

UNINTENTIONAL ERRORS IN SYNTAX

by A.A.G. Anderton

There is of course no clear-cut dividing line between deliberate departures and unintentional errors. A writer's deliberate perversion may in the course of slipshod time perpetuate itself unthinkingly. Or both types can appear in the same sentence or even in a single word: '*Gasping*, his hand reached for the door-knob.'¹ Or what may appear deliberate to one reader may seem to be accidental to another.

Errors are tabulated below according to grammatical and syntactical practice.

SYNTAX

CLUMSY SENTENCE A sentence is a group of words that makes sense. And it is essential that a sentence should have *unity*, as this example has not: 'A substantial structure on a hill near the village, the barracks were provided with wireless apparatus, and the garrison, up to last February, consisted of eight men.' A further short example of clumsy construction is: 'The main difficulty was the fences and ditches.'

OBSCURITY A favourite of government gazettes. Under this heading we may cite long sentences, involved sentences, faulty sentence-construction, ambiguity in expression ('When John meets his uncle he always raises his hat'), carelessness in phrasing, jargon, and omission of necessary words ('The good young Mohammedan is a believer and a player of healthy sports'). Under this heading we might also mention *circumlocution* or *periphrasis*: 'in the contemplated eventuality' which means 'if so'.²

¹ Unattached participle; clumsy syntactical form.

² Quoted by the Fowler brothers in *The King's English*: O.U.P., 1940, p. 13.

PLEONASM 'if and when', 'of any sort or kind'. These locutions verge on the cliché, and very often may not mean what was intended: the intention in 'if and when' may have been, and often is, 'when'.

CLICHÉS and HACKNEYED PHRASES See Partridge's *Dictionary of Cliches*.³ Mark Twain parodied such writing; and let us remember Pope's censure of clichés: 'Dullness is ever apt to magnify.' 'The Artificial Respiration Controversy', an article by Alan Plater in *Punch*, (20th August 1958, p. 238) illuminates by ridicule one of the prime weaknesses of a cliché, which is verbosity:

In the nick, an element of sanity was restored by the Prime, in a speech which might well go down. He agreed that troubled waters, but insisted that the Ship of State could. This would, of course, involve far greater exploitation of the peaceful uses. He had unlimited faith in, and co-existence must at all costs.

'Since then, some people have stopped crying that Inevitable; certainly, we all hope that somehow.'

It is interesting to observe not only that any reasonable phrasing can complete the ellipses, but also that the omissions give the article far greater succinctness and – *Punch*. From the beginning of 1960 certain advertisements by Tube Investments Ltd have also been using this gimmick. *The Northern News* (8th November, 1957, p. 6): 'The Cabinet recently decided that no money or scientific manpower would be spared to get the long-range Britannia right.' The error is obvious: it is in the avoidance of the cliché 'no effort would be spared', but it leaves the reader to decide for himself whether no money would be available, or whether no money would be begrudged. This is a neat example of the possible utter negation in intended communication. For 'spared' write 'begrudged' and the communication is crystal-clear.

MIXED METAPHORS A mixed metaphor is a kind of malaprop cliché. Much of modern American humorous prose (e.g. that of

³ Routledge, 1947.

Cornelia Otis Skinner) is shot through and through with similes and metaphors which, though not contiguous enough to be mixed in a sentence, are mixed in the paragraph. This appears to ensure literary success.

MISUSED PARTICIPLES It is 'not English', and certainly clumsy, to begin a sentence with a participle – especially a short one – as in 'singing, he walked home'. Whether participles are confused, disconnected, misrelated, suspended or dangling, these solecisms are among the most common faults in the English language. Research shows that, from fourteen books, twenty-two periodicals and forty daily papers (all English or South African publications), of the 880 participles noted down, no fewer than 292 were grammatically incorrect – more than a third. Here follows a cross-section of examples:

Unrelated or Misrelated: 'Quiet, popular and possessing great personal charm, I can never be too grateful for all he did.' Not a very modest statement! Also: 'As a woman, I trust you above all others' wrote Thackeray in *Henry Esmond*. Here the speaker was Henry Esmond himself.

