." . . . Webster, in speaking of the "strongest of two" as "not so correct as stronger" close to the place where he himself uses a superlative in this fashion, is probably to be understood as satisfying only the decent claims of reason and analogy. Certainly nobody in the eighteenth century, so far as it was here explored, took this matter as a serious and irrefragable rule.<sup>91</sup>

Whitney observes the great frequency in the use of the superlative with two: "The comparative degree strictly implies a comparison between two objects, the superlative between more than two. Yet . . . both in ordinary talk and in literature, it is very common to speak of one of two things as being *the longest*, although to say *the longer* is more accurate and more approved."<sup>92</sup> Professor Lounsbury also defends the superlative, saying that it is "met with constantly in the best writers."<sup>93</sup> Curme notes that the superlative of *two* ". . . still survives in popular and colloquial speech, as in 'the *smallest* of the two.' Sometimes in the literary language: 'They (i.e., the two squirrels) seemed to vie with one another who should be *most bold*' (Thoreau)."<sup>94</sup>

From the statements and examples cited above it seems fair to conclude that the textbook rule "When comparing *two* objects use the comparative degree (never the superlative)" is inaccurate with regard to current usage. The superlative is sometimes used, not only in colloquial speech where it is quite common, but in the published work of careful writers. Jespersen notes that "apart from

<sup>90</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *English Usage*, p. 280.

<sup>91</sup> Leonard, S. A., *Doctrine of Correctness*, pp. 61, 75.

<sup>92</sup> Whitney, *Essentials of English Grammar*, p. 81.

<sup>93</sup> Lounsbury, *History of the English Language*, p. 252.

<sup>94</sup> Curme, *Syntax*, p. 504.

set phrases like the *lower lip* and the *upper end* the natural tendency in modern English is to use the superlative everywhere."<sup>95</sup> At any rate, we may conclude that the superlative of two is neither inaccurate nor incorrect.

May such 'perfect' or 'complete' adjectives as *dead*, *square*, *round*, *equal*, *circular*, etc., be compared? The textbooks declare vehemently that they may not be compared, in words similar to these: "A few adjectives denote qualities that cannot exist in different degrees and hence they can neither be compared nor modified by *more* and *most*."<sup>96</sup> (*Query*: Is not modification by *more* and *most* regular English comparison?) But the frequent appearance of such phrases as "more dead than alive" "become more equal" "squarer than . . ." "rounder than . . ." etc., leads one to suspect that these adjectives are compared regularly in colloquial speech and at least sometimes in writing.

In the eighteenth century "The comparison of supposedly incomparable adjectives like *chief*, *extreme*, *round*, *perfect*, 'already superlative in signification,' was seriously debated . . . Lowth admits that 'poetry is in possession of these . . . improper superlatives, and may be indulged in the use of them' . . . but even this divagation from strict logic was the subject of serious concern."<sup>97</sup>

From his reading Hall reports a number of instances of these 'improper comparatives and superlatives.'

The present writer has seen the following cases: *Chiefest*, seven times in the King James Bible; four times in Shakespeare, once in Marlowe, Jeremy Taylor, Butler, Swift, Lamb, Emerson, Dean Trench, Phoebe Cary, Saintsbury, and Tennyson. *More perfect*, once in the Bible. *Most unique*, once in Dr. Henry Van Dyke. *Most favorite*, once each in Dr. Johnson, Irving, and Professor William Minto. *Most principal*, once in the Prayer Book. *Very unanimous*, twice in Bishop Burnet. *Deadest*, once each in Emerson and Browning. *Correctest*, once in Lamb. *Extremest*, twice in Congreve. *Most excellent* and *more excellent* are found in the Bible; the former certainly has wide vogue in polite society. *Very excellent* comes out prominently in one classic passage in the Prayer Book Psalter.<sup>98</sup>

It may be contended by some that since these examples are drawn so largely from the diction of an older age, or from poetic diction in the present, they do not give authority to the use of

<sup>95</sup> Jespersen, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

<sup>96</sup> Scott-Southworth, *Book Two*, 1925, p. 151.

<sup>97</sup> Leonard, S. A., *op. cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>98</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *op. cit.*, pp. 28, 29.

*more round*, *most exact*, *whiter*, etc., in modern English prose. But such eminent contemporary scholars as Lounsbury, Kittredge, and Curme all defend the usage. The latter says, "While we today in general avoid pleonastic comparisons, we do not feel such forms as *more perfect*, *most perfect*, *deader*, *deadest*, *more unique*, etc. as pleonastic, since we have in mind degrees of approach to something perfect, dead, or unique."<sup>99</sup> It seems almost beyond doubt that with regard to the comparison of 'complete' adjectives, the textbooks are still voicing the 'serious concern' of the eighteenth century, in ignorance of, or in spite of, the accepted usage in literature, early and current, the decisions of eminent linguists, and the language habits of members of polite society. A language rule opposed to such authority becomes futile and ridiculous.

#### THE INDEFINITE IT

The rules restricting the use of *it* are harmfully misleading to the inexperienced student. Such a rule as, "Do not use *it* without an antecedent except in impersonal expressions such as *it seems*, *it snows*, *it is warm*,"<sup>100</sup> arbitrarily cuts out many common and useful constructions with *it* which may not be strictly included under the term 'impersonal' as illustrated by the examples accompanying the rule. For example, the following rule from a widely used text seems to contradict in practice what it and the rule above express in theory. "A pronoun should refer definitely to its antecedent. *It* is not enough that there should be a specific antecedent for a pronoun. The reference should be so explicit that no confusion is possible."<sup>101</sup> The word beginning the second sentence is clearly an *it* without an antecedent, either specific or general, and it is not part of an impersonal expression like *it is warm* or *it rains*. Just exactly what is *it*, if not a pronoun without an antecedent conventionally used with an accepted type of syntax? The point to be stressed here is not that the rule-makers violated their own rule, although if their statements are to be taken literally such is the case; but rather that *it* is frequently used without a definite antecedent in constructions other than *it rains*, *it is warm*, and is so commonly accepted in these constructions that careful

<sup>99</sup> Curme, *op. cit.*, p. 504.

<sup>100</sup> Raymond, 1925, p. 459.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas, Manchester, and Scott, 1925, p. 168.

rule-makers could use it unwittingly in the heart of a general rule prohibiting it!

In point of fact, the use of *it* without an antecedent is a useful and respectable construction in modern English, having roots far back in the history of English. Professor Curme recognizes three distinct uses fully established in English which he treats of at some length.

Situation "it" as Subject. *It* is much used as subject to point to a person or thing that is at first presented in only dim outlines by the situation, but is often later identified by a predicate noun: "*It's John, or Anna, or the boys*". . . . *It* is often a substitute for a noun obvious from the situation or the context: "*It is twenty miles to Chicago*."<sup>102</sup> This use of the pronoun *it* without an antecedent is exceedingly common in spoken and written English and must be acknowledged to be standard English by the most discriminating grammarian.

Impersonal "It". We now say "*It rained yesterday*," but in Gothic . . . there was no *it* here. The verb had no subject at all. . . . This *it*, though containing no real meaning, serves the useful purpose of giving the statement the outward form of an ordinary declarative sentence with an expressed subject, thus making it possible to preserve under changed conditions a useful old construction perfectly intact. . . .<sup>103</sup> Since this usage is recognized by the textbooks, no further elaboration is here necessary.

Anticipatory "It." When we desire to call especial attention to the subject, we often withhold it for a time, causing the feeling of suspense: "*It is useless, of no use, no use, no good your saying anything*." . . . Anticipatory *it* is also used to point to a following subject *that* clause or a subject infinitive clause. "*It is necessary that you exert yourself*" (or *to exert yourself*). . . . Anticipatory *it* is also used when it is desired to emphasize a predicate adjective or noun, provided, however, that the logical subject is a singular noun denoting a lifeless thing, or is a clause. . . . After the analogy of the emphatic predicate adjectives and nouns . . . it has become common to make any noun, adverb, or adverbial phrase or clause emphatic by converting it into an emphatic predicate introduced by *it is* (or *was*) and followed by the subject of the sentence in the form of a subject clause.<sup>104</sup> Here is an abundance of uses for the indefinite *it* not included in the purely impersonal category, which are all recognized and acceptable usages. To this list might be added another, the *it* in the sentences, "*He hoofed it home*," "*We footed it across the fields*," in which the *it* may be described as an indefinite object. The word *it* without any antecedent sometimes follows an intransitive verb as if it were an object. . . . It might be regarded as a part of the verb itself.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 8.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12.

<sup>105</sup> Cross, *Fundamentals in English*, p. 390.

It is of course quite evident that the authors of the rule, "A pronoun should refer definitely to its antecedent," did not have in mind, or purposely overlooked the uses of the indefinite *it* as a matter apart from the rule they were propounding. The only criticism which can justly be upheld against this rule is that it is too general in its wording and might thereby seriously mislead an inexperienced teacher or literal-minded student. But with respect to the rule, "Do not use *it* without an antecedent except in impersonal expressions, etc.," very severe criticism is in order. Surely a textbook rule which arbitrarily excludes five or six standard literary uses of the word *it* must be an indication of unjustifiable over-sight on the part of the authors, or else must imply that they gave a much wider interpretation to the word 'impersonal' than is found in their own examples or in the examples of other textbooks.

The sentence, "When a pupil does poor work, it is not always the fault of the teacher," is condemned by one text<sup>106</sup> on the grounds that *it* has no specific antecedent. Nevertheless there is considerable defence for this construction, which is by no means rare in current usage, on the basis that any word other than *it* requires an awkward shift of subject conveniently avoided by the use of *it*. Thus, "When a pupil does poor work, the teacher is not always at fault," or, "When a pupil does poor work, the fault is not always the teacher's," in either case the subject shifts from 'pupil' to 'teacher' or to 'fault,' whereas the *it* retains the subject idea 'pupil's work' throughout the sentence. Though grammatically anomalous this construction is both useful and prevalent.

<sup>106</sup> Clippinger, 1917, p. 193.

## CHAPTER VI

## PRESCRIPTIVE USAGE

The materials considered in this chapter are rather miscellaneous in character and have, therefore, not been organized into specific categories. Inasmuch as they are frequently dealt with in grammars and handbooks under the actual word concerned, as for example "*sit* and *set*," "*if* or *whether*," they are arranged in this chapter in alphabetical order for easy reference. It may be objected that some items found here are more properly grammar or syntax than mere usage, and should be placed in the preceding chapters. If there be such, the reader's leniency is asked toward the application of the term "usage" to this section. It is taken here to include all those items of English speech which are considered chiefly on the grounds of propriety rather than on the grounds of grammatical accuracy or syntactical orderliness. Thus the word *set* as applied to a *setting hen* is questioned not so much because it is a transitive verb transferred to an intransitive function as it is rebuked for being a vulgar or dialect use. With this interpretation of the term "usage" it is believed that the following items are consistent.

A great deal of interesting material has been excluded from this chapter, partly to avoid endless expansion, and partly because convincing evidence is still to be found for much of it. There are many words and phrases condemned by handbooks and grammars which form part of the speech of nearly all cultivated people, but which are still on precarious footing in literature. These deserve the attention of every interested student of English for a period of several years, to determine their approximate standing and probable future. Some examples from the beginning of the list follow: (words or phrases in italics are the questioned usages) He treats every *one alike*; They shared the candy *among one another*; A doctor is *apt* to be called out at any hour of the night; *As long as* the train is late, we may as well return home; We've

had an *awfully* good time; etc.<sup>1</sup> All these usages are objected to by school texts; all of them, it is not unfair to say, are used in good society by cultivated people. This apparent inconsistency must be cleared up by more exact knowledge.

The usages found in the ensuing discussion are all clear-cut matters for which objective evidence is available. While there always has been and probably always will be dispute over the interpretation of the facts concerning a given usage, the facts themselves should prove enlightening. They should be sufficient, at least, to remove the textbooks' objections to items having the double support of literary precedent and present currency.

## ABOVE AS AN ADJECTIVE

Despite its frequent occurrence in writing (it is less common in speech because it is a writing device) the word *above* as an adjective: "See the *above* statement"; or as a noun: "Refer to the *above*," is the subject of criticism. One textbook says, "*Above*. Undesirable in such use as *the above statement*."<sup>2</sup> The word 'undesirable' must imply that objection to the usage is based upon one of the two grounds: either that *above* as an adjective or noun is a neologism, with no standing in literature, or else an older form now obsolescent. It is not difficult to prove that neither contention can be upheld.

Taking the second first, we find the *New English Dictionary* giving the usage full sanction as follows: "By ellipsis of a pple. as *said, written, mentioned, above* stands attributively, as 'above explanation'; or the noun also may be suppressed and *above* used absolutely as 'the above will show,' etc." To this authority on present usage may be added Hall, who defends it and cites examples.<sup>3</sup> Inasmuch as a long list of examples, both past and present, is attached to the following paragraph, none are offered here as additional support for the currency and acceptability of *above* as an adjective or a noun.

With regard to the use of *above* in literature, Reuben Steinbach offers overwhelming evidence. In spite of its length his list is worth citation as a whole because of its convincing presentation of past and present uses of *above*. He says,

<sup>1</sup> The entire list will be found in Appendix I, p. 162.

<sup>2</sup> French, J. C., 1924, p. 344.

<sup>3</sup> Hall, J. Leslie, *English Usage*, p. 31.

