CURRENT ENGLISH USAGE

A Concise Dictionary

BY

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PREFACE

THE aim of this book is a practical one: to provide an easy work of reference for those who wish to write good English. To some extent, therefore, it is necessarily prescriptive. It deals with points of syntax, punctuation, style, idiom, spelling and modern usage generally. With grammar as such it is not concerned, though specific grammatical points or constructions which may present difficulty have, of course, been included; but it has been assumed that anyone who uses the book will have a knowledge of the basic grammatical terms. Where differences of opinion exist, or where usage is changing, I have tried to avoid being too dogmatic, though I have usually counselled conservatism. In general I have sought not to encroach on the province of the ordinary dictionary, but I have felt it justifiable to draw attention to words which are often mis-spelt, misused or mispronounced. A number of examples of incorrect English are taken from newspapers, magazines and other periodicals, as well as from published reports of business houses and official bodies. Occasionally the name of the publication concerned has been given, but more often I have indicated merely the kind of publication, as 'a daily newspaper', 'a Free Church weekly', 'a women's magazine', 'a church magazine', and so on. This anonymity has been dictated by three considerations: first, because even Homer may nod; secondly, because the author of a book such as this must necessarily collect his examples mainly from the limited number of periodicals which he reads fairly regularly, and it would be unfair to give the impression that these journals were culpable beyond the rest, or that the examples quoted were typical of the general standard of English to be found in their pages; and thirdly because many come from signed articles or from the correspondence columns. Anyone using the book, however, may rest assured that all such examples are genuine.

Certain words and constructions have been described as Americanisms. This does not necessarily mean that they are bad

English. Many Americanisms (though not all) are good English — in America. But where British and American usage differ, British writers and speakers should follow the British idiom, not the American. The foreign student is at liberty to decide for himself which he will adopt, or to let his teacher decide for him.

A note should perhaps be added on pronunciation. The only really satisfactory way to indicate the pronunciation of a word is by one of the recognised systems of phonetic symbols. But as most of those who will use this book are not likely to have a knowledge of phonetics, to use such symbols would merely mystify rather than help them. Other methods have therefore had to be used, though it is recognised that they are not so accurate as phonetic symbols would be.

Finally I wish to express my indebtedness to Mr Thomas Mark, who read the whole of the book when it was at the manuscript stage, and made many valuable suggestions. Without his advice it would have contained many more imperfections than it does.

FREDERICK T. WOOD

Sheffield
September 1961

ABBREVIATIONS USED

C.O.D. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English.*

M.E.U. H. W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage.*

O.E.D. *The Oxford English Dictionary.*

R.C.R. Horace Hart, *Rules for Compositors and Readers at the University Press, Oxford.*

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A, AN (Indefinite Article). (i) The general rule is, use *a* before consonants and *an* before vowels, diphthongs or the unsounded *h*. Into this last class fall *heir, honest, honorary, honorarium, honour, hour* and their derivatives. *An hotel*, though not incorrect, is now old-fashioned; we usually sound the *h* and write *a hotel*. When used in an English context, French words beginning with *h* take *an*, since in French an initial *h* is unsounded: e.g. *an habitué, an hors-d'œuvre*.

(ii) The terms 'vowel' and 'consonant' are phonetic terms; that is, they refer to sounds, not to letters. Words which have the initial letters *u* or *eu* pronounced like an initial *y* do not, therefore, begin with a vowel but with a consonant, and take *a*: *a university, a united effort, a Unitarian, a European country*.

(ii) A few words in which an initial *h* is normally sounded may nevertheless take *an* when, owing to their position in the sentence, the distribution of stress makes it difficult to give the aspirate its full value: *an habitual action, an heretical opinion* and (occasionally) *an historical survey*.

(iv) Which we use before initials depends on whether, in reading aloud, we pronounce the names of the individual letters, or the words for which they stand: thus *an L.C.C. school, an M.A.*, because we say *ell-see-see* and *emm-aye*; but *a N.C.B. circular*, because we read it as *National Coal Board*.

Note: Always *an H.M.I.* (we could not possibly say 'a Her Majesty's Inspector') and *a MS.* (pronounce *manuscript*, not *emm-ess*).

(v) Beware of the intrusive article, exemplified in such expression as *no bigger a salary, no better a scholar*. The *a* should be omitted. It is idiomatic English with the positive degree (*as big a salary, as good a scholar*), but not with the comparative.