Dangling or Suspended: 'Climatically Kandy is delightful. Warm during the day, the nights are cool, and the early morning air is always refreshing.' (*Stamp Collecting*, 2nd September, 1959, p. 775) The grammar is not refreshing. Ibid: 'On entering, a short flight of stairs leads to the inner chamber.' A very common error.

Confused: 'Engaged in mining in Colorado, his technical ability ...' This use of the participle with a possessive pronoun is defensible, but it is well to avoid it.

Active-passive: 'The prisoner was found while searching in the woods.' Here is an example from *The Argus* (8th November, 1950): 'It is alleged that by destroying tally-sheets and other forms connected with the delivery of goods from the docks, the goods were smuggled from the docks for sale.' And how were the forms connected? By pins? And which docks were for sale? – A piece of bad writing. G.H.M. Bobbins points out that the use of the passive voice almost always results in the loss of the agent: 'Hearing of the disaster, a rescue party was sent out.'

GRAMMAR

From *The Reader's Digest* (Sept. 1958, p. 5):

'Even sitting on the ground these majestic airliners impart an aura of speed.' Here the grammar is unexceptionable; but the curious corollary arises that, in encountering a correct participle, one is so used to the incorrect that one tends to misconstrue by supplying the unintended ellipsis: 'Even (when you are) sitting on the ground these majestic airliners ...'. The flow of communication is then disturbed by the incongruous thought of having to sit on the ground while admiring airliners.

It-construction This is also very common, and hardly defensible: 'On entering the house it seemed to me ...'. This may also be classed as a Misused Gerund, as in: 'On entering the house, ferns are visible everywhere.'

Particular quality We must go further and consider the shades of participial quality which may or may not be given to a main clause according to the grammatical rule, introduced by the following prepositions and adverbs: *during, notwithstanding, considering, regarding, respecting, concerning, talking of, allowing for*, etc. etc. Kennedy⁴ calls these examples a 'creeping conversion' to the status of prepositions and adverbs, and mentions that Russell in 'The Dangling Participle'⁵ has proposed adding nine more, including *assuming, leaving*, and *looking*. Where is the grammarian to draw his line between the defensible and the indefensible? Bobbins⁶ says 'It is natural, and perhaps right, to explain this common type as originally not a participle at all, but a shortening (modification) of the gerund. ... The difficulty is to know when this development is complete. ... In all such cases, it is best to put off recognition.' For this is where we verge on the error of CONFUSION OF EXPRESSION (with two or more constructions in one sentence), as in: 'With the exception of aeroplanes, speeds have increased fairly steadily.'

⁴ A.G. Kennedy: *English Usage*, Appleton-Cent., N.Y., 1942.

⁵ *American Speech*, Vol. 10, 1935, pp. 113-118.

⁶ *Ibid.*

We must leave it at that and conclude that nearly all misused participles confound the sense and muddy the clear pool of meaning.

'THUS' AND A PRESENT PARTICIPLE These are often used as a slipshod makeshift, unrelated to the rest of the sentence, as in 'The dam broke, thus causing great destruction.'

CLUMSY AVOIDANCE OF SPLIT INFINITIVE First, let it be said that there are some split infinitives which cannot be unsplit without an alteration of words and without a subsequent change of meaning. 'Ask him to kindly come here' is the only way of saying what is meant, since 'ask him kindly' means in a kindly fashion, and 'to come kindly' has the sense 'to come quietly' (and suggests arrest, as Whitaker-Wilson points out in his book *How to Write English*);⁷ and 'kindly ask him' is not meant, since it enjoins the locutor. Similarly with: 'He told his boss to kindly drop dead.' A potent reason for the difficulty in transposition of 'kindly' is, of course, that its primary meaning changes with its position in the sentence. This applies to many other adverbs.

Secondly, the clumsiness of avoidance very often glaringly announces itself when the adverb leads the phrase, as in 'He began unashamedly to weep.' Apart from the risk that the adverb might here be understood to modify the first verb instead of the second as intended, a solution will nearly always be found if the adverb is tucked away neatly at the end of the sentence.