I have seen "the above events" in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (Chap. XIV) and "the above ceremony" (Chap. XXII); "the above resolutions" in Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* (Chap. I); "the above reflections" in George Campbell's *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Book I, Chap. I) and "the above passage" (Book I, Chap. II, Section III); "The above specimens will give some idea. . . ." T. L. K. Oliphant's *The Sources of Standard English* (1873), p. 180; "the above tabulations" in John Earle's *English Prose* (1890), p. 39; "the above notes" in W. W. Skeat's *Principles of English Etymology* (Second Series, 1891, p. 258); "the above interjections" in Henry Sweet's *A New English Grammar* (1900, Part I, p. 152); "the above dictionaries" and "the above initial letters" in F. A. March's *Thesaurus Dictionary* (see "Comparative View of Disputed Spellings"); "the above exposition" in Otto Jespersen's *Chapters on English* (1918), p. 136; "the above illustration" in Quiller-Couch's *Studies in Literature* (Second Series, 1922, p. 144); "the above list" in Arnold Bennett's *Literary Taste* (Chap. XI); "the above list" in Robert Bridges *On English Homophones* (see *Society for Pure English*, Tract II, p. 18) and "the above motives" in "The Society's Work" (see *Society for Pure English*, Tract XXI, p. 5); "the above words" and "the above list" in H. W. Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (see *hybrid derivations*); "the above propositions" in Bertrand Russell's *Philosophy* (1927), p. 169, and "the above discussion," p. 185; and "the above remarks" in Gilbert Murray's *The Classical Tradition in Poetry* (1927), p. 104.

Included in this list of authors are the names of keen and profound students of the English language who do not scruple to use *above* as an adjective. But it is needless to discuss this matter further. All I wish to say, in conclusion, is that Professor Henderson and the other rhetoricians spoken of attest the weakness of their rule by breaking it themselves.<sup>4</sup>

It is needless to add further discussion. Any writer may feel free at any time to use "the *above* statement," and with only slightly less assurance, "The *above* will prove. . . ." In either case he has the authority of scholars and standard literature.

#### AGGRAVATE FOR EXASPERATE

A textbook writer warns his readers, "distinguish between aggravate and exasperate."<sup>5</sup> That this distinction is not always observed, not only in colloquial speech but in writing, is fully established by reputable authorities. Professor Krapp says, "aggravating, adj., strictly should mean *something that makes a bad situation worse*, as in *His high temperature is an aggravating symptom*. But popularly and colloquially the adjective is used merely in the sense of *annoying or exasperating*, as in *an aggravating child*, *Now isn't*

<sup>4</sup> Steinbach, "On Usage in English," *American Speech*, Vol. IV, p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond, 1925, p. 455.

*that aggravating!* The past participle *aggravated* is used adjectivally in the same way, as in *I was never so aggravated in my life.*"<sup>6</sup> To Professor Krapp's terms "popularly and colloquially" should be added, "not infrequent in literature." The *New English Dictionary* acknowledges this usage thus: "To exasperate, incense, embitter (a person); *familiar*, to provoke, arouse the evil feelings of." Examples from the literature follow, two of which are here cited: "If both were to aggravate her parents, as my brother and sister do mine. . ." (Richardson); "Threats only serve to aggravate people in such cases" (Thackeray). Fittedward Hall also notes that W. D. Howells, in his *Italian Journeys*, used *aggravate* for *provoke*.<sup>7</sup>

Having before them the example, "That boy's mischievous behavior *aggravates* me," the judges of the Leonard-Moffett study<sup>8</sup> placed this usage 79th in a list of 102 items, with a general rating of 3.2 on a scale of 4 points. This rating is low enough to exclude it from the level of cultivated speech or writing, but it is interesting to discover two representative groups of judges who were more liberal. The business men, numbering 24, rated it 2.5, or standard colloquial usage; and 50 teachers of English, members of the English Council, rated it 2.7, or on the outer edge of standard colloquial. The latter score is particularly significant, inasmuch as groups of English teachers are in general very conservative in questions of usage.

From all the evidence, then, there seems to be no justification for condemning *aggravate* in the sense of *exasperate* without at least some qualifying statements. This usage is widespread in polite society, it has literary backing, it is recognized by the *New English Dictionary* and Professor Krapp, and by two representative groups of American people. Insofar as the high school is concerned, objection to it might well be omitted, or subordinated to a footnote. College textbooks should treat of it more fully, pointing to it as one of the many examples for the exercise of taste rather than arbitrary 'correctness.'

<sup>6</sup> Krapp, *Comprehensive Guide to Good English*, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Hall, Fittedward, *Recent Exemplifications of False Philology*, p. 106.

<sup>8</sup> Leonard-Moffett, "Levels in English Usage," *English Journal*, May, 1927, p. 355.

## AND WITH THE INFINITIVE

Several textbook writers object to the construction employing *and* to join two verbs, the second of which is usually called an infinitive. One text says, for example, "*Come to see me, Try to do your best*, are better English than *Come and see me, Try and do your best*; though they sound rather stiff and formal in ordinary convention."<sup>9</sup> These writers make use of the unfortunate term "better English" as though the construction with *and* were slightly off color, or in bad repute. As a matter of fact, the construction with *and* is in excellent repute; it has been employed by many careful writers of the past, and is frequent in the literature and cultivated speech of today. These examples from the literature show clearly that it has a long history and is not "inferior English." "At least try and teach the erring soul" (Milton); "Do go to his house, and thank him." (Johnson); "to try and soften his father's anger," "to try and choose your lot" (Eliot); "How serious a matter it is to try and resist, I had ample opportunity of experiencing" (Matthew Arnold); "To try and teach people how to live" (Froude).

Contemporary students of language endorse this usage as standard English. The *New English Dictionary* says, "And. 10. Connecting two verbs the latter of which would logically be in the infinitive, especially after go, come, send, try." Professor Krapp observes, "The construction is occasionally found in lighter literary style and is well established in cultivated colloquial use."<sup>10</sup> One is tempted to ask whether Professor Krapp would assign the examples cited above to the "lighter literary style" of Milton, Johnson, George Eliot, or Matthew Arnold. Hall lists a number of authorities, and adds, "*Try and* is used several times in Otto Jespersen's books. How can the locution be called a colloquialism with such support in literature?"<sup>11</sup> Professor Curme lists this use as a form of parataxis, saying, "Coordination often indicates a close relation between two words or two propositions, the context frequently showing clearly that one of these is subordinate to the other: . . . "You should *try and be reasonable*' (= *to be reasonable*, an abridged infinitive clause in the object relation).

<sup>9</sup> Scott-Southworth, *Book Two*, 1925, p. 213.

<sup>10</sup> Krapp, *Comprehensive Guide to Good English*, p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *English Usage*, p. 309.

'You will *come and see us*, won't you? (= *to see us*, an abridged adverbial infinitive clause of purpose).'<sup>12</sup>

While it may be concluded with full justification that the construction with *and* followed by a verb in parallel construction is standard, fully acceptable English, especially when the verb is *try, go, send, come*, and the like, there is another use of *and* limited to the lighter forms of speech. It appears in such expressions as "Don't *go and do it* now!" "He *went and hit me*," in which the first verb is nothing more than a loose form of intensifier. This construction, although very common in popular speech, must be clearly distinguished from the regular *and* construction in which the intensifier stands in a modifying relationship to the first verb. Notwithstanding the similarity in appearance and syntax, they are quite different in degree of social standing.

## AT OR IN

A rather finely drawn distinction is urged for the preposition used to describe the termination of a journey. "When traveling, we say that we arrive *at* a small town, but *in* a large city."<sup>13</sup> Aside from the fact that strict adherence to such a rule would lead inevitably to the question "How large must the city be to be entitled to the preposition *in*," this rule presents a distinction rarely observed by cultivated adults to the attention of beginners in language. Such matters have no place as definite rules in a school text. L. P. Smith says of this usage, "The general rule is that we use *in* for large cities and capitals, *at* for smaller places. There is, however, a notable exception: we commonly use *in* rather than *at* even for a small place if we ourselves are there, probably because then it bulks more largely in our imagination."<sup>14</sup>

## BECAUSE AFTER REASON

The *New English Dictionary* defines the word *because* with the meaning of *that* as "Obsolete. Common in dialects," but it is not clear that the writers had in mind the recently developed construction "The reason why he spoke was *because* he had to." If

<sup>12</sup> Curme, *Syntax*, p. 171.

<sup>13</sup> Kimball, *Book Two*, 1911, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, L. P., "English Idioms," Tract No. XII, S.P.E. Oxford University Press, 1928, p. 5.

they did refer to this use, the term 'dialects' will have to include cultivated as well as uncultivated levels, for "the reason . . . was because . . ." is very frequent today in polite conversation, public address, and good writing. Professor Krapp says of this use of *because* "in crude English pleonastically after *reason*,"<sup>15</sup> but as the date of publication of his *Guide* is 1927, and the writing probably antedated that by a year or so, no doubt the usage was less common and prominent then than now.

One text says, "Examine the following incorrect sentence: 'His excuse for remaining at home was because he was ill.' The dependent clause is a substantive clause used as subjective complement of the word *excuse*; therefore it should not have the form of an adverbial clause."<sup>16</sup> This advice is grammatically sound, but when an idiom like this establishes itself, grammar must yield. That the idiom is fairly well established in current use is based on the following evidence. The writer has heard it recently in public addresses by Stuart Chase, the noted writer and lecturer, and Professor Curme, the distinguished scholar and linguist, and in others of less note. He has collected these examples from current writing: ". . . the chief reason why it seems so dismal an absurdity is perhaps *because* it could only serve," etc., (Edith Franklin Wyatt, in the *New Republic*); "I suppose that the reason we went to this church . . . was *because* it stood near our home." (Clarence Day, *Harpers*, December 1931); ". . . the reason Dickens is so much read in America is *because* he assailed them." (Harris, *Life of Bernard Shaw*, 1931). No diligent search is required to add to these examples; they abound in current writing of the better sort.

There is no need to force this usage upon those who by taste or training find it objectionable. They may continue to avoid it. But there is equally no need to condemn it in the writing of school-children, who are reflecting in its use a natural and common idiom, so far established as to be not eschewed by speakers and writers of respectable attainments.

#### BETWEEN WITH MORE THAN TWO

There is unanimous agreement in the textbooks that the preposition *between* may be used only when the object consists of two

<sup>15</sup> Krapp, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Clippinger, 1917. pp. 445, 446.

persons or things; that more than two must be preceded by *among*. The rules are similar to this: ". . . correctness requires that *between* be used when the object represents two persons or things, and that *among* be used when the object represents more than two persons or things."<sup>17</sup> The distinction made by these rules was first insisted upon in the eighteenth century, though even then it was felt to be a formal rather than an actual distinction. "Johnson's *Dictionary* says, '*Between* is properly used of two, and *among* of more; but perhaps this accuracy is not always preserved.' It certainly was not in the title to Trusler's work, *Distinctions between Words Esteemed Synonymous*, for he distinguishes meticulously between all the members of groups of as many as nine words."<sup>18</sup>

In the Leonard-Moffett report the sentence, "A treaty was concluded *between* the four powers" was placed 27th in a list of 102 items, with a rating of 2.3 on a scale of 4 points. This rating indicates that the judges felt it to be cultivated, informal English. It is interesting to note, however, that the teachers of English rated it 2.7, reflecting, no doubt, the influence of the textbooks which are very explicit in this instance.<sup>19</sup>

The *New English Dictionary* is quite positive in its assertion that, "In all senses, *between* has been from its earliest appearance, extended to more than two. It is still the only word available to express the relation of a thing to many surrounding things severally and individually . . ." There are many examples, one of which is added here, "There were six, who collected *between* them 15s., 4d." (Cowper).

An interesting example is to be found in Whitney, who in describing the uses of the comparative and superlative degrees, says, "The comparative degree strictly implies a comparison between two objects, the superlative *between more than two*."<sup>20</sup>

It is clear from the evidence that *between* has two legitimate uses in modern English for which the present rules are inadequate. The first use (and the more common one) is that involving two persons or things in which *between* denotes a division into two, or a position in space interior to the designated objects or persons: "Divide the cake *between* Mary and John," "Sit *between* Mary and John," "The bush was planted *between* the two trees." The second

<sup>17</sup> Kirby and Carpenter, *Book Eight*, 1930, p. 323.

<sup>18</sup> Leonard, *Doctrine of Correctness*, p. 113.

<sup>19</sup> Leonard-Moffett, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

<sup>20</sup> Whitney, *Essentials of English Grammar*, p. 87.

use is that in which *between* denotes a distinction in several persons or objects considered individually: "The five diplomats settled the question *between* them," "Distinguish carefully *between* the five uses of the subjunctive"; the underlying psychology is that of distinguishing between any two of a larger number. On the other hand, when a group of more than two is treated as a group, or collectively, the preposition *among* is regularly used: "Divide this *among* the members of your class," "Plant this *among* the shrubs." It is incorrect, therefore, to state arbitrarily that *between* may never be used with more than two.

#### CAN AND MAY

The judges of the Leonard-Moffett study were far more liberal in their acceptance of the word *can* used to denote permission than are the textbook authors. The use of *can* in the sentence, "Can I be excused from the class?" was rated 2.3 on a scale of 4 points by the American linguists, and 2.0 by the British linguists<sup>21</sup> Either rating indicated clearly that in the minds of the judges this use of *can* is 'cultivated' informal English and is fully acceptable in the usual language of speech and writing. The schoolbooks, on the other hand, insist firmly that *can* may never be used in asking permission. Curiously enough, the text which devotes most space to the correction of this 'error' employs it elsewhere in a model exercise designed to stimulate children's writing. The writer says, ". . . *can* is a greedy and aggressive verb. It gets into every sentence in which it belongs, and it often crowds into sentences in which *may* properly belongs. Therefore, many people use *can* where it should not be used, where it is not correctly used. Remember that *can* does not ask for nor give permission; *can* is correctly concerned only with power or ability. Do you use the words correctly?"<sup>22</sup> But in spite of this warning *can* was permitted to crowd into a sentence, "in which *may* properly belongs" in a composition exercise which begins, "Say, Mary, why *can't* I come to your old party?"<sup>23</sup> From the context it is perfectly clear that the speaker lacks neither 'power' nor 'ability' to attend the party; it is 'permission' which is denied. Yet according to the authors of the book *can* "does not ask or give permission." Then why is

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353.

