

The Dictionary of Diseased English

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Able

Much favoured by writers on education. Nowadays it is impossible for a child to be stupid, unintelligent or idle on the one hand, or clever, intelligent or hardworking on the other. More able and less able are the preferred equivalents. 'In mixed ability groups, which is what we aim at, the least able and the most able are equally mixed'. (Hunter Davis: *The Creighton Report*, 1976) Cf Less able.

Above-the-line

A costing or budgeting item, often used in a very vague sense. Strictly speaking, an above-the-line cost is one that is to be charged to a particular budget, whereas anything below-the-line is ordinary expenditure, covered by the general financial provisions of the organisation. In the case of a television producer, for instance, heating and lighting his office and giving him a telephone service would be below-the-line, but a camera crew and fees paid to actors would be above-the-line. This distinction is by no means always observed by industrial and commercial concerns. 'His experience will include both above and below-the-line marketing activities' (*D Tel*, 27.11.75), for example, is a far from precise sentence, which is probably intended to convey no more than that the applicant for the post should have had wide experience of modern marketing methods. But 'below-the-line marketing' can also mean expenditure on giveaways, gimmicks and competitions, by contrast with advertising, which is reckoned to be 'above-the-line'. There is, however, confusion with the meaning given to the words in bridge, where there is a line drawn across the score-card. 'Above-the-line' points are scored for game, honours, overtricks or rubber, or for the failure of one's opponents to fulfil their contract, and 'below-the-line' points are for tricks bid and won. The linguistic muddle surrounding 'above-the-line' and 'below-the-line' is, in fact, so considerable that it seems prudent to avoid the terms wherever possible, however adventurous they may sound.

Abrasive

A very with-it word, with a spectrum of meaning that ranges from

Absolute

'sharp and creative' at the one end to 'irritating, negative and destructive' at the other. How, for instance, should one interpret, 'The underclass has its most abrasive contacts with the ruling élites less at the point of production than outside it' (Teodori, 1969)? 'Violent'? 'Exhausting'? 'Hostile'? 'Head-on'? 'Unpleasant'?

Absolute

Usually no more than a meaningless intensive. 'Built only two years ago on an absolute deep waterfrontage block' (*National Times*, 1.3.76). Water which was absolutely deep would presumably have no discoverable bottom, a terrifying prospect for mariners. Each room 'designed to give you absolute comfort' (Wentworth Hotel, Sydney, 1975 brochure) shows a similar degree of exaggeration. Absolute zero is a reality; absolute comfort is unlikely to be achieved in this world. A hotel which advertised nothing better than great or considerable comfort, however, would presumably be left standing by its competitors.

Accent

Both the noun and the verb have been in high fashion for some time among American advertisers and have, unfortunately but inevitably, now crossed the Atlantic. An 'accent' is an outstanding feature, a characteristic which hits the eye immediately. So, '... natural brick accent walls' (*Axiom*, Oct 1976), and 'We've even carpeted, draped and professionally accented five of these houses' (*Boston Sunday Globe*, 10.10.76). In the first case, the 'natural brick accent walls' are, on the evidence of a photograph, no more than brick walls, and, in the second, 'professionally accented' appears to mean that someone had been engaged to think about the interior decoration as a whole, instead of the matter being left to the local furniture store and do-it-yourself shop.

Acceptability

In correct usage, one can refuse to accept an argument, a knighthood or a telephone call for reasons one believes to be sound. A dirty knife is unacceptable to a fastidious person sitting down to a meal. The industrial would appears to view the word differently, however. 'The vital task will be to decide on the acceptability of information and its contribution to commercial growth' (*Fin Times*, 18.11.75). It is possible for information to be perfectly accurate, but distasteful, so that the recipient closes his ears and eyes to it. Does the *Financial Times*

mean this, or are we to understand that 'acceptability' means 'relevance' or 'significance'? If one of these two words is meant, why not use it?