OTHER CLUMSY AVOIDANCES For the writer who is hypersensitive to split infinitives there is a curious psychological continuation, namely a clumsy avoidance of the split present participle, as in: 'He made a point always of taking a cold bath.' Here the writer appears to have a nameless innate fear of the perfectly good phrase 'of always taking' because of his subconscious fear of the similarly constructed split infinitive.

The misplaced adverb (see Fowler on 'Position of Adverbs') is only a step away from the above; for instance, 'Please regard favourably my application.' (It must also be mentioned, however, that the misplaced adverb is often no more than a foreigner's solecism.) Lastly, there is the clumsy avoidance of the obsolete preposition-at-end fetish as in 'To

⁷ C. Whitaker-Wilson: *How to Write English*, World's Work, 1951.

whomever did you go ...?' instead of the more natural 'Whoever did you go to ...?' This is the sort of locution which prolongs the life of clumsy compound prepositions such as 'whereat', and which gives rise to the use of 'whence' in colloquial utterances where it is too stilted.

These points on clumsy avoidance lead us naturally to the next heading: 'Style'.

STYLE

Style and syntax are intertwined; but to define this relationship would be to invite the opinions of every writer. And in considering errors one should also be in a position to define error. This would lie somewhere between a dropped brick and a plasterer's toe. It is a matter of opinion, which is hard to assess; and to help us we take the example of good writers and good critics, with the broad assumption that they are good stylists themselves. Although this still leaves us very much in the air, we are nevertheless reinforced by the framework of grammatical rule, by the mortar of usage, and above all by meaning.

In the above paragraph it will be obvious that we have attempted to use the figure of speech which is metaphor, which ever since Chaucer has been an accepted concomitant of style.

To instance the force of meaning, and to examine how lack of style and errors in syntax blur the meaning, here is a piece of communication together with an attempt to clarify it:

PRESS COMMUNIQUE NO. 466, 1952

RAIL CRISIS: GENERAL

The following is a fairly comprehensive résumé of the rail transport conditions from the end of April to the present week-end in June, in so far as they have affected coal loadings.

During April a record movement of coal and coke was established. At the end of that month we were hit by two very serious accidents, the first in the Hunyani deviation, and the second a bad derailment on the service line to No 2 Colliery,

The following is a fairly comprehensive résumé of rail transport from the end of April to the present week-end in June, as regards coal loadings.

During April there was a record haulage of coal and coke. At the end of that month we were inconvenienced by two very serious accidents, the first in the Hunyani deviation, and the second as a result of a bad derailment on the service line to No 2 Colliery, which held up

which held up all traffic movements either side of Salisbury, and at Wankie.

Having no reserves of any description, recovery to normal conditions is inevitably a lengthy process and, of course, no backlog could be made up.

In early May there was pressure of heavy import traffic both from the Union and from Beira. Much of the traffic from Beira comprised bulk cargoes – wheat, cement, timber and fertiliser – resulting in delays in off-loading in both Southern and Northern Rhodesia. Additional to the heavy traffic from Beira to the Salisbury area was local traffic from the east and very heavy receipts from the Union.

Private sidings, goods sheds and banks became congested, delaying considerably the replacement, release and removal of coal-carrying trucks. The limitations of our inadequate shunting power militated against fluidity of movement in and out of depots.

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Private sidings, goods sheds and banks became congested. This considerably delayed the replacement, release and removal of coal trucks. Shortage of shunting engines delayed the movement of trucks in and out of depots.

OVER-USE OF THE PRONOUN 'ONE' The tendency seems to be greater among those who know French. The over-use can be exasperating and even comic, as in 'If one performs one's share of one's commitments, and one does all that one is called upon to do, one can hardly be blamed, can one?' In so many grammatical impasses, attempts at avoidance put one in a worse plight; in this case the temptation to substitute 'one' by 'he' and 'one's' by 'his'. This misusage is now apparently condoned, unhappily, in American usage at all levels. Indeed it abounds in the style of A.G. Kennedy himself.⁸ The advantage in dual gender that 'one' has over 'he' still does not seem to preclude the universal use of the latter word in this combination.

Particular instances of syntactical misusages will now be examined. Many of them stem from Fowler (marked F), whose remarks are often still germane; and further comments have been added.

⁸ A.G. Kennedy: *Current English*, Ginn & Co., New York, 1935.