<sup>22</sup> Kirby and Carpenter, Book Eight, 1930, p. 164.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

*can* used in the opening sentence of a model exercise? Quite clearly because it is customary usage and attracts no attention. Compare it with the 'correct' form, "Say, Mary, why *mayn't* I come to your old party?" to discover how odd and unusual the *may* form is. In polite usage, when the auxiliary comes first, as in a question, there is a tendency to distinguish between *may* for permission and *can* for ability. But when an interrogative particle precedes, especially in a negative sentence, *can't* is vastly predominant over *mayn't* or *may not*, as in, "Why *can't* I go out tonight?" The distinction may be summed up more clearly by saying that while *may* and *can* in their simpler forms are frequently used discriminately, *can't* is largely preferred to express denial of permission or ability.

Some interesting, though perhaps not conclusive, evidence is furnished by the study of telephone conversations referred to more fully in Chapter IV.<sup>24</sup> In this study the word *can* was used 396 times and *can't* 228 times, a total of 624 occurrences as compared with 60 uses of *may*. *Mayn't* was not used at all.<sup>25</sup> It is not unfair to assume that even though the 60 times that *may* was used might include all the situations in which permission was granted, some of the 228 cases of *can't* were to deny permission, inasmuch as *mayn't* was not used at all. In other words, it seems clear that *can't* is employed regularly for *may* and *can* in negative contexts.

#### DIVED OR DOVE

The past tense *dove* of the verb *to dive* is "not in the best use," says one textbook.<sup>26</sup> Inasmuch as *dove* is widespread in popular speech and is by no means unknown in the drawing-room, it remains only to determine whether or not it has a place in literature. Professor Krapp obviously prefers *dived*, but says, *dove* also is in permissible use.<sup>27</sup> The *New English Dictionary* calls it "U. S. and Eng. dialectal form," but quotes Hays, 1867, "The whole herd . . . *dove* down with a tremendous splash." From the returns of the Leonard-Moffett study it appears that the usage is far more acceptable in the United States than in Great Britain, inasmuch as the American judges rated it 2.8 (on the outer edge

<sup>24</sup> See p. 60.

<sup>25</sup> French, Carter, and Koenig, "The Words and Sounds of Telephone Conversations," Bell Telephone System, Monograph B-491, June, 1930.

<sup>26</sup> Scott-Southworth, Book Two, 1925, p. 252.

<sup>27</sup> Krapp, *Comprehensive Guide to Good English*, p. 202.

of acceptability) and the British judges rated it 3.8 (almost illiterate).<sup>28</sup> Yet it occurs twice, not in conversation, in J. B. Priestley's *Good Companions*. J. Lesslie Hall quotes John Earle as saying, "The preterit *dove* of the verb *dive* survives not only in the poetry of Longfellow but also in American prose."<sup>29</sup> Hall, however, is not inclined to accept the full value of this comment, for he adds, "Earle's statement is rather apt to mislead the student. . . . *Dived* is certainly supreme in polite society and in literature, but *dove* has great vitality in 'popular talk.'"<sup>30</sup>

If Hall's summary was true for the time in which he wrote it, we must then conclude that the "vitality in popular talk" of which he speaks is responsible for its now greater frequency. It is no longer true to say that *dived* is supreme in polite society and in literature, for in many sections of the country *dove* is the normal past tense for people of culture, and current writing, especially in the literary periodicals, uses *dove* often enough to challenge the supremacy of *dived*. As a matter of taste *dived* may be preferred, but there is no doubt that *dove* is correct.

We may conclude with Professor Krapp that *dived* has been the "conventionally 'correct' form, but the latter (*dove*), following the analogy of *drive, drove, ride, rode, etc.*, is a natural formation, and, in spoken use at least, is perhaps more frequently heard than the former."<sup>31</sup>

### DUE TO

The use of the phrase *due to* to introduce an adverbial modifier is much condemned, especially by writers of handbooks for college composition. Professor Krapp, who is generally inclined toward the liberal side in discussions of this sort, says, "Often incorrectly used as a conjunctive adverb (would not preposition be better?) as in *The battle was lost, due to the lack of ammunition*. The better form would be *The battle was lost, owing to the lack of ammunition, or because of, etc.*"<sup>32</sup> The question arises, why is *owing to* permissible in this construction while *due to* is not? The textbooks also agree in condemning *due to* as follows:

<sup>28</sup> Leonard-Moffett, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

<sup>29</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *English Usage*, p. 78.

<sup>30</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> Krapp, *Modern English*, p. 292.

<sup>32</sup> Krapp, *Comprehensive Guide to Good English*, p. 210.

*Due to* is faulty in such use as: *Due to the rain the exercises were postponed. Let it agree with a noun, as in: the postponement was due to rain.*<sup>33</sup>

*Due to . . .* is used to introduce adjective phrases only.<sup>34</sup>

In an article entitled "The Dangling Participle *Due*," Professor Kenyon discusses at length the history and development of this usage. *Due*, like *owing* is a participle. Both these words in their earlier use modified substantives. But like other participles they had a tendency to "dangle"; that is, to become detached from a specific substantive and modify instead a phrase or a clause.<sup>35</sup> In this evolution the word *owing* has gone all the way, gaining complete emancipation from participial use in the phrase *owing to*, which is partly prepositional. It may therefore introduce an adverbial modifier with perfect impunity. *Due to*, on the other hand, has lagged somewhat behind in this evolution, and is on that account frowned upon in spite of the parallel development of *owing to*.

This adverbial-prepositional use of *due* is evidently widespread. But its spread appears to have been recent; no dictionary I have seen mentions it. It is my impression that it is found rarely, if at all, in masters of English style; but those so considered are usually conservative. . . . Its frequency is certainly greater among the less educated, but it appears to be rapidly working its way upward, for some highly respectable writers admit it. It seems to be about equally common in America and England.<sup>36</sup> Some of his examples are added here:

"The population of Pennsylvania increased from 50,000 in 1730 to more than 200,000 in 1763, *due* in largest part to the thousands of Scotch Irish (etc.);" (Charles McLean Andrews); "*Due* to the lack of stress on the last syllable, the *h*-sound disappeared" (E. W. Burlingame); "*Due* largely to the absence from the country of the Committee on Academic Freedom . . . its report has been delayed two years" (Bulletin of American Association of University Professors); "*Largely due* to the literary activities of Alfred the Great, . . . the language of Wessex became accepted (etc.);" (George H. McKnight); "Immigration . . . from other parts of Brazil has been large, *due* to the rubber excitement" (Colonel George Earl Church); "Suppose, for example, that, *due* to one exigency or another, the lecturer has to become a traveling salesman" (John B. Watson); "America, where women began to predominate from pioneer times, *due* to their scarcity and greater demands" (Count Keyserling); "Whether *due* to her persistence, or to the fact that the official they saw was an old school

<sup>33</sup> French, 1924, p. 345.

<sup>34</sup> Raymond, 1925, p. 458.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. discussion of dangling modifiers in Chapter V, p. 99.

<sup>36</sup> Kenyon, "The Dangling Participle *Due*," *American Speech*, Vol. VI, p. 68.

friend of Jolyon's, they obtained permission for Holly to share the single cabin" (John Galsworthy). And on the brass tablet in front of the Old State House, Philadelphia, is this: "Here the Continental Congress sat from the date it convened . . . except when it sat in Baltimore . . . *due* to the temporary occupation of Philadelphia by the British army."

The article continues: "In recording the foregoing examples of the development and present use of *due to* as a preposition, I should like to make my own position clear. I neither approve nor condemn its use. My speech-feeling is against it; I do not use it, and it always offends my grammatical prejudices. . . . On the other hand I am forced to recognize the facts. *Due to* as a preposition has traveled precisely the same path as the now accepted *owing to*, . . . Undoubtedly it began with the less educated, where it is still most common; but so did hundreds of changes in usage and pronunciation that have attained the best of standing. In fact, there is no surer guarantee of permanence to a new language development that has gained general currency than having a widespread basis in popular practice. Strong as is my own prejudice against the prepositional use of *due to*, I greatly fear it has staked its claim and squatted in our midst alongside of and in exact imitation of *owing to*, its aristocratic neighbor and respected fellow-citizen.<sup>37</sup>

### EACH OTHER; ONE ANOTHER

The grammarians of the schoolbooks insist upon a distinction in meaning between *each other* and *one another*, pointing out that the first must be used for two only, and the second for more than two. Such a distinction does not exist outside of textbooks, for the common use of cultured people as well as the use of standard authors over a long period of time is free from any distinction in meaning. Yet the texts say clearly: "Use *each other* in speaking of two, and use *one another* in speaking of more than two."<sup>38</sup> Professor Krapp also follows tradition rather than usage in this instance, saying, "*each other*, properly used as referring to only two; for more than two the correct form is *one another*."<sup>39</sup> The *New English Dictionary*, on the other hand, denies any distinction at the outset, saying, "each other: used as a reciprocal pronoun in acc., dat., or gen. case; equals one another.

Some examples from various sources show how free from distinction literary usage has been in this matter. "The Church and Christ congratulate one another" (The Canticles); "These

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>38</sup> Clippinger, 1917, p. 236.

<sup>39</sup> Krapp, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

two imparidised in one another's arms" (Milton); "Fowls that live by blood eat not each other" (Trevisa); "These two were great enemies to one another" (Addison); "Sixteen ministers, who met weekly at each others' houses" (Dr. Johnson); "The citizens of different states should know each others' characters" (Webster). Still more interesting is the use of both forms in the same sentence, meaning more than two: "It is a bad thing that men should hate each other; but it is far worse that they should contract the habit of cutting one anothers' throats without hatred" (Macaulay).

*Each other* with more than two in the sentence. "The members of that family often laugh at each other," was placed 16th in a list of 102 items with a rating of 2.0 by the judges of the Leonard-Moffett inquiry.<sup>40</sup> This rating means that it was considered fully acceptable by more than 75 per cent of the judges; six in fact, called it "literary or formal English."

With such convincing evidence from dictionaries, studies of usage, and the literature itself that *each other* may be used interchangeably with *one another*, there is no justification whatever for the textbook rules which try to make a distinction between them. These rules can well be omitted from future textbooks.

### EITHER, NEITHER, WITH MORE THAN TWO

By common custom *either* or *neither* is used when speaking of two, and the phrases *anyone*, *not one*, or *not any one* for more than two. According to the textbooks and some authorities the words *either* and *neither* are strictly limited to the use with two, and may not be used correctly of more. So we find, "*Either, neither*, designates one of two persons or things, not one of three or more,"<sup>41</sup> and from Professor Krapp, "The pronouns *either, neither*, are correctly used only when the choice is between two."<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, *either* and *neither* are sometimes used of more than two, and have fair literary authority for such use. The *New English Dictionary* says, "*either* sometimes = each (of more than two things) (1867, Howells, 'Just above the feet, at *either* of the three corners is an exquisite female bust')." Richard Grant White, the American purist and pedant, used *either* and *neither* in

<sup>40</sup> Leonard-Moffett, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

<sup>41</sup> Raymond, 1923, p. 459.

<sup>42</sup> Krapp, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

his *Life and Genius of Shakespeare* thus: "That he wrote the plays that bear his name we know; but, except by inference, we do not know the years in which *either* of them was first performed. . . . Peasant, yeoman, artisan, tradesman, and gentleman could then be distinguished from each other (sic!) almost as far as they could be seen. Except in cases of unusual audacity, *neither* presumed to wear the dress of his betters."<sup>43</sup>

J. Lesslie Hall records having found *either* and *neither* with more than two in Poe, Emerson, O. W. Holmes, W. D. Whitney, C. Collins, H. W. Mabie, J. F. Genung, and John Earle. "Genung's own rule (*either*, to be used of two objects; *any one* of more than two) is too strict for him to obey, because it is stricter than the language itself."<sup>44</sup> We may conclude with Hall that *either* and *neither*, although generally employed with two, may occasionally be used with more than two because the rules limiting these words to use with two are stricter than actually observed usage. It is proper to point out, however, that the use with more than two is somewhat rare.

#### FURTHER, FARTHER

Four textbooks set up a distinction between the uses of *farther* and *further* by some such rule as this: "Careful writers use *farther* of actual space, and *further* of degree."<sup>45</sup> While there is no doubt that some writers as a matter of taste have made this distinction, there is also no evidence that the distinction is so universal in literature as to become regimented. Professor Leonard found no reference to it in the eighteenth century other than that in Johnson's *Dictionary*, in which he allowed either use to both words.<sup>46</sup> This is a powerful argument from silence that no distinction was felt in the eighteenth century, a fact further supported by some quotations to follow later. The nineteenth century evidently discovered and fostered the distinction between *farther* and *further*, although some of the best grammars, like Whitney's, failed to mention it.

Professor Curme gives a very clear and sane description of the uses of *farther* and *further* in saying, "We use *farther* and

<sup>43</sup> I am indebted to Fitzedward Hall for these illustrations. See also Hodgson, *Errors in the Use of English*, p. 22, for additional examples.

<sup>44</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *English Usage*, p. 86.

<sup>45</sup> French, 1924, p. 345.

<sup>46</sup> Leonard, *Doctrine of Correctness*, p. 289.