Accessorised

Used as an accessory, possessing the qualities of an accessory, or provided with accessories? 'A good suit, fashionable and properly accessorised' (*Signature*, Jan/Feb 1976) is clumsy and leaves one in doubt as to the meaning. Is the suit sold complete with accessories? Is being 'properly accessorised' part of the suit's goodness?

Acclimate

A barbarism, which in some circles is reckoned to be more impressive and 'professional' than 'accustom', and more specialised and technical than 'acclimatise'. So: 'The first lesson was a practice lesson, largely to acclimate the trainee to the video-tape equipment' (*JER*, 63/3, Nov 1969).

Accommodating

A pompous piece of businessese for 'meeting', which is felt to be too ordinary to be dignified. 'The key task will be to lead the continued development of the manufacturing operations whilst effectively accommodating the current demands of a volatile market' (*D Tel*, 5.2.76). This is not a muddled, illiterate way of saying 'accommodating oneself to the current demands of a volatile market'. Industrial leaders meet challenges head on, never 'accustom themselves' to them, which would suggest compromise.

Accomplishments

Now often used as a synonym for 'achievement', apparently because modern industry demands something better, even if the result is confusion and nonsense. When one referred to a Victorian lady's accomplishments, one was thinking of her taste, artistic and musical prowess, charm and beautiful manners. Not so the modern business world. 'We are looking for a uniquely talented individual with a proven record of accomplishments' (*S Times*, 30.5.76). It is unlikely that the person required would be expected to produce evidence of his ability to play the piano, sing and do fine needlework, although, since he needed to be 'uniquely talented', one never knows.

Accountability

Accountability

In these numerate days, a more sought after and more highly remunerated quality than mere 'responsibility'. 'Members of our account management group are given early accountability for providing a comprehensive recruitment service to a number of clients with diverse activities' (*D Tel*, 1.7.76). A surgeon is accountable for the number of swabs he places inside one of his patients and a soldier for the weapons issued to him, but an accountant is hardly accountable for his advice, unless, perhaps, he should happen to leave it lying about, allowing it to be stolen.

Accrual

'Accrue', properly used, conveys the notion of something being added to something else. It is a synonym for 'accumulate', not 'grow' or 'increase'. A plant cannot accrue, nor can a small boy or a balloon. One therefore blinks a little at 'the framework is accrual in scope' (*Business Horizons*, Aug 1975). All that is meant is that the scope of the job will increase as time goes on, but this would be nothing like grand enough to attract the right kind of candidate.

Acculturated

A very nasty barnacle on the American language. No-one but a sociologist would have any difficulty in writing 'rooted', 'absorbed' or 'associated with', but since sociologists feel a need to prove that they are not as other men, we have: 'the measure of a Jewish student's desire to become more acculturated in the Jewish tradition and culture' (Pride and Holmes, 1972), with no sign of shame at the ugly repetition of 'acculturated' and 'culture'.

Achieve

One is usually safe with 'achieve' when it is used transitively. 'He achieved nothing', or 'she achieved what she'd always wanted, an apology from Henry' make good sense, but 'If you have leadership potential, with the desire to achieve' (*The Citizen*, 8.10.76) is quite another matter. Achieve what? 100,000 dollars a year? A seven-foot wife? A coronary? An invitation to dine with the President? Peace of mind?

Achievement

'... when taught in a manner consonant with their achievement

orientations' (JEP. 64/2, 1973). Any word with 'orientations' tagged on to it brings problems of interpretation. One is never sure if the person in question is turning round, thinking of something, or navigating by something, but psychologists and businessmen love their 'orientations', so we shall probably have to suffer it for some time yet. Here, we might perhaps translate 'when taught what is likely to help them in their career', or 'what (or in a way that) suits their ambitions' or, even less politely, 'in a way they can understand'.

Action

In the world of business, a capacity for action is the supreme virtue. People are not hired to sit around and think, although thought translated into action is tolerated, as evidenced by: 'The incumbent will be an action-oriented thinker' (*S Times*, 30.5.76). The increasingly common use of 'action' as a verb produces sentences which do not stand up well to close examination. Consider, '... for individual training and experience requirements to be identified and actioned' (*D Tel*, 1.7.76). A rendering of this into ordinary English might be: '... to make sure that employees get the right training and experience', but that is not nearly impressive enough for the purpose.