(vi) On the question of *kind* (*sort*) *of a thing* as against *kind* (*sort*) *of thing*, see under KIND and SORT.

(vii) Note the omission of the article in sentences of the type 'He is more fool than knave', where the noun is used in a descriptive capacity and has thus something of the force of an adjective (*foolish, knavish*), though it is stronger than the actual adjective would be.

ABBREVIATIONS

I. **The full stop.** Fowler (*M.E.U.*) recommended that no stop should be used if the last letter of an abbreviated word was written, and this recommendation may be followed if one so desires; but it has not been universally accepted. Even the Oxford University Press, which publishes Fowler's work, does not recognise it. Moreover, it gives rise to a number of difficulties; for instance, most plural abbreviations have the final *s*; are we, then, to use the stop for *log.* (*logarithm*), *prefab.* and *mac.*, but not for their plurals *logs*, *prefabs* and *macs*?

All things considered, we advise the use of the stop for abbreviated words whether the last letter is written or not, subject to the following exceptions:

(i) No stop for *Mr* and *Mrs*, as these have come to be accepted as the full spelling.

(ii) No stop for words like *pub*, *pram*, *cab*, *taxi*, *zoo*, which, though actually abbreviations, have come to be accepted as colloquial words in their own right. (*Exam.*, *maths.* and *prom.* have not quite attained this status yet, so the stop should be used.)

(iii) No stop for familiar names like *Fred*, *Will*, *Tom*, *Doll*; but *Geo.*, *Chas.*, *Wm.*, *Thos.*, *Eliz.*, etc., where the full name is pronounced though the shortened form is written, must have the stop.

(iv) Though the names of most of the English and Welsh counties, when written in abbreviated form, take the stop, none should be used with *Hants*, *Northants*, *Salop* and *Devon*. (Though one may, of course, be needed if they come at the end of an address.)

(v) No stop after the ordinal numbers when written as 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, etc.

(vi) No stop in those rare cases where a genitive of an abbreviated word has to be written. Thus *Messrs. T. J. Jones & Co.* will have the stop after *Co.*, but it will be omitted in *Jones & Co's sausages*. The apostrophe serves to denote both the genitive and the omission.

N.B.—A fairly detailed list of abbreviations which the writer of ordinary prose will have less occasion to use, with their recommended pointing, is given in *R.C.R.* Many of them refer to scientific, technical and mathematical treatises.

II. **Initials.** Generally a full stop should be placed after each letter that stands for a full word, as *P.T.O.*, *R.S.V.P.* With combinations like MS. (manuscript), TV. (television) a stop

is required after the last letter only, since the first does not represent a separate word. For points of the compass, NW., SW., SE. (only one stop), but for London postal districts, N.W., S.W., S.E. (two stops).

A practice has recently grown up of omitting the stops in the case of well-known organisations which are normally known (in spoken English at least) by the initials rather than by the full name (e.g. the BBC, the WEA, the GPO, BOAC, the NUT, the TUC). This is allowable, but it is better to insert the stops, especially in matter of a formal or official character. Where it has become the common practice to pronounce the initials as a word, no stops should be used: e.g. UNESCO, NALGO, NATO, UNICEF.

For the plural of initials the addition of a small *s* is advised (M.P.s, J.P.s, H.M.I.s), leaving the apostrophe for the genitive ('an M.P.'s duties, J.P.s' qualifications'). Note, however, that the plurals of *p.* (page) and *l.* (line) are *pp.* and *ll.* respectively.

III. **Abbreviation of Latin Words.** The non-Latinist, or anyone else who is not quite sure, had better make certain which of the Latin words or phrases that are commonly used in English are abbreviations and which are not. In the case of phrases, sometimes neither word is abbreviated (*pro rata, sine die*), sometimes only one (*ad lib., infra dig.*), sometimes both (*nem. con., verb. sap.*). Most English dictionaries have an appendix giving such expressions, correctly pointed.

IV. **The Apostrophe.** Use the apostrophe, not the full stop, to indicate the omission of letters from the end or the beginning of a word to indicate slovenly or affected pronunciation (*at 'ome, huntin', shootin' and fishin'*), as well as for contractions by the omission of letters internally (*can't, isn't*). The following points, however, should be noted.