*further* with the same local and temporal meaning, but *further* has also the meanings *additional*, *more extended*, *more*; "The cabin stands on the *farther* (or *further*) side of the brook." "I shall be back in three days *at the farthest* (or *at the furthest*)." But: *further* details; without *further* delay. "After a *further* search, I found her." "Have you anything *further* (= *more*) to say?" In adverbial function *farther* and *further* are used indiscriminately: "You may go *farther* (or *further*) and fare worse." There is, however, a decided tendency to employ *further* to express the idea of additional, more extended, action: "I shall be glad to discuss the matter *further* with you."<sup>47</sup> But compare "Do you wish to press the matter *farther* (or *further*)?" in which current usage is about equally divided between the two forms.

Professor Krapp also points out the true distinction, saying that "*farther* (is) the comparative degree of *far*, with a variant *further* in the sense of *more far*, *more distant*. But in the sense of *in addition*, *also*, *more*, . . . the form *further* is the one usually employed."<sup>48</sup> Another writer says, "Some teachers and grammarians make a distinction between the use of *farther* and *further*. . . . Usage does not support this distinction. The two forms seem to be used interchangeably."<sup>49</sup>

All the foregoing discussion may be summed up as follows: *farther* and *further* may be used interchangeably in all meanings but that of *in addition*, or *more*, in which *further* is preferred. Some such statement as this is recommended to textbook writers.

An interesting example of the reversal of the usual rules for *farther* and *further* occurs in Lane's translation of the *Arabian Nights* (London, 1821) which he makes read, "Aladdin's mother pressed him no *farther* but left him at liberty to sit where he pleased." In this sentence *farther* clearly has the meaning of *in addition*, or *more*, a use customarily denied it. Two pages further occurs ". . . as he had a mind to carry him *further* to execute his design . . ." in which *further* clearly means *more far* in space. There are several similar instances in the same work.

The sanction given to the interchangeable use of *farther* and *further* does not, however, extend to the phrase "all the farther" in the sense of "as far as." While such sentences as, "This is all

<sup>47</sup> Curme, *Syntax*, pp. 501, 502.

<sup>48</sup> Krapp, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

<sup>49</sup> Cross, *Fundamentals in English*, p. 290.

the farther the train goes," are extremely common in popular speech, especially in the western part of the United States, this locution has no standing in cultivated English, either spoken or written. Usage may eventually make it an accepted idiom, but that time has not yet arrived.

#### USES OF THE VERB GET

1. The use of *have got* meaning *to have* or *to possess*. Despite the very common use of *have got* or more particularly the construction *'ve got* to signify simple possession in speech and writing, the textbooks object to it strongly on the grounds of logic or 'correctness.' Thus one says, "The verb *get* means 'obtain' and the verb *have* means 'possess.' Do not use these verbs together. When I say 'I have a book,' I mean that I have obtained it [note the extreme confusion of words in this explanation in which *have* is used in two entirely different senses, and *obtain* is hopelessly confused with *get* and *have*!]; therefore it is not only unnecessary but actually wrong to say 'I have got a book.'"<sup>50</sup> The use of the words "actually wrong" is unfortunate, for it is not difficult to prove that the linguistic process by which *have got* comes to mean *have* or *possess* is sound and fully recognized, and furthermore that *have got* has all the support in literature and current usage that can be desired. All the reference materials turned to in defence of *have got* in this section were written prior to the textbook rule above which calls it "actually wrong."

The process by which a perfect tense comes to have present meaning is described tersely by the *New English Dictionary* and more fully by Jespersen. Says the former, "The present tense of *have* form a present of completed action, or present perfect. Here in origin and form belongs *I have got*, colloquially used for *I have*." In other words *I have got* originally meant "having obtained (in the past) I now have (in the present)." But as present possession the result of previous getting and present possession detached from the idea of getting are for immediate purposes scarcely distinguishable, it is quite natural that the frequently used *have got* should fade sufficiently to be applied to either situation. Jespersen calls it a pure present. Commenting upon the shifting aspects of tense in certain words, he says,

<sup>50</sup> Pearson and Kirchwey, 1928, p. 166.

Some of the old perfects are used exclusively as real presents, e. g. Lat. *Odi, Memini*; in the Gothic languages the so-called praeteritopræsentia . . . e. g. Eng. *can, may*, and Gothic *wait*. . . . To express the perfect-meaning compounds with *have* were then formed: *I have driven, sung, held*, etc. In quite recent times one of these combinations has become a pure present (thus a new perfectopresent verb); *I have got (I've got)*: the retrospective element is quite absent in *I've got no time*. . . .<sup>51</sup>

So much for scholarly exposition of the process by which *have got* can mean a present *have*. It remains to show that *have got* is used thus in literature and has support in current usage. Hall says,

Besides being recognized by Bradley, Kellner, and Jespersen, *have got* is used by the following writers and speakers of repute: Goldsmith, Lamb, Thomas Hood, Carlyle, Thackeray, A. H. Clough, Gladstone, D. S. Mitchell, Ruskin, Holmes, Sir Henry Taylor, L. Kellner, Dickens. If the names count, *have got* should have some standing and not be branded as a vulgarity. Moreover, it is used too widely in polite society to be so treated.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, the judges of the Leonard-Moffett study placed *have got* in the sentence "*I have got* my own opinion on that" number 28 in a list of 102 items, with a rating of 2.3, meaning fully acceptable "cultivated informal English."<sup>53</sup> Inasmuch as these judges included the most competent linguists in America and Great Britain, their opinion fully substantiates the claim that *have got* is good current usage. It is evident that the statement "it is not only unnecessary but actually wrong" is nothing more than uninformed opinion. As such it has no place in a common school textbook.

2. There is some dispute as to the correct past participle of the verb *get*. Is the form *gotten* obsolescent and out of good current usage, as most of the dictionaries say? May it be tolerated at all? The textbooks call *gotten* 'obsolescent,' 'undesirable,' 'no longer used'; one text specifically says, "Everyone should notice that the third principal part of *get* is *got* and not *gotten*. The form *got* is preferred by good writers; the older form *gotten* is no longer used by them. It has outlived its usefulness. The correct form is *got*."<sup>54</sup>

So positive a statement as the foregoing excludes *ex cathedra* all writers who use the form *gotten* from the ranks of 'good writers.' Yet oddly enough, the arch-purist of the nineteenth cen-

<sup>51</sup> Jespersen, *Philosophy of Grammar*, p. 270.

<sup>52</sup> Hall, J. Leslie. *English Usage*, p. 122.

<sup>53</sup> Leonard-Moffett, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

<sup>54</sup> Kirby and Carpenter, *Book Seven*, 1930, p. 176; *Book Eight*, p. 314.

tury, Richard Grant White, although condemning almost everything that came to his attention, vigorously defended *gotten* by saying, "Many persons abbreviate *gotten* into *got*," thus bringing down on his head the wrath of Fitzedward Hall,<sup>55</sup> who opposed *gotten*. But J. Lesslie Hall, after admitting his own earlier objection to *gotten*, cites from his studies a list of 50 authors who used *gotten* ranging from William Caxton to Sir Henry Taylor. In America, though Webster's Dictionary of 1864 called it obsolescent, it was used by Poe, Hawthorne, Richard Grant White, W. D. Whitney, Sidney Lanier, and John Burroughs. "In polite society in large parts of America, the longer form has wide vogue in spite of some popular dictionaries."<sup>56</sup> There is every evidence that *gotten* is still alive and flourishing in modern English on both sides of the Atlantic, and that many 'good writers' use it naturally and correctly.

3. The present writer feels a distinction between the uses of *got* and *gotten*, however, which is different from that noted by other writers on the subject. In the uses of the past participle with *have* to imply simple possession or necessity, the form *got* seems to be almost invariably selected. "I've got no time"; "he's got to go"; "we've got the tickets." But in the sense of fetch or obtain, or with certain prepositions, *gotten* seems frequently preferred, as in, "This book was *gotten* from the library"; "Having *gotten* us up"; "The point was *gotten* over very clearly." This observation receives considerable support in the fact that for all the uses of *have* with *got* quoted by Hall as meaning possession, *have gotten* does not occur; on the other hand, in the quotation for *gotten* alone, the meaning is always that of 'obtain,' 'secure,' or else 'move,' as in, "His right hand, and his holy arm, hath *gotten* him the victory" (King James Bible); ". . . so soon as we were *gotten* out of hearing"; "The sun had now *gotten* much higher" (Stevenson). If any rule for *got* and *gotten* is necessary, it ought to explain clearly that for sentences in which the meaning of *get* is to obtain, secure, or move, either *got* or *gotten* may be used as past participle; when the meaning is that of possession *got* with some form of *have* is invariably used.

<sup>55</sup> Hall, Fitzedward, *Recent Exemplifications of False Philology*, p. 65.

<sup>56</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *op. cit.*, pp. 111, 112.

## IF FOR WHETHER

May *if* be used to introduce a noun clause implying uncertainty or doubt? Is it correct to say, "I do not know *if* he can come?" Two texts answer definitely in the negative; "*If* should not be used for *whether*." I don't know *whether* (not *if*) I can."<sup>57</sup> And also, "*If*. Do not use as synonymous with *whether*."<sup>58</sup> Another text does not mention the noun-clause use of *if*, but insists that whenever *whether* is used it must be followed by the phrase *or not* either expressed or implied. If the complementary phrase may be omitted, as is the case when it is merely implied, one wonders why the issue is raised at all.

In the eighteenth century Leonard found only one objection to *if* for *whether*, in the dictionary of J. Johnson, 1763. Here it was listed as a Scotticism in Hume's *Political Discourses*.<sup>59</sup>

The history and authority of this usage are ably presented by A. J. F. Zieglschmid, who calls to attention the linguistic relationship of English *if* to the German *ob*, cognate words, each originally used to introduce conditional clauses or noun clauses of doubt. In German the *ob* has become specialized to noun clauses, *wenn* taking its place in conditional clauses.

In identically the same way, English *if* was originally used in these same categories. In the course of time, however, the use of *if* became so intimately associated with conditional clauses (contrary to the German development) that it became in literary English largely restricted to this category. For this reason the use of *if* in noun clauses seems inappropriate to our "purists with idiosyncratic notions." The fact, however, has to be recognized that in spite of these teachings of these purists *if* is still widely used to introduce noun clauses, as this old historic usage is deeply rooted in natural feeling. The modern conjunction *whether* may, of course, be preferred in literary language.<sup>60</sup>

Concluding an article in which he shows that many writers of rules violate their own precepts, Reuben Steinbach says, "In ending the discussion of *if* for *whether*, I should like to point out that euphony should at times determine one's choice between the two conjunctions. For example, the sentence, 'He was asked if he knew when his friends would speak' reads more smoothly, I

<sup>57</sup> Raymond, 1925, p. 459.

<sup>58</sup> French, 1924, p. 345.

<sup>59</sup> Leonard, S. A., *op. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>60</sup> Zieglschmid, "If for Whether," *American Speech*, Vol V, p. 50.

think, than it would read if *whether* were used after 'asked.' On the other hand, the word *if* after 'knew' would clearly be less desirable than *whether*.

"I have said enough to prove that in a sentence not involving the consideration of euphony, *if* may be used for *whether* to introduce a noun clause following the verbs see, ask, doubt, know, wonder, or the like."<sup>61</sup>

#### LIKE AS A CONJUNCTION

The use of *like* as a conjunction is a usage on the border-line of acceptability in American English. In spite of its comparative infrequency in literature, in spite of the solemn warnings of grammarians and writers of handbooks on usage, and in spite of the active hostility of generations of school-teachers, *like* has firmly established itself in the speech of many sections of the United States, and, if we may judge from current dramatic literature, it is common in many parts of England. In those parts of the United States where it is common, particularly the middle- and far-western portions, college presidents, public lecturers, and leading clergymen—men and women of otherwise impeccable speech—use *like* freely as a conjunction with no sense of sin. The English teachers of these sections either bow to the inevitable and grudgingly admit the usage, or else persist in a never-ending and futile attack upon it.

Needless to say, the textbooks are unanimously opposed to admitting the conjunction *like* to accepted usage, saying in effect, ". . . *like* and *unlike* are incorrectly used as conjunctions. They should be used as prepositions and not as conjunctions."<sup>62</sup> Inasmuch as the authors of these texts are very largely residents of the east coast, where the usage is less common, or have been trained in eastern institutions, this unanimity is not surprising. The recognition by textbooks of local variations of acceptability in English usage is reserved for a later day.

Although *like* as an isolated conjunction is not a recent use, having been employed by Shakespeare and his predecessors, it was usually considered an abridgment of *like as* and was not objected to. Professor Leonard records that *like* as a conjunction was

<sup>61</sup> Steinbach, "On Usage in English," *American Speech*, Vol. IV, p. 161.  
<sup>62</sup> Kirby and Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

"neither used nor mentioned in 18 C. grammars."<sup>63</sup> That it was common in the nineteenth century, however, even creeping into the literature, is witnessed by these examples collected by Hodgson:

"Bidding the customers *like* Queen Eleanor did Fair Rosmund" (Mayhew, 1864); "A timid nervous child *like* Martin was" (*Ibid.*); "And if each man would only add his mite, *like* the pilgrim adds his stone to the heap in the desert. . . ." (Js. Bromfield, 1866); "A nation must laugh . . . *like* a satyr, or *like* those bitter fisher women did in France . . . , or *like* we have laughed under Punch's auspices for many years." (J. Hain Friswell, 1870); ". . . the coin is produced *like* wine is produced in bottles . . ." (Bonamy Price, 1869); "Then, with ingenuous vanity, and forgetting grammar in gush, he (C. Dickens) protests: 'Nobody will miss her *like* I shall.' (*Temple Bar*, May, 1873)."<sup>64</sup>

The writer has seen the conjunction *like* in the dialogue of recent plays by Galsworthy, Shaw, Drinkwater, and Philpotts. The attention of some British critics who are pleased to call *like* a 'vulgar Americanism' is directed to a study of the dialects of rural England uncontaminated by contact with American vulgarity.