Active

Bacilli are active and so apparently are some hospitals, but not all. What is 'a 500-bed fully accredited active treatment hospital' (*Hospital Administration in Canada*, Aug 1976)? It cannot be 'a hospital in which treatment is actually carried out', because that, one has always supposed, is true of all hospitals. Or is there, perhaps, a category of hospital in which people simply lie in bed and wait for nature and the passage of time to put them right? Or do some forms of treatment, 'active treatments', have a higher prestige than others? What, the person who is not a hospital administrator has a right to ask, is 'active treatment'?

Activist

An activist, broadly speaking, is a person who, in the eyes of the authorities, engages in politically disreputable activities. There is no such thing as a good activist. All activists are bad. We therefore find: 'Teachers with an activist orientation risk administrative sanction' (*Educ & Soc Sci*, Vol 1, No 2, July 1969). For anyone who has difficulty in understanding this sentence, the key piece of information is that 'risk' is a verb. The meaning then becomes plain enough;

Actual

teachers who take an active part in left-wing politics, and especially in demonstrations, are likely to find themselves in trouble with their employers and may get fired. But how different the flavour of the translation is and how much more veiled the threat of the original.

Actual

A useful word that has taken a sad battering during the past twenty years or so. Nowadays its function is often no more than to indicate that the following word should be emphasised, although it can also serve as a source of confusion and bewilderment. 'The Museum's specimens of actual wooden furniture are mostly fragmentary' (*Con*, Vol 166, Sept/Dec 1967), means nothing more than 'specimens of wooden furniture'.

Actualise

An unnecessary and unhelpful word. What does it mean in, for example, 'The index would show only such contextual subordination as had been actualised' (Perreault, 1969)? The nearest one can get—and this is only an intelligent guess—is: 'The index would show only items mentioned by name in the text'.

Acumen

The word properly means 'sharpness of wit, keenness of perception', and is almost a synonym for 'intelligence'. It is not, however, thought fitting or decent for an advertisement to demand publicly that a senior industrial executive shall be intelligent, and one therefore finds: 'This position calls for a man with high acumen' (*S Times*, 30.11.75). Acumen, however, is measured by the thinness and sharpness of its cutting edge, not by its height. It needs no benefit of adjective, it is sufficient by itself. In the jargon of the industrial/commercial world, however, 'high-acumen' is showing worrying signs of becoming a compound noun.

Additionally

A space-filling reinforcement for 'and', with no extra meaning in itself. '... and additionally provide assistance to our customer ...' (*D Tel*, 2.1.76)

Adjacent

The prestigious equivalent of 'near,' 'close', or 'on'. '... a profitable company adjacent to North West coast' (*D Tel*, 6.2.76) leaves the

reader in doubt, possibly deliberately, as to whether the factory is near the coast or on the coast. How close is 'adjacent'?

Advisement

The in-word for 'advisory', designed to dazzle the layman with the scientific basis of the advice being given. 'An academic advisement system for boys may need to be different from one for girls' (*JER*, 63/1, Sept 1969), but whether the clients are boys or girls what is offered is simply advice on the educational courses to which they seem best suited.

Affectable

'Affectability', says the *British Medical Dictionary*, is 'the quality or state of being responsive to a stimulus'. One may, in this sense, be affectable by a sunset, a pretty woman or a restaurant menu. What is less intelligible or useful is to make 'affectable' refer to a thing or a process, instead of a person, as in 'the affectable changes in attitude and involvement by Museum visitors' (*Mus News*, Jan/Feb 1974). This presumably means the changes in attitude brought about by visiting a museum and looking at its exhibits.

Affordability

Anything on the market offers reliability, good looks and value for money in varying degrees. 'Affordability', however, is no kind of a quality at all. Whether or not one can afford to buy a Rolls Royce depends on the state of one's bank balance, not on any intrinsic merit of the Rolls Royce itself. To suggest that a commodity contains built-in affordability is a majestic swindle. 'A car that satisfies one's pragmatic sense by its surprising affordability' (*New Yorker*, 11.10.76).