PERIPHRAISIS Over-use of words such as 'case' and 'character' will cause one 'to canter nine miles round a cabbage.' Semantic confusion results. (For examples, see Fowler on 'slipshod Extension'.)

FALSE SCENT (F) 'The causing of a reader to suppose that a sentence or part of one is taking a certain course, which he afterwards finds to his confusion that it does not take.' These might be called 'bamboozlers', to coin a word. For instance: 'In the case of the Egyptian mummy, experts found that the accused could not be convicted.'

SWAPPING HORSES (F) Changing the sense of a word in the middle of a sentence, as in 'The insurance cheque was owing to him and to his foresight in providing against accident'.

ELEGANT VARIATION (F) '50%' instead of 'one half'. The jump from the frying-pan of word-repetition into the fire of elegant variation can nearly always be avoided by the complete recasting of the sentence. It is well for the writer to remember here that perfect synonyms are almost non-existent.

GENTEELISMS (F) A modern example from contemporary English is the advertising phrase 'barley wine' for 'ale' or merely 'beer'. Wine is made from grapes, and beer from hops; and language is made from common sense.

DIDACTICISM (F) 'Khalif' for 'Caliph'. This is a matter for speech level: let the gaoler speak of 'recidivists' among his associates, but to the lay public he must say 'men imprisoned again' to make himself understood.

TWOPENCE COLOURED (F) The insertion of irrelevant details, as in: 'Mrs. George Brown, whose sister is Lady Snell, wore a white straw hat.' The semantic quandary here is, of course, what did the writer intend to convey?

POSITIVE WORDS IN NEUTRAL PLACES (F) For instance: 'An admirably cheap method.' Knowing what is wrong here goes a long way towards knowing what is good style and what is bad.

ABSTRACT APPENDAGE 'Goods of inferior quality' for 'inferior goods'; 'a person of intelligence'; 'a storm of unusual violence', etc. etc. 'Abhor the abstract appendage,' says R.G. Ralph⁹ in his

⁹ R.G. Ralph: *Putting it Plainly*, Methuen, 1952, p. 65, et ff.

chapter on 'Light the blue paper and retire' which endorses Hayakawa¹⁰, Each of these examples is a periphrasis.

ENUMERATION FORMS (F) 'He raises fruit, vegetables, and keeps fowls.' This is one of the several errors attributable to bad schooling, since it is widespread and is unconsciously perpetrated by the literate, to such an extent that it is knocking on the door of accepted usage.

DOUBLE PASSIVES (F) 'The point is sought to be evaded' — which is so clumsy that it hardly makes sense. Fowler calls these 'clumsy and incorrect monstrosities.'

FAULTY PROXIMITY Misusages occur particularly with *only* and the correlative conjunctions *both* and *not only*. For example: 'The clerk only spoke to the visitor when he entered the office.' Although in most cases the intended meaning can be guessed at, guessing should not be necessary; and in several instances even a guess fails to elicit the meaning.

CLUMSY SUFFIXES Ugly constructions such as *resistless*, *heavenlily*, *embarrassedly*, *leathern* and *to quieten* are all the more distracting when a writer makes a fetish of them. Just as 'uncoordinated' seems to claim some relationship with the Scots 'unco guid', so 'lovelily' seems to suggest an amorous white flower, and so on. These constructions are best eschewed — for the sake of euphony if for nothing else.

ACCIDENCE

The grammatical errors instanced here are given in approximately descending order of importance. All examples given will show semantic disturbance to a greater or lesser degree, depending upon context, speech level, and the common sense of the reader being greater than that of the writer whose communication is faulty.

FAULTY ELLIPSES *General*: 'One of the most important, if not the most important, method is electrolysis.' *Anacoluthon*: 'This is essentially a business, a practical age.' ('... a business and a practical ...') A first reading of this sentence imputes substantiveness to the word 'business'. *Unequal Yokefellows* (F): 'Either he did not know or was lying.' ('He either ...') Unnecessarily to mystify the reader is to begin to

¹⁰ S.I. Hayakawa: *Language in Action*, Harcourt Brace, N.Y., 1948.

lose his sympathy. *Walled-up Object* (F): 'I scolded and sent him to bed.' *Faulty Comparisons*: 'The value of exercise is greater than any other recreation.'