The conjunction *like* is discussed with unusual impartiality in Professor Krapp's *Modern English*. He says,

The use of *like* as a conjunction arises from the ellipsis of a fuller form, *like as*, as in the verse in the Psalms, "Like as a father pitieth his children," etc. In the simplification of this double conjunction it happens that the second half is the one which has most generally persisted and the one which the formal grammarian would raise to the position of standard. But the ellipsis of *as*, leaving *like* for the simplified conjunction, is just as natural and just as reasonable, and so we find it in use side by side with *as*. . . . A colloquialism *like* as a conjunction may be, but indefensible it certainly is not. It is first of all a widespread custom of the speech, it has arisen naturally and in the same way that *as* has, and unless one starts from the *a priori* position that there is only one legitimate form of expression for every idea in speech, it makes as strong a bid for favor as the conjunction *as*.<sup>65</sup>

Elsewhere he adds, "For *like* as a conjunction both the spoken and the written language supply evidence to aid him who should seek to justify this particular form of English speech."<sup>66</sup> The present writer however, has never seen this use in any of the books of Professor Krapp which he has read. Professor Curme, after a brief note on the older English *like as*, says, "The present tendency

<sup>63</sup> Leonard, S. A., *op. cit.*, p. 260.

<sup>64</sup> Hodgson, *Errors in the use of English*, p. 118.

<sup>65</sup> Krapp, *Modern English*, p. 320.

<sup>66</sup> Krapp, *The Knowledge of English*, p. 180.

in colloquial and popular speech is to simplify these forms to *like*: 'It looks *like* he was afraid.'<sup>67</sup>

To the linguistic student the present position of the conjunction *like* is extremely interesting. It is trembling on the balance-point of acceptability. It can neither be fully defended as standard English, nor fully condemned. While from all current observations it seems to be establishing itself more firmly every year, its ultimate position is still unpredictable. Since its use is still avoided even by the students of language who find cause to defend it, the careful writer does well to be cautious of its use. But that it is widely used in speech, and is finding its way into literature, no one can deny. It may be fully established by the time this discussion reaches the press.

#### MOST FOR ALMOST

"*Most* means a great number, or in a great degree—while *almost* means nearly or not quite. These words cannot be used for each other."<sup>68</sup> Yet despite this warning, which is repeated in several other texts the word *most* frequently occurs in speech and sometimes in writing as a substitute for *almost*. The *New English Dictionary*, although it calls *most* in this use "Obsolete except in dialect," also adds, "It is doubtful whether this is not merely an aphetic form of *almost*; it is often written 'maist,' 'most.'" Krapp also conceives of it as a clipped form as he writes it "*most*" adding, "dialectal for *almost*."<sup>69</sup> In the combinations 'most all,' 'most any one,' 'most everybody,' especially in initial positions, *most* has some standing. That it cannot be freely substituted for *almost* is seen in such examples as, "He *most* won the prize," "John was *most* the only one there," which are unusual to the point of absurdity. But in "*Most* everyone has seen this picture," and "*Most* all of my friends were older than I" the use of *most* may be tolerated if not commended. Leonard sums up this use thus, "'Most all' for 'almost all,' though it has no clear dictionary backing, is nevertheless so common in informal speech among people of at least average culture that it seems a point of pedantry or of rather extreme cultivation to object to it."<sup>70</sup> While *most* for *almost*

<sup>67</sup> Curme, *Syntax*, pp. 282, 283.

<sup>68</sup> Kimball, *Book One*, 1911, p. 46.

<sup>69</sup> Krapp, *Comprehensive Guide to Good English*, p. 398.

<sup>70</sup> Leonard, S. A., "Usage Notes," *American Speech*, Vol. IV, p. 252.

cannot be defended in formal literary style, there is no reason for condemning it in elementary schoolbooks. It is at least common enough to be permitted in speech and in the informal writing of children.

#### MYSELF FOR I, OR ME

A correspondent voices his objection to *myself* in *American Speech* thus: "A layman . . . is particularly distressed to see you permit the ridiculous practice that is in such very common use of substituting 'myself' for 'me' in such a sentence as the one you give 'They invited my friends and myself'; no one would say, 'they invited myself.'"<sup>71</sup>

There are two points of particular interest in this extract: one is the admission of the great currency of the usage, and the other is the confusing of the use of *myself* as sole object of a verb with the use of *myself* as the second member of a compound object. As a matter of fact there are five distinct uses of *myself* as the substitute for a personal pronoun, disregarding the reflexive uses, ranging in acceptability from absolescence to current standard usage. They are:

1. Sole subject of a verb. Example: "*Myself* when young did eagerly frequent doctor and saint . . ." (Fitzgerald). Archaic, poetic, not acceptable in current prose usage, though good English in poetry.
2. Second member of a compound subject. Example: "John and *myself* brought the Yule log home." Frequently heard, but not fully enough established to gain recognition. Nevertheless it was frequently used in this manner by Washington in his personal correspondence, in sentences like the following: "From the moment Mrs. Washington and *myself* adopted the two youngest children. . ."
3. After comparisons with *than*. Example: "Enough to make a better man than *myself* . . . run into madness." (Richardson). Acceptable, informal usage, not at all rare in literature. Similarly after *as*: "No one knew this as well as *myself*."
4. Sole object of a verb or preposition. Example: "To *myself*, mountains are the beginning and the end of all natural scenery." (Ruskin). Not quite as acceptable in current usage as number 5. (This use must of course not be confused with the simple reflexive as in "I read to *myself*.")
5. The second or later member of a compound object of a verb or preposition. Example: "He . . . invited John Wilson and *myself* to visit

<sup>71</sup> *American Speech*, Vol. IV, p. 252.

him for a day or two." (Lockhart, *Life of Sir Walter Scott*). This use is fully established in literature and current English.

The textbooks make no effort to distinguish these various uses of *myself*, condemning it altogether as a substitute for the personal pronoun. Two examples will serve to show their point of view:

a. "In speaking of yourself with others never use the pronoun myself."<sup>72</sup> Note that this rule prohibits such a sentence as "I gave a folder to all present, not omitting myself," a sentence fully acceptable in literary usage.

b. "There is one misuse against which you should be warned. It is seen in the following sentences: Father, mother, and *myself* were all going. The teacher gave problems to John, Mary, and *myself*."<sup>73</sup> In this rule there is no attempt to distinguish between the nominative and objective uses of *myself*, although in actual usage there is much greater authority for the latter than for the former. The rules in the other texts are similar.<sup>74</sup>

The two uses of *myself* as a substitute for the personal pronoun which can be defended on the grounds of literary example and current frequency are (1) in the nominative case in a comparison after *than* or *as*; (2) as the second or later member of a compound object. Of the former the *New English Dictionary* says, ". . . *myself* in this use now expresses no special emphasis, being preferred to avoid the awkwardness of *I*." In other words, it is fully acceptable English. Of the second usage it says, "In an enumeration, when not occupying the first place, it does not now express any special emphasis, being in this position commonly preferred to *me*." Examples are given from Layamon to Ruskin. This too is acceptable English.

A further note on the use of *myself* as the second object of an enumeration is found in the Leonard-Moffett study. The average of all the judges for this usage in the sentence, "They invited my friends and *myself*" was 2.4 on a scale of 4 points; the British judges alone gave it 2.0, revealing the fact that the usage is more firmly established in Great Britain than in the United States. Nevertheless the general rating of 2.4 means that the American

<sup>72</sup> Pearson and Kirchwey, 1928, p. 191.

<sup>73</sup> Kirby and Carpenter, Book Eight, 1930, p. 272.

<sup>74</sup> See Kimball, Book Two, 1911, p. 84; Brooks, 1911, p. 251; Lewis, and Hosc, 1916, p. 120; McFadden, 1919, p. 175; French, 1924, pp. 311, 345; Raymond, 1925, p. 232.

judges felt it to be well within the range of currently acceptable English.<sup>75</sup>

There is little doubt that this usage springs either from the desire to avoid making a choice between *I* and *me*, or from the psychological urge to avoid the bluntness of the first person pronoun. *I* and *me* in enumerations or comparisons are direct, forceful, and subjective; *myself* in the same constructions permits an impersonal feeling, an objectifying of the self into the group. It softens the intrusion of the ego; it is felt to be modest, polite, and courteous. From all angles—literary authority, current usage, and psychological need—*myself* as the objective in an enumeration, or as the nominative after *than* or *as* is good English. The textbooks must acknowledge it and distinguish its uses.

#### PROVEN

The past participle *proven* is objectionable to many writers of textbooks, who are perhaps influenced in this decision by the common dictionaries which call *proven* 'archaic' or 'Scottish.' One writer says, "Always use *proved*. There is excellent linguistic reason for objecting to *proven*,"<sup>76</sup> but he fails to show what the 'excellent linguistic reason' is. The principal linguistic reason for using or avoiding an expression is its standing in literature and current speech, but one can be sure that the author quoted above does not have this in mind. He refers, no doubt, to the fact that since *prove* came into English from Latin *probare* through the Old French *prover* it has no right to an Anglo-Saxon *-n* past participle as though it were a native strong verb. There are two good answers to such an objection: first, that native suffixes are frequently attached to foreign roots to form a useful word, as in the once much disputed *talented*; second, that if *proven* has an honorable history in English and some standing in current literature and speech, a doubtful etymology cannot be urged against it.

The *New English Dictionary* recognizes *proven*, saying, "The past participle *proven*, originally Scotch from *prove*, follows the strong verbs; e.g. cleave, cloven; weave, woven," and quotes several authors. Professor Lounsbury is a strong supporter of it, concluding, "Some authors of repute employ it; others avoid it.

<sup>75</sup> Leonard-Moffet, *op. cit.*, p. 355.

<sup>76</sup> French, 1924, p. 346.

. . . It is more than likely that it is destined to establish itself permanently in the language of literature."<sup>77</sup> Hall records having seen it "at least seven times in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and twice in his *Aylmer's Field* . . . once in Huxley; twice in Kipling's serious verse; once in Fitz-Greene Halleck's poetry; once in Miss Katherine Lee Bate's *Religious Drama*."<sup>78</sup> He adds further, "If one great author can establish a form, Tennyson has established *proven*. . . In America, *proven* has considerable vogue in polite society and in the best journals."<sup>79</sup>

The present writer has noted two instances in a current journal of high literary standing, *Harper's Magazine*. In the issue for Augst, 1931, appeared an advertisement for books published "By the House of Harper" which began, "*Proven*—Books whose various excellencies have raised them to honors, etc." In the issue for October, 1931, in an article by Max Eastman entitled, "Poets Talking to Themselves" appears the sentence, ". . . if only for having so specifically *disproven* the hard saying of Pascal."

It appears from the evidence that *proven* is accredited and acceptable. With long enough standing to be absolved from the charge of being a neologism, it has been used freely by reputable authors of the last half century, it is found regularly in current writing of literary merit, and it is extremely common in speech. No further defence is needed to admit it to the ranks of correct usage.

#### REAL AND SURE AS ADVERBS

"The worst offenders," says a recent textbook,<sup>80</sup> "are *sure* and *real*. They are used incorrectly to modify verbs, adjectives, and adverbs instead of the adverbs *really* and *surely*." It is scarcely just to lump *real* and *sure* together in this way, for even as adverbs they vary greatly in use and acceptability. There is, for example, an appreciable difference in social level between "This pie is *sure* good," and "This pie is *real* good." Moreover *sure* is frequently used in popular speech as a verb modifier: "We *sure* had a good time," whereas *real* is never used this way. To do them full justice, even in condemnation, they must be treated separately.

<sup>77</sup> Lounsbury, *The Standard of Usage in English*, pp. 62-65.

<sup>78</sup> Hall, J. Lesslie, *op. cit.*, pp. 227, 228.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>80</sup> Kirby and Carpenter, *Book Eight*, 1930, p. 200.

*Sure* was once a "flat" adverb, and was commonly used as in this example: "He is *sure* a prince of a royal courage," (George Cavendish, d. 1562, *Life of Thomas Wolsey*). But today, while it is exceedingly common in popular speech, it is almost entirely excluded from polite conversation and careful writing. In fact, the avoidance of *sure* is one of the indications of cultivation in speech; its use is felt to be socially undesirable.

The position of *real* as the modifier of an adjective or adverb is considerably higher. While it cannot be called a formal, polished use, it is nevertheless frequently heard in professional and social groups in such sentences as: "It was *real* good of you to come"; "Shall we have a *real* fine day tomorrow?"; "I want everyone to be *real* quiet for a moment." That these uses are natural and proper in informal cultivated speech can scarcely be denied.

In a sentence similar to the last above, "I will write *real* soon," a textbook author substitutes "really soon."<sup>81</sup> This is utter nonsense. No one every says, "I will write *really* soon." We may say "I will write soon; I will really write soon; I will write soon, really," but never "I will write *really* soon." It simply isn't English, grammar and grammarians notwithstanding. The more one examines the original sentence, the more one becomes convinced that "I will write *real* soon," is by far the most natural and expedite manner of expressing the idea.