Age-group

We have reached the stage, it appears, at which one's age-group is more important and more easily understandable than one's age. Employers are consequently fond of referring to 'the successful applicant who is expected to be in the age group 35 to 55' (*D Tel*, 28.1.76). The old way of putting this, 'between the ages of 35 and 55', is too personal, too emotive, too precise, whereas to belong to an age-group is merely to indicate a figure to be fed into the computer. To ask a woman her age is not polite, but to enquire her age-group is as neutral and inoffensive as enquiring about her height or blood group.

Age-peers

Contemporaries. Although one may not have realised it at the time, the people in one's form at school were one's age-peers, but 'Why don't you hit someone your own age?' somehow sounds different from 'Why don't you hit one of your age-peers?', which one assumes to be the usual form of speech in the home of a social scientist, who finds it natural to investigate 'the extent to which the old interact with age-peers' (*B J Soc*, Mar 1968).

Aggressive

Modern business is always trying to recruit 'aggressive' people, by which it seems to mean men with the urge to get ahead fast, knocking over and treading on anybody else who happens to be in the way. Usually the man himself is expected to be aggressive, but sometimes the adjective gets transferred to his aims and we have that very remarkable phenomenon, the aggressive goal. Examples of both usages are: 'We seek an ambitious, aggressive graduate as National Sales Manager' (*The Age*, 1976) '... ambitious technical contributors who have aggressive career goals' (*Boston Sunday Globe*, 10.10.76). For some reason, the word is applied only to men. No example has so far come to hand for a company looking for aggressive female staff. Some firms, indeed, make it clear that aggressive women are not acceptable as candidates. An anonymous 'professional money management organisation located in San Francisco, California', for instance, is on record as saying that the woman it requires as an administrative assistant/social secretary must be 'non-aggressive, supportative' (*Times*, 22.7.76)

Aid

A crossword synonym for 'help', rarely used by anyone but journalists, but very important to them, as proof that one is a true professional, at least on the *Mirror* and *Sun* level. The occasions when it is and is not used are interesting. 'It may be days before aid gets through' (*B.B.C. News*, 8.2.76), on the low-brow Radio 2, but two minutes later on the same day, the B.B.C.'s Radio 3 News, which is aimed at an educated audience, said 'It may take days to get help to them'. Recently, both as a noun and a verb, 'aid' has shown signs of spreading outwards from journalism into writing of a more serious and permanent kind, e.g. 'The survey's potential for aiding architects and planners' (Michelson, 1975). This can hardly be because 'aid' is

felt to be punchier and more arresting than 'help' (Christian Aid; Aid for Shipwrecked Mariners). A more likely explanation is that, at least in some contexts, 'aid' is coming to be thought of as the cold, scientific, impersonal word, by contrast with 'help', which is warmer. A drowning person does not, as yet, shout 'Aid!'. There may be some justification for using 'aid' rather than 'help' or 'support' when one country is providing money or resources for another, for example, 'British aid for victims of the Romanian earthquake'. 'Aid' would then be the equivalent of public or governmental help.

Alcohol

In these mealy-mouthed days one has to be very careful about saying that a person is drunk. It is more socially acceptable to say, if he was driving at the time, that the alcohol content of his blood was above the legal limit or, if he was on foot, that he had an alcohol problem. The results of this euphemistic approach can be misleading. Nothing could be more objective and clinical than 'He was asked to attend hospital for treatment of an alcohol problem' (*SMJ*, 15.4.76), but in this particular case the man concerned had been convicted of being drunk and disorderly and assaulting a policeman. It might almost be true to say that he had a policeman problem, as well as an alcohol problem.

Alignment

Agreement, commitment. The non-aligned countries are those which have refused to identify themselves with the quarrels and rivalries of the Soviet Union, China and the United States—the good, honest old word was 'neutral'. Politicians are expected to 'reveal their alignment', i.e. to make clear how they intend to vote, or whose interests they propose to support, and what used to be called 'consensus of opinion' or, even more straightforward and old-fashioned, 'general agreement', has now become 'alignment of intelligence'. 'There is a strong alignment of intelligence demanding a reappraisal of Australia's position' (*Queensland*, 1974).