REDUNDANCIES *Tautology* and *Pleonasm*: 'Equally as well as', 'Limited only to', etc. An accidental tautology contains an over-duplication of meaning not intended by its author, and if it is understood by the reader as a duplication then semantic error arises. *Compound Prepositions* (F): 'As to (whether)' *Redundant Perfect Infinitive*: 'I should have liked to have gone.' Here the semantic problem is where the perfect infinitive was intended to be. The alternatives 'I should have liked to go' and 'I should like to have gone' not only have different shades of meanings but also may affect the context.

Unnecessary Plural: 'slimes dam', 'a large works', etc. T.A. Rickard¹¹ writes: 'when, in 1903, the leaders in technical science in South Africa decided to prepare a comprehensive treatise on the mining and metallurgy of the great goldfield of the Witwatersrand they issued a style-sheet requesting contributors to use "slime", "concentrate", "tailing", and so forth, unless the reference was to several of these products.' The words 'depth' and 'field' also readily suggest themselves, as well as the sentence, 'His present whereabouts are unknown.' (Perhaps he is in several places at the same time.) But since 1903 these usages have become increasingly common, and it might be correct to say that the battle has been lost and that they are now established usage.

CURTAILED WORDS (F) 'turps', 'bio'. In these cases the degree of semantic error will vary with historical usage ('auto' and 'car' are now accepted), and with the degree of inappropriateness at the speech level used – though we must treat with care: nowadays a duchess is as likely to say 'fridge' where her butler says 'refrigerator'.

CONFUSION OF PARTICIPLE AND GERUND 'I hate him playing the piano.' Here we have the type of fused participle that would have been accepted by Fowler if the confused meaning has been absent.

ERRORS IN AGREEMENT 'None of the representatives were punctual.' But 'was' gives an incredibly clumsy feeling. The sentence should have been re-cast.

¹¹ Ibid.

ERRORS IN CASE 'Who did you see?' seems destined to become established usage soon; but 'between you and I' remains a solecism though it is widespread in its speech level and social level. Another common error in case is 'my' in general construction.

ERRORS IN NUMBER 'Our only guide were the stars.' See the remarks above. If it sounds awkward to be correct, the sentence should be recast.

OBJECT-SHUFFLING (F) 'Instil (for 'inspire') with courage'. This type of error is not easily noticeable though it is quite frequent, and it unconsciously adds a woolliness to meaning.

IDIOM WITH WRONG PREPOSITION 'Obligatory for.' This is a difficult topic, which has been extensively commented on by Fowler and Partridge.

-WARDS (F) 'Eastwards' for 'Eastward', and 'towards' for 'toward'.

MALAPROPISMS The humorous uses of Sheridan and Dickensian malapropisms may be insidious, but they are not usually invidious. It is their unconscious use which sullies the clear intent of meaning, as in 'masterful' for 'masterly' or 'afflict' for 'inflict'.

NEGATIVES Blunders with negatives are extra-ordinarily frequent, form the type 'Yes, we have no bananas' upwards.

INCOMPATIBLES (F) 'Decimate by 50%'. Though this may reveal the author's ignorance it does not reveal his meaning.

-LY (F) The difference between the adverbs 'hard' and 'hardly', as with the difference between 'too much' and 'very much', and 'few' and 'a few', may fox a foreigner. Wrongly used at any speech level they cause disaster to any intended meaning.

ILLITERACIES If we were to strike a percentage from the degree of illiteracy plus frequency, the prize would seem to go to the use of 'like' for 'as', as in the phrase 'like I always said'. As with misspellings, illiteracies tend to bring us up with a jolt to disturb the flow of thought.

