

of the reference section. Particularly useful, I think, is the section on the definite and indefinite article. Selection of the correct article is not always easy for people whose home language is English, and for foreigners to English it must be little short of soul-destroying. In spite of this, it is a part of speech much neglected in language textbooks, most of which are content merely to point out the two types of article and to say that they limit nouns.

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J.J. Lamberts: *A Short Introduction to English Usage*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1972, xiv, 358 pp., (Index, 26 pp.), Boards, R7,80.

A great memory does not make a philosopher, any more than a dictionary can be called a grammar.

Cardinal Newman: *Knowledge in relation to Learning*

There is a weird power in a spoken word. And a word carries far – very far.

Joseph Conrad: *Lord Jim*

In support of these quotations, R.A. Moon¹ maintains that:

Grammar is not an abstract and difficult science, remote from the practical world. Essentially, it is one of the means by which we examine whether our expression is accurate or not. Grammar determines the shape, proportion, relation and movement of thought. It is so much a part of the living nature of expression that to study grammar is to see how ideas live together and acquire meaning. In other words, we look at grammar not as something detached from expression but as being active in expression.

¹ R.A. Moon: *Functional Grammar*, London, Edward Arnold, 1959, p. 9.

Dr Lamberts, Professor of English at Arizona State University, is supremely aware of this widely held belief that 'grammar' is 'active in expression'. In his preface to *A Short Introduction to English Usage*, he states that,

...English Grammar has a bearing on the problems of English Usage. Of this we are reminded again and again as we see grave sins being levelled at nouns, verbs, pronouns and other features of the language. In fact, our school-books and school teachers take it for granted that there must be a link between the two even though they neglect to spell it out. We shall take the next step. Throughout this book then it will be assumed that any usage may be described in grammatical terms, that is, as a physical happening. Like any scientific description, a description of language must be impartial; and therefore we must be prepared to find that a grammatical 'rule' itself has no scruples about usage.

(p. xii)

The author readily acknowledges that usage studies themselves 'are anything but unique', and that a list of usages is, by its very nature, selective:

Our dictionaries of usage are intended for people whose language is on public exhibition... . Fowler and Krapp for instance offer hints on pronunciation to speakers of English; Copperud on the other hand narrows his scope to journalists.

(p. xiii)

He goes on to say that his book is 'likewise' selective:

It has no intention of arming the reader with a catalog of cautions; instead it offers him a broad sampling of typical pronunciations and grammatical constructions in order to demonstrate how usage operates. The specific purpose is not to inform, but to sensitize; not to transmit a body of facts, but to instill an attitude. Each of us after all needs to decide for himself whether he can live tranquilly with this or that usage, or whether he should turn it in for another one.

(p. xiv)

Accordingly, in addition to the chapters on nouns, pronouns, verbs and connectives, there are well-written and informative sections dealing with 'Approaches to Usage', 'Phonology', 'Pronunciation' and 'Derivation'. In the former chapters, the reader will see 'where, when and how' words may be used, and by implication, may not be.

In the chapter on 'Phonology', sounds are discussed and presented in relation to the physical movements of tongue and lips. For instance:

	Labiodental	Interdental	Dental	Palatal	Glottal
Voiceless	f	θ	s	ʃ	h
Voiced	v	ð	z	ʒ	

(p. 42)

In contrast to the somewhat complex dissertation on 'Phonology', pronunciation (Chapter 4) is shown simply but adequately: as it needs to be, at a time when public speakers can be heard giving unusual sounds to words such as *benignity*, *diptych*, and *schism*.

Those who think that a book on language is bound to be dull and pedantic will find that the author has adopted an approach that is often witty and seldom 'dry'. For instance, in his section on 'Inverted Plurals' he mentions the often repeated story about James Bennet, editor of the *New York Herald*:

...(he) used to insist that *news* was plural. On a certain occasion he wired a correspondent: 'Are there any news?' To which the reply came back, 'Not a new'.

(p. 137)

In the chapter on verbs, Lamberts maintains that 'usage determines correctness'. He remarks that there have been, and still are 'people who try to do it the other way':

Ambrose Bierce, to mention one of them, insisted that it was a grave error to speak of a criminal being executed since it was the sentence that had to be executed and the criminal that had to be hanged.

(p. 243)

A Short Introduction to English Usage justifies its ‘blurb’: it is, indeed, an interesting ‘consideration of English Language usage as a social and linguistic phenomenon...’ The different levels of acceptability **within** the language are carefully indicated, although Dr Lamberts might well have considered discussing: new idioms (‘in the picture’); the technicalities of our new scientific exploits (‘blast-off’, ‘lunik’); recent uses or misuses (‘fabulous’, ‘contemporary’); new aspects of our social and political life (‘baby-sit’, ‘admass’); and slang words like ‘bint’ and ‘snafu’. He could also, perhaps, have expressed his awareness that we live in a world where ‘megadeath’ and ‘overkill’ are expressive coinages.

However, as stated, Dr Lamberts’s book *does* achieve what it sets out to do. It is an attractive survey of the origins, vagaries, rules and problems of English Usage. While the author has corrected errors and added fresh information, his sense of history and stress on word-connections remain particularly valuable. In short, it is good to be reminded that there is method in conventions, and more latitude than we sometimes care to enjoy.

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