Alternative

The political left has fostered the curious myth of two societies existing side by side within each of the 'capitalist' countries. One society is 'established' or 'official' the other has no connexion with the corrupt, evil world of government, taxation and careers—although the closest and most fruitful links with the system of unemployment

Ambassadorial

pay and welfare arrangements of all kinds—and is quaintly known as ‘alternative’. We therefore have references to ‘. . . the development of alternative and community newspapers’ (*New Statesman*, 20.8.76). The bourgeois and individualistic word ‘independent’, it should be noted, is never used by the Left, although ‘alternative newspapers’ are, in plain, non-socialist terms, ‘independent newspapers’. But, because they are capitalist, ‘independent schools’ cannot be ‘alternative schools’, a term which is reserved for a type of school which, although outside the State system, is run at a subsistence level for the children of difficult parents and for dissident teachers, and always has a left-wing atmosphere.

Ambassadorial

A word much loved by estate agents and meaning ‘large, pre-1914, and expensive’, as in: ‘The extensive accommodation is of ambassadorial standard’ (*S Times*, 23.11.75)

Ambience

Environment, surroundings, atmosphere. Correctly used, it implies no judgement as to the quality of the ‘ambience’. A steel-works and the premises of a Paris couturier both have ‘ambience’. In the English-speaking world, however, this potentially useful word gets out of control, as in: ‘The ambience of the painting is involved with people who are all going towards a similar thing’ (Russell and Gablik, 1969). More serious, however, is the apparently irresistible tendency for it to acquire snobbish overtones, so that it now has the connotation, more often than not, of ‘an atmosphere suggesting money, taste and good breeding’. The best people can visit at least one Toronto hotel with complete confidence, ‘knowing they can count on the ambience, the service’ (*Toronto Globe and Mail*, 7.10.76).

Amiable, Amiability

A favourite piece of nonsense among wine-writers, although in trying to decide what it means one person’s guess is as good as another’s. We are told, for example, that ‘Asti styles vary from the ultra-amiable to the austere’ (*Times*, 2.2.76). That ‘some shippers feel that in time they (i.e. certain wines, not the shippers) may develop, more amiability’ (*Times*, 31.7.76), and that a particular variety ‘gives the amiability and appeal when used in certain blends of grapes for many classic Italian wines’ (*Times*, 12.6.76). But, however many examples he accumulates, the lay observer is likely to be no closer to

understanding what this mysterious quality of amiability is. If he is told instead that the wine in question is 'friendly' or 'likeable', he is no further forward, but in cases like this it is probably wiser to admit defeat.

Ample

Another word much bandied about in wine literature, e.g. '... a wine that is ample, but never too much so' (*Times*, 6.3.76), and '... the 1971 Montagny is a bright, definite gold colour, with a scented warm bouquet and slightly ample taste' (*Times*, 21.2.76). This appears to mean 'containing a satisfying amount of body' or, less reverently, 'not too watery', but a connoisseur would undoubtedly regard this as a far from satisfactory translation, although unable to do any better himself. 'Ample', he is all too likely to say, means 'ample', no more and no less.

Analogous

Comparable, similar. 'In-depth experience in an analogous environment' (*D Tel*, 22.1.76) means 'good experience in a similar job'. 'Analogous', however, suggests, to those who know no better, computers and modern management techniques and is often preferred for that reason.

Analysis

A scientific-sounding and often flattering word for 'examination'. One can do no more with facts than collect and examine them carefully, whatever the 'analysis' may pretend. A chemist analyses, in the strict sense of the word, and all other uses are figurative at best and a swindle at worst. What, for instance, is one to make of 'Competitor activity analysis' (*D Tel*, 28.1.76)? Does it, can it mean anything more profound or valuable than 'an examination of what one's competitors are doing'?