*Real* as the modifier of another adverb in *real quick*, *real soon*, *real fast*, and the like seems to be on the outer edge of acceptability. As the modifier of an adjective, as in *real good*, *real bad*, *real strong*, it is slightly less secure. Nevertheless, the child who is instructed to purchase a bottle of "Carter's *Real* Black Fountain Pen Ink"<sup>82</sup> can scarcely be censured the next day for writing "a *real* dark night" or even "a *real* good boy." He has the example before him on his desk. So does his teacher. It is quite conceivable that forty million ink bottles may establish *real* as the modifier of an adjective. It would be far less remarkable than the establishment of the verb *to kodak* from the name of a commercial product.

#### SIT AND SET; LIE AND LAY

The confusion of the parts of the verb *sit* and *set*, *lie* and *lay* is so widespread in English and is characteristic of speech levels

<sup>81</sup> French, 1924, p. 290.

<sup>82</sup> I think no one will insist that the manufacturers are speaking of *Real Black-Ink*, in which the adjective modifies a hyphenated noun.

so far above those in which other verb-form errors are common that it may be considered a distinct problem. Many cultivated people otherwise accurate in verb usage admit of considerable uncertainty in the use of these verbs. Discrimination is further confused by certain idiomatic exceptions which will be noted later. The textbooks on the whole are rather clear in their presentation of the transitive and intransitive functions of these verbs; one only of the books examined for this study asserts arbitrarily "*Lay* is transitive; *lie* is intransitive; *set* is a transitive verb; *sit* is intransitive."<sup>83</sup> The authors may claim with some justice that these rules are for classroom purposes and that to add exceptions and vagaries of usage to the otherwise clear-cut distinction would result in a "confusion worse confounded." Yet so common and correct an idiom as "the sun sets" is ignored or tacitly condemned by the rules as they stand. The matter is admittedly difficult, as Greenough and Kittredge agree,

. . . it is not surprising that the distinction between *sit* and *set*, *lie* and *lay* has broken down in vulgar English, and has not always maintained itself in literature. In the first half of the last century *lay* was pretty common for *lie* even in respectable authors. (See examples below.) The sun still *sets*, and it is excessively difficult (hardly desirable) for a poultry farmer to speak of "a *sitting* hen."<sup>84</sup>

It will be interesting to note some of the literary confusion and anomalous idioms. The most common by far is the substitution of *laid* for *lay* (the past tense of *lie*). It is not only heard daily in the speech of cultivated people, but has appeared frequently enough in literature to merit observation. For example,

"The Waterloo man was represented by a little child of three; a Martin of course, who *laid* in the gutter" (Kingsley); "The look of immovable endurance which *underlaid* her expression" (Wilkie Collins); "I have *laid* awake upon it" (Trollope); ". . . I never took off my clothes, but *laid* down in them wrapped in my cloak" (C. J. Matthews); "He again *laid* down and addressed himself to sleep" (De Quincey). Less frequently the confusion of *lie* and *lay* in the present tense occurs in literature. One recalls Byron's "There let him *lay*"; G. W. Dasent is quoted by W. B. Todgson as saying, "Dapple had to *lay* down on all fours before the lad could bestride him."<sup>85</sup> The use of *lay* intransitively in the idiom *to lay in wait* is recognized by the *New English Dictionary* thus: "*lay*, intransitive. To lay for; to set an ambush or a trap for; to lie in wait." In nautical terminology

<sup>83</sup> Lewis and Hoscic, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>84</sup> Greenough and Kittredge, *Words and Their Ways in English Speech*, p. 281.

<sup>85</sup> Hodgson, *Errors in the Use of English*, p. 37.

occurs also the idiom "To lay out along" as in "The sailors *laid* out along the yards."

*Set* as an intransitive verb has already been noted in connection with the "setting sun" and the "setting hen." No textbook questions the correctness of "the sun sets," but one at least makes an issue of the poultry idiom: "Supply the right form of *sit* or *set*" in the sentences, "The dove is . . . . . on the eggs," "Hens . . . . . on eggs."<sup>86</sup> The child is of course bullied into writing "The dove is *sitting* on the eggs," and "Hens *sit* on eggs," although he is fully conscious of the real distinction between *sitting* (casually assuming a sitting position) and *setting* (purposefully incubating eggs). If one concedes that the purpose of language is to convey complete and accurate meaning, the idiom "the hen *sets*" is vastly preferable to "the hen *sits*."

The verb *sit* is predominantly intransitive, but it has one or two transitive functions worthy of note. For example, there is a subtle distinction between "set the baby down" and "sit him up." The more grammatical "set him up" is too general; it denotes any change from a recumbent position. But "sit him up" means specifically "cause him to sit." Similarly "set him here by me" lacks the exactness of "sit him here by me." It is unfortunate that these distinctions, commonplaces of everyday speech, should be tacitly or openly condemned by schoolbook rules. They should be recognized and commended as types of accuracy far superior to the merely formal accuracy of textbook definitions of 'transitive' and 'intransitive' verbs.

The foregoing discussion is not a defence of an indiscriminate confusion of the forms *sit* and *set*, *lie* and *lay*. These words in their normal uses convey clear, distinct, and accurate meanings which are regrettably obscured in much present-day speech. The point the writer wishes to stress is that whenever any of these words ordinarily transitive or intransitive, acquires a new, distinct, and accurate meaning by a shift in function from transitive to intransitive or the reverse, the new use should be defined and accredited instead of being condemned as a violation of purely formal rules. To acknowledge it so is to show a commendable appreciation of the real purpose of language.

<sup>86</sup> Scott-Southworth, *Book One*, 1925, p. 158.

## THAN AS A QUASI-PREPOSITION

The textbooks are firm in their insistence that *than* is always a conjunction and must be followed by a clause or an ellipsis of a clause. In particular they stress the fact that *than* may never be used with *different*. One says, ". . . *than* and *as* are conjunctions and not prepositions."<sup>87</sup> With more specific reference another adds, "Never use the word *than* after the word *different*."<sup>88</sup> This latter rule overleaps itself inasmuch as there is a perfectly good use of *than* after *different* in which *than* is a conjunction. For example: "Is he different from his brother?" "He is much more *different than* you would suppose." Attention is called to this construction merely to point out once again the danger of ill-considered rules.

The real question at hand is whether or not *than* may be used after *different* as a quasi-preposition, similar in use to the more common *from*. Curme has no use for this construction, dismissing it with brief comment: "Since *different* has the same meaning as *other*, many improperly employ *than* after it instead of the preposition *from*: 'Your idea is different *than* (instead of the correct *from*) mine.'"<sup>89</sup> But Krapp is inclined to a more tolerant view.

"The construction *different than*," he says, "though reprehended by the authorities and avoided by careful writers, may nevertheless be found occasionally in writings of good standing. It is a convenient construction. . . ."<sup>90</sup> In another place he says, "Modern purist opinion is very firm against the use of *different than*, but as experienced a writer as H. G. Wells uses it freely. He writes, for example, in one of his prefaces, that a character of his "sees things from a different angle than did Mr. Polly," and a little later occurs the sentence, "They will have a different sort of strategy than the disorganization of political parties and subtler methods than sabotage schemes in cellars and the misdirection of honest discontent."<sup>91</sup>

It must be added, in fairness to Professor Krapp, that he feels that the usage of one or two writers, even those as prominent as H. G. Wells, does not establish a form in English. But we are not dependent upon the usage of a few contemporaries. *Different than* is an old construction, occurring in the works of the best-known English writers. Fitzedward Hall notes this sentence in

<sup>87</sup> Raymond, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>88</sup> Kimball, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>89</sup> Curme, *Syntax*, p. 303.

<sup>90</sup> Krapp, *Comprehensive Guide to Good English*, p. 195.

<sup>91</sup> Krapp, *The Knowledge of English*, p. 208.

DeQuincey, "And, apart from that objection, at this period, the hasty unfolding of far *different* intellectual interests *than* such as belong to mere literature. . . ."<sup>92</sup> Elsewhere he notes more fully, "We find as the result of mere heedlessness, *different than* in Addison, Steele, Defoe, Richardson, Coleman and Thornton, Miss Burney, Coleridge, Mr. DeQuincey, Mr. Thackeray, and Dr. Newman."<sup>93</sup> Surely a most respectable list of 'heedless' writers. Further examples are offered by Hodgson: ". . . our English poet . . . has given us a picture of a very *different* kind *than* what Homer intended." (Fitzosborne, *Letters*); "The seventeenth century evidently had a *different* notion of books and women *than* that which flourishes in the nineteenth." (*Pall Mall Gazette*, August, 1867); "Provision is made for happiness of a quite *different* nature *than* can be said to be made for misery" (W. Smith, *Gravenhurst*).<sup>94</sup> To which may be added another contemporary use: "See that you use no word in a *different* meaning *than* it was used one hundred years ago" (Walter Hines Page, *Letters*).

It may be seen, then, that *different than* is no stranger in literature, past or present, and that it is by no means as reprehensible as the textbook writers would have it. While there is little doubt that *different from* is the currently preferred form, *different than* is a possible substitute to be found in reputable writers and polite conversation. In such a sentence as, "My book is different from yours," *than* is undoubtedly avoided by all but the less literate. But in sentences requiring "from that which" to complete the comparison, "than" is a convenient short-cut often employed, as in the sentence of Mr. Page above.

The case of the pronoun after *than* in comparisons is usually nominative, although the accusative appears in popular speech and older literature. On the whole, however, contemporary cultivated speech and writing is quite consistent in the use of the nominative in all constructions but one: the relative pronoun *whom*. Although it is grammatically anomalous, usage has established beyond doubt the objective case of the relative pronoun after *than*. Professor Setzler says,

Than is regularly and properly a conjunction, but after *than* the relative pronoun frequently takes the objective form. The reason for this is not

<sup>92</sup> Hall, Fitzedward, *Recent Exemplifications of False Philology*, p. 21, footnote.

<sup>93</sup> Hall, Fitzedward, *Modern English*, p. 82.

<sup>94</sup> Hodgson, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

easily explained, but the practice is of long standing in English; it dates at least from the oft-quoted line of Milton, "Satan than *whom* none higher sat." The use of this form for the nominative relative after *than* occurs not only colloquially, but it is also very frequent in the literary language.<sup>95</sup>

Hall cites several examples antedating Milton to show that he did not originate this construction.

Jeremy Taylor says, "and all this for man, *than whom* nothing could be more miserable . . ." (Date 1650-51). Richard Hooker says, "Many men there are, *than whom* nothing is more commendable than when they are singled" (Date, *ante* 1600). Sidney says, "so grave counsellors, as besides many . . . *than whom*, (I think) that Realm never brought forth a more accomplished judgment, more firmly builded upon vertue" (About 1581). These passages alone prove that Milton did not originate this phrase, though the fact that he used it in *Paradise Lost* helped no little in giving it wide currency.<sup>96</sup>

Fitzedward Hall takes Cobbett to account for his condemnation of this construction. "Not unlike Mr. White's position regarding ill is that of Cobbett regarding *than whom*:

"Cromwell, *than whom* no man was better skilled in artifice." A hundred such phrases might be collected from Hume, Blackstone, and even from Doctors Blair and Johnson. Yet they are bad grammar. In all such cases *who* should be made use of; for it is nominative and not objective.

". . . and, therefore, we should write: 'Cromwell, *than who* no man was better skilled in artifice.' That any one but Cobbett would abide this, as English, is highly improbable; and how the expression, a quite classical one, which he discards can be justified grammatically, except by calling its *than* a preposition, others may resolve at their leisure and pleasure."<sup>97</sup>

Enough has been written to show that *than whom* is an ancient and respectable form, fully established in English, though not without occasional protest. Moreover, it persists untouched by the more rigid custom of modern English demanding the nominative after *than* which has practically driven out *than him*, *than her*, and *than them* from literary and cultivated usage.

<sup>95</sup> Setzler, *Advanced English Syntax*, p. 79.

<sup>96</sup> Hall, J. Leslie, *English Usage*, p. 295.

<sup>97</sup> Hall, Fitzedward, *Recent Exemplifications of False Philology*, p. 84.

#### WHOSE AS A NEUTER POSSESSIVE PRONOUN

Modern English sadly lacks a neuter possessive pronoun, to supply which lack the masculine-feminine *whose* has been extended to cover the meaning which must otherwise be expressed by *of which*. Inasmuch as the latter phrase frequently necessitates an awkward revision of the sentence in which it occurs, sometimes obscuring rather than clarifying the meaning, the extension of *whose* is highly commendable as a practical and sensible way out of the difficulty. But eighteenth-century guardians of the language, influenced by the restriction of *who* and *whom* to persons, raised serious doubts about the propriety of *whose* in the neuter use, and formulated objections which later become crystalized into rules. Thus Dr. Johnson says, "*Whose* is rather the poetical than the regular genitive of *which*"; Bishop Lowth adds, "*Whose* is, by some authors, made the possessive case of *which* . . . I think improperly."<sup>98</sup> Priestly comments, "I do not think that the construction is generally pleasing." Hornsey is more explicit: "*Which* properly speaking is indeclinable."<sup>99</sup>

These strictures became in time rules which have been copied from book to book so that today we find statements like this in the current textbooks: "*Whose* is sometimes used also for the possessive of *which*, but the form *of which* is better."<sup>100</sup> *Of which* is better only if it is either the superior manner of expressing clearly the idea of neuter possession, or if it has decided preference in the literature or current usage of English. The first reason cannot be upheld; *of which* is frequently awkward and devious where *whose* is clear and direct. In answer to the second reason there is so much evidence available that only the limits of space preclude an overwhelming array. F. Hall sums up a long discussion with ". . . the use of *whose* for *of which* where the antecedent is not only irrational but inanimate, has had the support of high authorities for several hundred years."<sup>101</sup> To this he appends a long list of references. J. Leslie Hall presents a list of 1,050 passages from 140 authors from Thomas Malory to W. W. Skeat, covering a period of 400 years. He asks,

Are there any authors left to name? The results of this study of the neuter *whose* amaze the present writer; he is fully prepared to endorse the state-

<sup>98</sup> Hall, Fitzedward, *Recent Exemplifications of False Philology*, p. 6.