MISCELLANEOUS

FOREIGN DANGER (F) *General*: 'cui bono'. We have mentioned elsewhere that when an English-speaker borrows a foreign word or phrase he is quite likely to use it wrongly. The French concert-lover

says 'bis' and not 'encore'; and the cagey French author writes under a 'nom de guerre', not a 'nom de plume' – even if the 'plume' belongs to 'ma tante'. But these two are now accepted usage. *French Words*: 'bien entendu', 'par exemple'. In a succinct passage on the over-use of this habit, Fowler delightfully calls it 'the bower-bird instinct', and lists all usual examples with remarks that are still very relevant. Take the word 'fauteuil': how is it pronounced anyway? Furthermore, the translating of such phrases directly into English ('that jumps to the eyes'), far from convulsing us with the author's wit, merely presents us with a bower-bird strutting in borrowed plumes.

ODD FEMININES J.P. Postgate, in his introduction to Breal's 'Semantics',¹² observes that in German a young lady has no sex, while a turnip has. Nor in Latin, for that matter, does 'ecce, duae longae' mean 'Look, two long women!' but 'Look, two long galleys!' But nowadays we know how to recognize women. A typist is a female typist, and a drum-majorette, one may be sure, is a girl. Nor should one alter 'naif' to 'naive' for the feminine, or vice versa. 'Such corrections', says Fowler, 'are pedantic when they are needless.' The turn of the tide has come in the word 'blonde heroes'. The feminines -e and ette have come to stay.

OVER-COMPOUNDED WORDS Compare 'Capetown' for 'Cape Town' (SAE) and 'Copperbelt' for 'Copper Belt' (RhodE). Without unnecessary digression we may confirm the general observation that familiarity leads to compounding, as it also leads to initials (e.g. all attorneys but few laymen speak of an A.N.C.). 'Antiaircraft' is patently the villain of the above examples and, like 'Clumsy Avoidance of Predicative Construction' quoted previously, it seems to stem from Germanic influence – though it is interesting to observe that the German word itself for 'anti-aircraft gun' was such a mouthful (flugzeugabwehrkanon) that it was conveniently abbreviated to its initials 'flak'. And compare the current American acceptance and the standard English rejection of the word 'onto' (despite the long-standing English acceptance of 'into').

'It is difficult', states the preface to *A New English Dictionary*¹³,

¹² M. Breal: *Semantics*, Heinemann, London, 1899.

¹³ ed. James A.H. Murray, O.U.P., 1888.

‘to determine which of these combinations are matters for the lexicographer, and to what extent they are, or are not, grammatical.’

OMITTED HYPHEN The historical tendency is to drop the hyphen, as has happened to such words as *freebooter*, *grasshopper*, *minelayer*, *smelling salts*, *port wine*, *motor car*, and a host of others which seem quaint in Victorian novels. The reader will have noticed that the dropping of the hyphen has by no means always resulted in the fusion of the words.

But a greater degree of semantic disturbance occurs from careless omissions of obligatory hyphens. Your-guess-is-as-good-as-mine results from the phrase ‘a crude ore bin’ which may mean either ‘a crude-ore bin’ or ‘a crude ore-bin’. When we are informed that ‘the foreman is a hard working man’, we might accept employment under him if our informant meant ‘a hard-working man’ and refuse it if he meant ‘a hard working-man’. These examples were suggested by T.A. Rickard in his book, *Technical Writing*.¹⁴

MISUSED INTERROGATION MARK ‘Yes. I am told that she uses nail polish?’ This is Agatha Christie’s favourite solecism, and she evidently uses the mannerism to convey inflexion.

ABSOLUTE PHRASE This includes mis-punctuation by a comma: ‘The child, having crossed the street, the policeman released the flow of traffic.’ Another illiteracy.

COMMA MISUSED ‘The man who lives here, left an hour ago.’ This type of fault separates subject from verb, and arises partly from an instinct to bracket off the clause, and partly from an attempt to clarify a clumsily-constructed sentence.

Then again, ‘Whoever it was, got a good night’s rest.’ The comma is almost justifiable, in view of the mess the writer has got himself into by the clumsy juxtaposition of ‘was got’.

UNNECESSARY DIACRITICAL MARKS All the examples quoted are American usage, of which only one (*round*) has been noticed so far in current English writing.

‘Coöperative’: admittedly the presence of the diaeresis gives a better look to the word than if the mark were absent, and indeed the ‘cooperative’ found in English practice invites the pronunciation ‘ku:pr t v’. But what is wrong with ‘co-operative’? Nothing, until we

¹⁴ Ibid.

try to make a negative of it. 'Unco-operative' does not look unco guid even to a Scot, and we can suggest no solution except to eschew the word. But the American resuscitation of the dead diaeresis is unwelcome: such diacritical marks in the English language should remain buried.