Anecdotal

Backed up by example. A piece of social-science pomposity. If we 'provide anecdotal support for the idea that a parent's imitation of a child is pleasurable for the child' (Hoppe, 1970), we mean, believe it or not, that someone has noticed that a small child who has just said 'wabbit' is happy when his mother or father says 'wabbit' back to him.

Antiqued

Antiqued

Made to look old, given a nice 18th century colour and patina, an activity which might be thought to deserve criminal proceedings, rather than publicity and pride. No British example has yet been observed, but the word is common enough in America and can hardly fail to cross the Atlantic in time. Meanwhile, here is a typical example, relating to leather upholstery which is 'hand-padded, antiqued and polished in a wide assortment of pieces' (*House Beautiful*, Oct 1976).

Antisocial

An increasingly widely used euphemism, concealing the fact that an individual or a group are behaving like savages. Going on the rampage after a football match is 'antisocial', and so is setting fire to one's school or ripping up the seat covers in a train. Considerable demands are made on the reader's imagination by such sentences as: 'Some Pacific Island immigrants respond to alcohol in a more apparent antisocial manner than citizens from other ethnic backgrounds' (*BB/NZ*, 1975). One must not, for some reason, do more than hint that the nature of the Pacific Islanders' antisocial behaviour is that they get disgustingly, violently and destructively drunk. To be drunk is, so to speak, one's own responsibility; to be guilty of antisocial behaviour conveys the idea that it is at least partly society's fault, which is, of course, in accordance with the spirit of the age.

Antithetical

Opposed to, against. Why not use these simple terms, instead of indulging in such pedantries as 'This position is not really antithetical to Piaget's basic ideas' (*JEP*, 64/1, 1973)? 'Quite antithetical to the proper functioning of the school' (*Educ & Soc Sci*, Vol 1, No 4, Feb 1970) is a worthy Australian contribution.

Apparel

A shopkeeper's up-grading of 'clothing'. A firm can consequently be described, to someone in the trade, as 'producing curtaining, furnishing fabrics and apparel' (*D Tel*, 22.1.76). It is not clear why this faintly ridiculous word is found necessary. 'Apparel' is no more comprehensive than 'clothes' or 'clothing', and even the most exalted people are not ashamed to admit that they buy and wear clothes.

Appreciate

One of the most notorious cover-up words of modern times. In correct usage, to appreciate something is to understand and enjoy it. Politicians and diplomats think differently, however. To them, 'appreciate' means 'unfortunately have to listen to', and they use the word in this sense, the normal connotation of 'enjoy' being used as a fraudulent veneer. Cyrus Vance does not really 'appreciate' something that General Amin has just said. He is baffled and infuriated and despises the man who is responsible for it. When a politician uses 'appreciate', he should certainly never be believed and not infrequently goes on to hang himself with his own rope. So, for example, 'Obviously we all appreciate the frankest possible speaking at the United Nations and elsewhere, but it is not necessarily my view that that kind of speaking is good for either the Western Alliances or the United Nations' (*H. of C. Oral Answers*, 5.2.76).

Appropriate

A perfect word for the administrator. It should normally be translated, 'If you're lucky', 'If we think it's politic or safe', or 'If it can't be avoided'. If something is deemed 'inappropriate', one should understand the official to mean that, for reasons he does not feel inclined to explain, he has no intention whatever of following that particular course of action. There is no shortage of examples. Here are two. 'Housing may be available in appropriate circumstances' (*Times*, 28.11.75); 'It was recognised that in view of Papua New Guinea's advance towards independence it might no longer be appropriate that a major socio-economic research organisation should be a unit of a university of a foreign country' (*ANU*, 1973).

Aristocratic

Expensive, of high quality. A particularly potent word in the United States, which has always, except in 1776, had a soft spot in its heart for British aristocrats. So, 'aristocratic linens, a versatile contemporary design from the hunt country to your home' (*Washington Star*, 17.10.76). Knowing too much about their own variety, the British seem to find French aristocrats more romantic: '... the deliciously aristocratic Giscours'—a wine (*Times*, 17.7.76). And for American males, who apparently cherish a deep longing to smell like European dukes, there is, to oblige them, 'an aristocratic new fragrance for men' (*New Yorker*, 13.9.76).