<sup>99</sup> Leonard, S. A., *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>100</sup> Kimball, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>101</sup> Hall, Fitzedward, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

ment made by Lounsbury that this *whose* is used by every author entitled to be called an authority.<sup>102</sup>

In sharp contrast with the textbook grammarians quoted above as saying "*of which* is better English," is the statement of Curme:

In poetry and choice prose the old form is still the favorite: "a little white building whose small windows were overgrown with creepers" (Galsworthy). The use of *whose* for persons and things is the survival of older usage which knew nothing of the differentiation (*of whose* and *of which*).<sup>103</sup>

Professor Krapp also says, ". . . *whose* has always been freely used as the possessive of neuters."<sup>104</sup>

There is no support whatever to the claim that *of which* "is better" than *whose*. The history of the language, the usage of reputable authors, both past and present, and the opinions of qualified linguists all point conclusively to the fact that *whose* is correct, acceptable, and in many instances "better" English.

<sup>102</sup> Hall, J. Leselle, *English Usage*, p. 325.

<sup>103</sup> Curme, *Syntax*, pp. 229, 230.

<sup>104</sup> Krapp, *Comprehensive Guide to Good English*, p. 623.

## CHAPTER VII

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WRITING OF TEXTBOOKS IN ENGLISH

It has been the purpose of this study to reveal in clear outline two fundamental deficiencies of contemporary textbooks in grammar and composition. On the side of theory it has been shown in Chapters II and III that the movement toward the correction and regimentation of English which reached its height in the eighteenth century, and which determined almost exclusively the language theory and practice of the nineteenth century, still has a strong influence upon the theories of language and usage in contemporary textbooks, only slightly modified by the late nineteenth-century development of a science of linguistics. In theory, therefore, the textbooks are deficient in cleaving to a traditional set of standards and attitudes to the neglect of contemporary linguistic principles.

On the side of practice it has been shown in Chapters IV, V, and VI that the rules of the textbooks, supposedly descriptive of the grammar, syntax, and usage of modern English, are in many instances partially or totally misrepresentative of current English usage, urging distinctions not found in the language itself, or prohibiting uses fully established in the language on the grounds of logic, analogy, etymology, and other eighteenth-century criteria. The textbooks are therefore deficient in practice, in that they fail to represent accurately and faithfully modern English as it is actually used in speech and writing. Closely related to these two chief faults is a third; namely, the failure to arouse in the student an attitude toward English as a living, changing organism, influencing and being itself influenced by every individual who speaks and writes it. This attitude is more than the passive acceptance of a sound linguistic theory; it must be a vitalizing force giving new life to the study of language. It is what Professor Curme means when he says, "It will give a thrill to English-speaking students to discover that the English language does not

belong to the school teacher but belongs to them and that its future destiny will soon rest entirely in their hands."<sup>1</sup>

Scarcely necessary is it to repeat the statement that the charges brought against the textbooks in English are preferred against them as a group. No single text is thoroughly bad or entirely free from censure. Moreover, the texts analyzed for this study were selected chiefly on the basis of popularity; the nature of their contents was unknown prior to the analysis. Except where exact citation was demanded, references to particular texts were omitted, and the citations themselves were distributed among the several texts as impartially as possible. Throughout the work the spirit of impersonal, scholarly criticism has guided the task, in the effort to present clearly a situation which needs intelligent study and correction. The fact that certain textbooks provided the basis for the study is merely a necessary concession to the limits of time. The suggestions which follow are written in the same spirit, in an earnest effort to clarify certain confused issues and to present conclusions based upon the study of textbooks in grammar and composition as a group.

#### I. RECOMMENDATIONS TOWARD A SOUND THEORY OF LANGUAGE AND CORRECTNESS IN CURRENT TEXTBOOKS

##### 1. *The social aspects of language.*

Edward Sapir defines language as "a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols."<sup>2</sup> Language, in other words, is that group of auditory and motor symbols which alone or in combination have by common consent attained a generalized meaning, and are therefore the medium of exchange of ideas between man and his fellows. Language arose to supply a social need; it is purely the product of society, and its continuance rests solely upon its value to society. When a new expressional need arises, the social group invents or adapts a combination of symbols to form a tag for the idea; when an expressional need disappears, the social group neglects the tag for it to the point of extinction. The only valid defence for the creation or preservation of an idea-tag, or word, is utility; if it is useful it

<sup>1</sup> Curme, "The Split Infinitive," *American Speech*, Vol. II, p. 342.

<sup>2</sup> Sapir, *Language*, p. 7.

is good. Thus it is clearly seen that "the language" (as we generally speak of our own tongue) is the communication of ideas by *speech* and *hearing*; the social group created and perpetuated a spoken language for unknown centuries before writing was known. To know about a language, then, we must go directly to the social group to observe what is *said* and to determine by experience what is *meant* by what is said. This is the heart of the language, and the only valid source for the study of the language.

Written language, on the other hand, is at best a second-hand form of language. It consists of symbols; conventions of visual forms representative of conventions of auditory symbols. Except in artificial phonetic transcriptions written language is not even accurate symbolism, for the symbols do not represent the sounds they once were created to represent. It follows, then, that written language cannot be considered "the language," nor can it be used to determine the standards of language except with great caution, both because it is inaccurate symbolism and because it is individual, not social. Furthermore, in a very definite sense it is not only individual but partial, being only that part of the individual's speech which he selects to write down.

The textbooks, however, rely almost exclusively upon writing as "the language." Their examples and illustrations of good English are all literary, drawn from books; their strictures against faulty English are very largely directed toward the correct and commonly used idioms of speech. If they were used exclusively as manuals of writing, this criticism would not be valid, but they are regularly used in the classroom as authorities for correctness in all English, spoken or written, without distinction.

The English textbooks of the future, to sum up, must recognize the social nature of language, and English in particular, by

1. acknowledging that language is the tool of the social group,
2. granting that utility is the only valid basis for the creation or perpetuity of a language form,
3. pointing out the part each individual speaker plays in the retardation or acceleration of change,
4. regarding the written language in its proper light as the secondary and partial representation of the real language.

##### 2. *The physiological and psychological aspects of language.*

Man does not possess organs primarily designed for speech. The production and modification of speech sounds is a group of

functions superimposed upon organs designed for breathing, biting, swallowing, etc. It is obvious, therefore, that audible speech is the product of, and is totally dependent upon, the physiological structure of man. The science dealing with the production of speech sounds is called *phonetics*, the knowledge of which is an essential to the intelligent understanding of speech. The inflection and pronunciation of modern English are the products of phonetic laws which have been operative since the dawn of speech and which are no less operative today in determining the English of the future. It follows, therefore, that no adequate description of modern English in a textbook, no matter how elementary, can be written without an implicit recognition of the phonetic principles which have shaped the language we now use, and which are no whit less active today in shaping the language of the future.

Moreover, since speech is the outward manifestation of man's intellectual processes, it is also a psychological phenomenon. Speech is not the random assemblage of words into meaningful relationships; it is largely the clothing of idea patterns with the appropriate words. Some patterns are so invariable that Jespersen calls them *formulas*, e.g., *how do you do? beg your pardon!* etc.;<sup>8</sup> others are regular in outline but permit of variation in wording, as in *John hit Mary*. While an infinite variety of substitutions may be made in such a sentence, the pattern remains unchanged. In addition to these patterns and formulas, many other peculiarities of English syntax may be traced to psychological sources; especially *ellipsis*, the omission of words supplied implicitly by the context, a very common feature of modern English; *parataxis*, the ranging of propositions side by side without connectives, the relationship arising from contiguity; and *anakoluthon*, the abrupt shift to a new construction before the first is completed. This list could be extended; the point to be made is that back of many "errors" and "inaccuracies" of the textbooks, condemned as being no part of an orderly system of grammar, lie these psychological phenomena, which not only explain but defend the questioned usages. It is evident, therefore, that writers of texts must be acquainted with the psychological aspects of speech to avoid misleading and erroneous statements about modern English usage.

<sup>8</sup> Jespersen, *Philosophy of Grammar*, p. 18 ff.

### 3. *The historical view of language.*

Much of the earnest but misguided effort of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to correct and improve English according to *a priori* standards may be condoned when it is realized how little of the historic background of English was known or understood. Eighteenth-century comments on the language of Chaucer or even of Shakespeare reveal how little was known of the history of English, and even less of how to interpret such facts as were known. But there is no excuse for a similar ignorance today. Linguistic science, though in its infancy, has on the one hand assembled a body of facts concerning the English language so complete that it is possible to know with considerable accuracy what the language was at any given period, and on the other hand has developed a set of principles which enable the student to determine the antecedent history for any linguistic fact. It is inconceivable, therefore, that any one should attempt to describe modern English, or much less to prescribe for it, without a thorough knowledge of the facts of its history and the principles underlying the facts. No phase of modern English can be understood or intelligently described without this essential perspective. Inflectional forms, particularly where there are variants, forms of words, word doublets, idioms, pronunciations, dialect variants in sound and meaning, all are the results of processes and developments of the past, and can be understood and interpreted today only in the light of the past. It is imperative, therefore, that the writer of a textbook in English grammar should be thoroughly trained in the history of English.

### 4. *Standards in English.*

Ever since Swift's proposal in 1712 for the foundation of an English academy to "improve and ascertain the English tongue," there has been a succession of efforts to standardize English, or at least to establish a standard dialect. But English has always successfully eluded these efforts at formal standardization, though it has been considerably affected by the normalizing influence of the schools. How the eighteenth-century theories of correctness influenced the nineteenth-century school teaching, and to a considerable extent the twentieth, has been discussed in Chapter II. The task here is to outline a theory of correctness, or to define a standard, which will be linguistically sound and at the same time prac-

ticable for the use of textbooks. The necessity for regarding English from its social, physiological, psychological, and historical aspects has already been urged. Any doctrine of correctness advanced, therefore, must be consistent with these principles. But it must furthermore be simple, clear, and sufficiently definite to form a working basis for classroom instruction.

The acceptance of a relative or changing standard of good English in place of a positive or fixed standard in no way endangers the integrity of English. One of the most remarkable periods in the history of English is that from 1066 to 1362 when English was a spoken language only with no standards at all, ignored and despised by the learned and ruling classes. Yet it lived triumphantly through three centuries of eclipse and emerged vastly changed, but in no sense weakened or debased. The reason for its victory lay in the fact that it was an outward manifestation of the English people. So long as a language is the expression of the homely life of a people, so long as it meets their domestic, social, and intellectual needs, it is a sound language without corruption, no matter how it may change. Corruption lies in divorcing language from the life of the people, either through the limited intellectual range of ignorance or bigotry, or through the equally limited range of hyper-urbanism and eclectic nicety. As long as the standard of good English is based upon the language as it is spoken by English-speaking people as a whole, with due regard, of course, for group characteristics of the English, Irish, Scotch, Americans, Canadians, etc., there need be no fear of the corruption of the language. The determination of such a standard of good English is our next concern.

At the outset it must be acknowledged that there can be no absolute, positive definition of correct English. Correct English is an approximate term used to describe a series of evaluations of usage dependent upon appropriateness, locality, social level, purpose, and other variables. It is really the composite of a group of partial definitions, each of which favors some special aspect of the whole. It will be helpful, therefore, to list the partial definitions to establish the foundation upon which the inclusive definition is to be built. Such definitions include:

1. Good English is present, living, useful English.
2. Good English is appropriate to the purpose for which it is spoken or written.

3. Good English is comfortable English.
4. Good English is English suitable to the linguistic act in which it occurs.
5. Good English varies according to the occasion.
6. Good English must satisfy the inner sense of goodness of the speaker or writer.
7. Good English is true to its inheritance and to the taste and sense and blood and rhythm of life.
8. Good English is that form of speech normal to the speech-community in which it is used.
9. Good English does not draw attention from the idea expressed to the words used for the expression.
10. Good English, like good manners, has no standard more fixed than the ever-changing customs of society.

In the foregoing definitions three factors conspicuous in the textbook definitions are entirely missing. They are (1) "reputability," the determination of good usage by reference to standard authors; (2) "preservation," the obligation to defend and maintain language uses because they are traditional, or are felt to be more elegant; (3) "literary," the identification of good usage with formal, literary usage. Freed from the obligation to include these factors, we may now construct an inclusive definition of good English consistent with the language theories of the present day, yet simple enough to serve as a guide to usage in the school-room. The following definition is offered in an earnest attempt to meet the requirements. *Good English is that form of speech which is appropriate to the purpose of the speaker, true to the language as it is, and comfortable to speaker and listener. It is the product of custom, neither cramped by rule nor freed from all restraint; it is never fixed, but changes with the organic life of the language.*

It is at once apparent that the acceptance of this or a similar definition of good English necessitates great changes in the presentation of usage in textbooks and in the classroom. Those teachers accustomed to rule and authority, an absolute right and wrong in language, will find great difficulty in making the mental readjustment imperative for a relative rather than an absolute standard of usage. Much of the conventional teaching of grammar and correctness will have to be vastly modified or discarded. There will be much confusion and some distress. But eventually there will come into the schools a new theory of good English, so closely knit with the language itself that the error, misrepresentation,

dogma, and inconsistencies of the present textbooks may never again be repeated.