'Materiél', meaning supplies, is the comparatively new American differentiation of 'material', excluding the latter's meanings of 'cloth' and 'important'. It may be useful, but it is extremely clumsy, and it flies in the face of our healthy historical tendency to drop marks of accent.

So also with 'rôle' and 'depôt'. There is no valid reason that the circumflex should be perpetuated.

Fly 'round the world with TWA', states an advertisement. The perfectly good adverb 'round' has been so lost to Americans' usage that they now resort to the clumsy expedient of shortening 'around' to 'round'. Similarly we find 'til' for 'till'.

MISSPELLINGS A misspelling noted by the reader brings him up with a jerk and disturbs the smooth flow of thought. The London *Evening News* of 18th October 1950 has: 'Now, because of the near state of equity between Parties, the Government has been loathe to bring forward the promised legislation ...' It might even have been loathed if it had.

'Seperate' is a common illiteracy, especially in letter-writing.

It is also possible for semantic disturbance to occur when a reader holds a pronounced prejudice in favour of one of two accepted spellings. We know of one diehard who refuses to countenance 'connection' for 'connexion' (though the O.E.D. gives both) because of the etymologically correct root 'nexus'. His head would lie easier upon his pillow if he were to accept the fact that unstabilized usages continually and continuously change morphological conventions. For example the word 'mutton', before its spelling was thus fixed early in the reign of James I, has been spelt: *moltoun, motoun, motone, motene, motonne, motton, mouton, muton, muttoun, mutown and mutten*.

OTHER MISUSAGES

For the sake of completeness the remaining categories of current misusages in English are given at the end of this paragraph. They nearly

all deal with matters of style, which do not particularly concern our study except as occurs in the script. For convenience they are all given the Fowler headings (which can hardly be improved upon) and are grouped according to continuity of matter:

Haziness; Battered Ornaments; Mannerisms; Facetious Formations; Pedantic Humour; Worn-out Humour; Polysyllabic Humour; Vogue-Words; Hackneyed Phrases; Sobriquets; Popularized Technicalities; Generic Names; Novelese; Stock Pathos; Wardour Street; Archaism; Where-Compounds; Formal Words; Working and Stylish Words; Love of the Long Word; Needless Variants; Superfluous Words; Novelty-Hunting; Vulgarisation; Avoidance of the Obvious; Pedantry; Quotataion; Misquotation; True and False Etymology; Pride of Knowledge; Zeugma.

ORAL MISUSAGES We cannot conclude without mentioning the *oral* faults which affect communication. We usually find that as often as not it is errors in the script such as are mentioned in Fowler's 'Swapping Horses' and 'Unequal Yokefellows' (plus awkward words such as 'embarrassedly') which cause the radio announcer to trip, pause, and say 'I beg your pardon, I'll read that passage again.' It is further important to realise that an oral error may have more serious communication failure than the written error, since the latter can at least be re-read to find the intended meaning, while the former in passing unrepeated gives rise either to misunderstanding or to incomprehensibility and a waste of breath.

The semantic functions of stress and tone must also be borne in mind. Roger Kingdon in a succinct article of that title¹⁵ quotes an example of semantic stress on the sentence-stress level:

Do you 'ever deal in 'horses? – 'That's my "business.

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DEGREE OF ACCEPTANCE Some of the usages discussed above indicate that all grammatical conventions are by no means fixed. In the

¹⁵ To be found in *English Language Teaching*, Vol. III, No. 7 (May 1949), The British Council and Longmans Green.

following study the language level of accepted spoken usage is used as a common denominator, taking as our yardstick the 230 Expressions of Leonard,¹⁶ as discussed by Marckwardt and Walcott.¹⁷ These are classified as ESTABLISHED USAGES, DISPUTABLE USAGES, UNCULTIVATED USAGES, and ILLITERATE USAGES. We have subdivided ESTABLISHED and DISPUTABLE into the following categories: *Verb*, *Pronoun*, *Adverb*, *Former Solecism*, *Cliché*, and *Got-construction*. A further subdivision is made, indicating those usages which are neither established nor disputable and which may yet to be relegated to the uncultivated or the illiterate.