Armamentarium

Armamentarium

Body, group. A business school word, easier to write than to say. '... to equip the managers with a definitive armamentarium of skills' (Rapoport, 1970).

Articulate

The with-it word for express, expressive, expressed. '... simply a way of articulating her dissatisfaction' (Perreault, 1969); 'Articulate apparel for men' (*Panorama*, Boston, Oct 1976); 'Its design is articulate through darker streaking within a densely grained area' (*Con*, Vol 161, Jan/Apr 1966). This strange and regrettable usage is so far confined to America. The English way of abusing a good word is seen in the demand that a prospective employee shall be 'highly articulate, with the ability to communicate well' (*D Tel*, 27.11.75). Things have reached a pretty pass when a firm finds it necessary to insist that its executives shall be able to talk. 'Jeremy Barlow gave a brisk and articulate account of the E minor flute sonata' (*Classical Music*, 20.10.76). This probably means 'expressive', but 'with the notes well-defined', or 'easy to hear and follow' are also possibilities. On the other hand, it may signify no more than that the critic liked it, but was frightened of letting his profession down by using an old-fashioned word like 'pleasant'.

Artifact

Properly, 'a product of human labour' but, as used by the business world, it is not a word to spend time over. It means 'consequence' or 'product', when it means anything. 'The apparent inconsistencies may be an artifact of our trade-off approach' (Michelson, 1975).

Aspect

Image. Usually found in association with 'company', as in: 'This is a major appointment, finalising a senior management team which is responsible for the development of the company aspect' (*The Age*, 28.2.76). We translate the last part of the quotation as 'which is responsible for improving the company's public image'.

Assertive

Makes its presence felt; not shy and retiring; with a forceful personality. This can be used either of people—'The successful candidate must be assertive and highly motivated' (*Times*,

28.11.75)—or of wine—‘The Côte Chalounais reds can accompany the sharper matured cheeses of the British Isles, on account of their assertive and definite character’ (*Times*, 21.2.76). An age not bothered by sex discrimination acts would probably say ‘masculine’. Among wine-writers, however, ‘assertive character’ has almost become a compound noun, as ‘luxury flat’ did years ago. ‘Chiltdown is very well made. With the assertive character of the Reichensteinen grape, it makes an agreeable mouthful’ (*Times*, 29.5.76). The noun ‘assertiveness’ is also used, with equal vagueness. ‘Torres de Casta Rosado has far more assertiveness than many rosés’ (*Times*, 20.3.76). The rule with these prose-poem wine adjectives has to be, never use them, unless one can complete the sentence, ‘Waiter, is this wine . . . ?’, without mirth or embarrassment. Few people, even wine writers, could imagine themselves asking, ‘Waiter, is this wine assertive?’

Astringent

Properly, ‘having power to draw together or contract the soft organic tissues’, like surgical spirit on the skin, or a slice of lemon or a sloe in the mouth. It is difficult to think of music which has quite the same effect, although music critics appear to find no problem and write, for example, of ‘the astringent lyricism that is unique to early Prokofiev’ (*Times*, 4.3.76). A singing lemon is indeed worthy of note, and so is a wine which touches the palate in the way a lemon does. Yet there is wine, we learn, ‘with excellent bouquet and flavour and a clean, delicate astringency’ (*National Times*, 1.3.76). What does it all mean?

Attack

Management English for look at, deal with, improve, review. These verbs are too gentle, too static for the modern manager, who is always, sword in hand, leading his troops into battle. Even to attack is not enough. Something even more vigorous and determined is required in the never-ending search for efficiency and profit, and so now we have what must be very close to the ultimate, the ‘aggressive attack’. ‘The manager will be responsible for an aggressive attack on production methods’ (*D Tel*, 1.7.76)

Attenuate

Weaken, but coldly and scientifically, without allowing the emotions to be involved. ‘These studies were introduced mainly to dem-