## II. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE HANDLING OF SPECIFIC ITEMS IN CURRENT TEXTBOOKS

Several times in the course of this study it has been pointed out that the textbooks in English language show a decided discrepancy between theory and practice; that after establishing a theory of language and a doctrine of correctness in usage they proceed to do violence to it in specific matters. The weight of tradition and the tendency to copy specific rules from book to book are largely responsible for this discrepancy. It is therefore earnestly recommended, for the selection and treatment of specific rules and examples in the textbooks of the future, that every item be viewed objectively and impartially in the light of its history, its use in literature, its present utility, and its present levels of usage. Only by some such re-evaluation of materials can the texts of the future avoid the startling discrepancies which mar the texts of the past and present.

The following recommendations are offered as a guide to the process of re-evaluation of items, and are briefly illustrated by references to matters discussed more fully in the preceding chapters.

1. Whenever traditional grammatical classification ignores or misrepresents current usage, it must be changed or expanded.

The treatment of tense is a point in question. Properly speaking, English has but two tenses, present and past. All other tense-forms are verb phrases, constructed to express variations in the time-relationship. Because of the influence of Latin grammar, four of these phrases were selected to form tenses parallel with the Latin tenses. This was a mere convention, however; there are many other similar phrases just as truly representative of time as the traditional future, perfect, past perfect, and future perfect. The present and past tenses of the verbs *mean*, *intend*, *expect*, and the past tense *used* are as surely auxiliaries of time as *shall*, *will*, *have*, *had*. This point is worthy of a dissertation in itself, but the following brief outline may serve for illustration.

### The verb *sing*

Present time—I'm singing (rarely, I sing)

Past time—I sang, or I used to sing, etc.

Future time—I shall sing, or I will sing, or I intend to sing, or I sing (tomorrow) etc.

Continuous or indeterminate time—I sing, (sometimes sang after an introductory past tense: I knew that she sang (= can sing).

This is but the most brief mention of a subject demanding a full and careful treatment under some heading such as "The expression of time-relationships in modern English."

Another example of the need for an expansion of the traditional categories arises in the discussion of gender. In addition to the usual definitions of the masculine, feminine, neuter, and common genders, mention must be made of the English custom of referring to certain neuter objects as *she*: There *she* goes; here *she* comes, of a train or ship; *she's* a grand old country (nation, city, state, etc). Even though this phenomenon may be a special kind of personification, it is sufficiently common and idiomatic in the language to merit mention in the discussion of gender.

2. Proper reference to the history of English must accompany the discussion of variant forms.

In the discussion of adverbs, the failure to describe and account for the "flat" adverbs, those descended from the Old English *-e* adverb ending, is to leave unexplained many of the modern English adverb uses. When are *loud*, *soft*, *slow*, *quick* adverbs? When and why does one use *loudly*, *softly*, *slowly*, *quickly*? What governs the choice? The writer has seen no textbook discussion which covered these problems at all.

In similar manner the variant forms of the past tense of strong verbs must be explained historically. Why does one find in literature *sang*, *sung*; *rang*, *rung*, *drank*, *drunk*; and sometimes *swang*, *swung*, all used as past tense forms? Why do we have *ride*, *rode*, *ridden*, but *bite*, *bit*, *bitten*? Why are not *rid* and *bote* also past tense forms? Language will begin to live for children who learn irregular verbs historically.

3. When custom has established two forms or usages on approximately equal standing, both must be presented.

Traditional rules frequently discriminate between usages of almost equal standing in speech and writing, chiefly, it would seem, because the textbooks are committed to the naming of a "correct" form. There should be no hesitation in listing alternate forms of speech custom when both are established. Some examples under this suggestion are: (1) the "split" infinitive; an adverb may be placed between the *to* and the infinitive of the verb at the discretion of the writer. Custom sanctions both the insertion and the omission. (2) the case of the noun or pronoun with a gerund; long established usage permits either the possessive or objective case; in certain specific instances one or the other case is generally preferred. (3) the use of the possessive case with inanimate objects. While it is true that the *of* phrase is more commonly used with inanimate objects, the possessive case is not infrequent in present speech and in the literature. In cases of choice like these the textbooks must list both forms to be consistent with actual usage.

4. When current established usage conflicts with traditional rules, the rules must be modified or discarded.

\* The following items, examples of current usage in conflict with traditional rules, have been discussed at length in previous chapters and need only be mentioned here.

- a. The uses of *shall* and *will* as future auxiliaries and in the expression of determination etc.
- b. The use of *so* and *such* as intensifying adverbs.
- c. The use of the superlative degree in comparing two objects.
- d. The use of the construction *the reason . . . was because . . .*
- e. *I've got*, meaning possession or compulsion.
- f. *Gotten* as a past participle.
- g. *Proven* as a past participle.

5. When current speech practices are modified or obliterating traditional rules, the facts must be noted.

The student is preparing for the use of English in the future and is at least a generation ahead of his teachers. He should be acquainted with the actual changes now taking place in the language, that he may watch them intelligently and be guided by his observation. Some changes of this sort are:

- a. The use of *data* as a singular noun.
- b. The establishment of *it's me*.
- c. The extension of uses of the indefinite *it*.
- d. The establishment of *due to* on a basis parallel with *owing to*.
- e. The increasing use of the conjunction *like*.

6. When psychological language habits bring about uses in conflict with formal rules, the rules must be modified.

The principal example of this type is the matter of number agreement in subjects and verbs, and in pronouns and antecedents. English has always inclined toward an agreement with the *implied* number of the subject or antecedent rather than with the *formal* number. The rules, on the other hand, insist upon agreement in *form*. The new textbooks must take into account the mental processes which have created and established violations of purely formal agreement, and modify the rules accordingly.

Similarly the position of the words *only* and *all* as modifiers is established more by a language habit than by strict attention to formal modification. Hence "I only had five dollars"; and "All boys do not smoke," are established uses in English because they are customary patterns.

The "dangling" or isolated participial construction is another instance of the influence of habit upon syntax. Although the participial phrase is supposed to modify a subject immediately expressed, by a process similar to ellipsis it is frequently made to modify a subject more or less implied but not expressed. When the "dangling" construction too readily attaches itself to the wrong subject, it is bad; but in all other cases it is at least permissible.

The use of *between* with more than two; *either* or *neither* with more than two; and the phrase *among one another* are further examples. Particular attention is called to the discussion in Chapter VI of the psychological factors involved in the use of *myself* as a substitute for *I* or *me*.

7. Levels of usage, the result of social standards, or of the purpose and tone of the speaking and writing, must be distinguished.

This principle has of course been observed in the textbooks, but the error has been in the interpretation of the levels. The texts have assumed that only formal, literary usage is correct; that colloquial, popular, and dialectal uses are to be discouraged. It cannot be too firmly reiterated that "the language" consists principally of the colloquial, popular and dialect uses which the books condemn, and that the formal, literary uses consist of specific selections for specific purposes. In other words, the texts must present both formal and informal uses, with adequate discussion to enable the student to use each intelligently and appropriately.

A few specific examples may be mentioned: (1) Who (or whom) in such a sentence as "Who (or whom) did you invite?" (2) Aggravate or exasperate, as in "That child aggravates (or exasperates) me." (3) Most or almost, as in "Most (or almost) all my friends go to that school." (4) Real, or some more formal substitute, as in "We had a real good time," or "We had an excellent time."

8. Fine distinctions, matters of taste or of personal predilection, may be profitably omitted.

There is little value in troubling young students with the distinction between *at* or *in* in referring to a city, as in "We arrived *in* Paris" or "We arrived *at* Smalltown." Similarly the pretended distinctions between *farther* and *further*, *one another* and *each other*, and *above* as an adverb or adjective may be omitted. The school child has enough to learn without being bothered by doubtful distinctions of this sort.

#### GENERAL SUMMARY

The English language is the most precious social heritage of English speaking peoples. The schools are institutions founded by society for the purpose of passing on to succeeding generations the social heritage of the people; in other words, the schools are maintained by society to fit individuals to take their places in the social group equipped to meet all the usual needs of life. Of all these social needs, an adequate command of the language and an intelligent understanding of its nature are paramount. It is the solemn obligation of the schools, therefore, to teach a form

of English adequate for the needs of society, true to the facts of the past and present, and quickened with a live, organic, and objective theory of language and usage.

The vast majority of instruction in English is conducted in classes of twenty to forty students studying from the same textbook. Even when full allowance is made for the skill and inspiration of the individual teacher, the responsibility of the textbook, and behind it its authors, is seen to be very great. That these authors strive with earnestness and sincerity to meet the responsibility of their office is not doubted; but, that owing to various influences, prejudices, and, it must be admitted, deficiencies, they have failed to measure up to their responsibility has been demonstrated by this study. The conclusions of this study, presented in the form of recommendations, are here summarized and offered in the hope that they may assist future writers of textbooks in English to avoid repeating the mistakes and misconceptions of the past.

I. Textbooks in English must reflect a sound linguistic theory of the nature of language, with a full understanding of its social, physiological, psychological and historical aspects.

II. Textbooks in English must reflect a theory of correctness consistent with the actually observed usage of modern English, free from prejudice and outworn tradition, and cognizant of the uses and relative values of formal, informal, and popular levels of speech.

III. In the treatment of specific items, textbooks in English must avoid inconsistency in theory and practice by attention to these principles.

1. Whenever traditional grammatical classification ignores or misrepresents current usage, the classification must be changed or expanded.
2. Proper reference to the history of English must accompany the discussion of variant forms.
3. When custom has established two forms or usages on approximately equal standing, both must be presented.
4. When current established usage conflicts with traditional rules, the rules must be modified or discarded.
5. When current speech practices are modifying or obliterating traditional rules, the facts must be noted.

6. When psychological language habits bring about uses in conflict with formal rules, the rules must be modified.
7. Levels of usage, the result of social standards, or of the purpose and tone of the speaking or writing, must be distinguished.
8. Fine distinctions, matters of taste or personal predilection, may be profitably omitted.

## APPENDIX I

The words and phrases which are placed below have all been objected to by one or more of the textbooks examined as forms of 'incorrect' English. Judged by the standards for the formal, literary essay, many of them are undesirable for that kind of writing, but as has been pointed out in Chapter III, the formal, literary standard is not the only criterion of 'correctness.' Indeed, many of these uses are established beyond doubt in the informal speech of cultivated people; many others are frequently heard, if not fully approved; and none are definitely illiterate. The attempt to eliminate them from the speech or informal writing of students, even of those in college courses, is as futile as it is wrong. The commendable attitude to take with regard to these less established usages is one of interested inquiry, to determine to what extent they are used, by what people, on what occasions. Only by a number of such observations carefully kept by interested students in various parts of the English speaking world can anyone arrive at a proper estimate of the standing of the expressions.

The usages are listed in alphabetical order, with an illustrative sentence as condemned by one or more textbooks.

- alike. He treats everyone alike. (Clippinger, p. 502).  
 among. . . . among one another. (French, p. 308).  
 appreciate. I very much appreciate the favor you have done me. (Raymond, p. 456).  
 apt. A doctor is apt to be called out at any hour of the night. (Raymond, p. 453).  
 as long as. The expression *as long as* should not be used as a conjunction. (Clippinger, p. 445).  
 awful. Means inspiring with awe. (Raymond, p. 457).  
 back of, in back of. We should not say *back of* the house. In back of is also incorrect. (Kimball, II, p. 35).  
 balance. I read fifteen pages, but I was unable to read the *balance* of the assignment. (Raymond, p. 553).

- blame on. *Blame on in blame a thing on* a person is faulty. (French, p. 345).  
 directly. Directly I entered I saw something was wrong. (French, p. 304).  
 dying wish. Sir Bevidere fulfilled the dying wish of the king. (Clippinger, p. 173).  
 enthuse. Not yet reputable as a verb. (Clippinger, p. 508).  
 expect. When do you expect they will come? (Clippinger, p. 59).  
 fix. Colloquial when used with the meaning to repair. (Clippinger, p. 508).  
 foot. Three feet wide, not three foot wide. (Scott-Southworth, p. 153).  
 guess. I guess so. Guess is wrong here. (Pearson-Kirchwey, p. 107).  
 help but. Cannot help but see. (French, p. 308).  
 home. Use at home after verbs expressing rest; use home after verbs expressing motion. (McFadden-Ferguson, p. 69).  
 hung. They hung the man at five o'clock. (Thomas, Manchester, and Scott, p. 543).  
 love. I love apple pie. (Clippinger, p. 59).  
 nice. He spoke and acted nicer and more gentlemanly-like than anyone I know. (Raymond, p. 453).  
 out. He looked out the window. (McFadden-Ferguson, p. 69).  
 over again. The work had to be done over again. (Clippinger, p. 175).  
 providing. He will remain providing he is needed. (Clippinger, p. 60).  
 raise. Next month I am going to have a raise in salary. (Scott-Southworth, p. 270).  
 sewn. The woman had sewn all day. (Clippinger, p. 204).  
 stop. We stopped at the hotel two days. (Clippinger, p. 59).  
 that. That, this, should not be used as an adverb. If he went that far he must have reached the summit. (Raymond, p. 463).  
 there. Avoid useless initial there. There are two kinds of drawings which have to be made. (French, p. 140).

strong cups. The man drank three strong cups of coffee.  
(Clippinger, p. 173).

very. Such expressions as "very pleased" "very disappointed" are avoided by careful speakers and writers. (Scott-Southworth, p. 222).

ways. The old cat came with us a little ways. (Scott-Southworth, p. 270).

This list is not exhaustive, but it does illustrate the kind of usages condemned on general principles, or on personal aversion, by textbook writers. Each of the expressions is worthy of careful study, to determine its history, its place in literature, and its standing in current usage.

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