ESTABLISHED USAGES

Case & Pronouns

Each should bear <i>his</i> or <i>her</i> ... Everyone was here, but <i>they</i> 've gone. Invite <i>whoever</i> you like	It's <i>me</i> <i>Who</i> do you want? If it had been <i>us</i> <i>You</i> have to have money
<i>It</i> says in the book that ...	
<i>They</i> had strikes in England	
Did <i>they</i> (someone) leave a message?	
They invited Bob and <i>myself</i> .	

Verb

I can't <i>stand</i> him	<i>Taxied</i> home
If it <i>wasn't</i> for cricket	He <i>priced</i> it.

Adverb

We <i>only</i> had one left	Go <i>slow</i>
They were <i>mostly</i> closed	He moves <i>quick</i>
I <i>felt badly</i> about it	<i>Partially</i> to raise
He was <i>this</i> high.	

(N.B. Compare SAE 'I'm coming *just now*.')

¹⁶ S.A. Leonard: *The Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage, 1700-1800*, Madison NY, 1929.

¹⁷ A.H. Marckwardt and F.G. Walcott: *Facts about Current English Usage*, (Monograph No. 7, N.C.T.E.), Appleton Century NY, 1938.

Got

I've *got to*
I couldn't get through

I *have got*

Cliché

In this connection
Point of view
Under these circumstances
To the end that
In the case of
Along these lines
Nice
Viewpoint
He made a *date*

I for one
This much is certain
As regards ...
One of those (for *a*)
All dressed up
The way (for *as*)
Pretty good
Awfully

Former Solecism

An historical novel
The man I knew (omitted Relative)
No so large (for Not *as*)
Ask *whomsoever*
As well as (for *so* well as)
Reason was *because*
In front of (for *before*)
I went home, *which* was a mistake
Try and get it
He came *around* four o'clock
I don't know *if* I can
I've no doubt *but what*
Shouldn't be surprised if it *didn't* ...
What was the reason for *John making* that noise? There was (1), (2) and (3) in the room. *Between the four* powers.

To at least go
had rather; had better
The chapter *whose* ...
A large works
Further (for *farther*)
Reason why
None are
Shall (for *will*)
From whence
Providing (for *if*)
Can I? (for *may*)

DISPUTABLE USAGES

Pronoun

You know better than *me*

Yourself and your friends are invited

Verb

The book has begun to *date*
He *dove* into the water

It *aggravates* me
Do you *wish* for some?

Adverb

Kind of silly
Didn't do so *bad*.

It works *fine*

Cliché

Good and cold.

Former Solecism

I will probably come late
It looks *like* they mean business
Like they have in the tropics
Of *them* being found out
As well or better than I
The reason for *me leaving*
I can't help but eat it
The captain with his men *were* cheered
Intoxication is *when* the brain reels
I would have been glad to *have been* there.

We haven't but a few left
The *biggest* of two
Neither ... are
It's *liable* to snow
Everybody ... their
Between each bed
These kind of
Differently *from what*

NOT CONSIDERED ESTABLISHED OR DISPUTABLE

It was *me* that
Will you be at
The green kind of apples *are* sour
He *loaned*
I read *where* a man bit a dog
It's *real* cold today
He would *likely* come.

One ... *his*
Fix a meal
I wish I *was*
My *folks*.
One ... *he*
Off *of* the roof

CONSIDERED NOW ESTABLISHED

Fix a clock

Aren't I?

I can't seem to get this right
Mad about it
Either of these three.

Leave me alone
I expect he knows

The above classifications are purely arbitrary, and the fact that no two persons will agree on all of them reinforces the fact that they are disputable. It is interesting to observe that our disagreement nearly always relates to usages now widespread in American English but not yet in standard English ('my folks'), and also to dialects ('He would likely come'). In conclusion: if grammatical usages are as disputable as we trust has been shown; if the framework upon which we hang our sentences is loose; then the clarity of our meaning and the interpretation of its intention must also suffer.