(i) See that the apostrophe is correctly placed. (It is surprising how many examination candidates write *is'nt* and *could'nt.*)

(ii) If there are two omissions in a word, only the second is normally indicated (*shan't, can't*).

(iii) If both the beginning and the end of a word are omitted, only the first omission is indicated. Thus *'flu*, not *'flu.*, as the abbreviation of *influenza.* (Though see point iv, below.)

(iv) Use no apostrophe for *bus.* It may also be omitted from *phone* (especially when used as a verb) and *flu*, but must be inserted in *'plane* (for aeroplane).

V. **The Use of Abbreviations.** (i) In a colloquial or informal style the contractions *didn't, haven't, shouldn't,* etc. are allowable, but in more formal writing the full forms should be used.

(ii) Even in an address at the head of a letter or on an envelope it is better not to use the abbreviated forms *Cromwell Rd., Church St., Gordon Sq.,* etc., and the words should certainly be spelt in full when they occur in a sentence. Do not write 'Theophilus Lindsey established a church in Essex St., just off the Strand'.

(iii) Do not use the abbreviations *Dr.* and *Prof.* unless they stand before a personal name. Even then it is better to write *Professor Thompson* than *Prof. Thompson,* though *Dr. Jackson* is to be preferred to *Doctor Jackson.*

VI. **Abbreviations to Avoid.** (i) The following are permissible in conversational English but should not be used in writing except of the most informal kind (e.g. in letters between friends, where a conversational style is adopted): *chrysanth.* (chrysanthemum), *'flu, fridge, lab., lino., maths., meth.* (methylated spirit), *prep. school, turps., vet.* (veterinary surgeon), *on spec.* (speculation).

(ii) The following 'dainty' words may be suitable for women's magazines or for the women's page of a popular newspaper, but they should not appear in serious writing: *hanky* (handkerchief), *pinny* (pinafore), *nightie* (night-dress), *tummy* (stomach). (See also CHILDISH WORDS.)

(iii) Do not write *boro', tho', altho', thro'.* There are no places named *Scarboro', Gainsboro', Wellingboro'* or *Hillsboro'.*

(iv) The following abbreviations are vulgarisms, and should not be used in either speech or writing: *advert.* (advertisement), *on appro.* (on approval), *gent.* (gentleman), *Jap.* (Japanese), *an invite* (an invitation), *a recommend* (a recommendation). Unlike *'plane* for *aeroplane,* the abbreviated form *'copter* for *helicopter* is not yet recognised.

ABIDE BY. When used with its usual sense of 'stay', the verb *abide* has the past tense and the past participle *abode,* but *abide by* (a decision, a promise, etc.) has *abided.* 'He abided faithfully by his promise.' 'He has always abided by his word.'

ABORIGINES. The singular is *aboriginal* not *aborigine* or (worse still) *aboriginee.*

ABSTRACT LANGUAGE. It was over forty years ago that Fowler gave the advice, in *The King's English,* 'prefer the concrete term to the abstract', and more recently this has been reinforced by Sir Ernest Gowers (*Plain Words*). It would be unfortunate, however, if this were to lead to a rather conscious avoidance of all abstract terms. They cannot be dispensed with altogether; one must use discretion. 'The Chairman expressed his appreciation of the loyalty of the staff and the workpeople' is much to be preferred to '. . . said he appreciated the way that the staff and the workpeople had been loyal', and 'There is no denying the seriousness of the situation' is no more objectionable than 'There is no denying that the situation is serious'. If the abstract style is concise, clear and euphonious there seems no objection to it; a change to the concrete may be a change for the worse. But of recent years there has grown up, especially in official documents and in journalism, a woolly kind of style which uses circumlocutory, periphrastic abstractions which are clumsy in construction and which say rather ineffectively what could have been said much more clearly in far fewer words. This should certainly be avoided by anyone who wishes to write good English. Below are a few examples. A simplified version is given after each one.

What is the position with regard to the availability of a house? (Is a house available?)

There is no likelihood of an early finalisation of the plans. (It is unlikely that the plans will be put into a final form for some time.)

The implementation of the scheme would involve the expenditure of a large sum of money. (It would be very costly to carry out the scheme.)

The situation with regard to the export of cars has shown a slight improvement. (Rather more cars have been exported.)

In the eventuality of this being the case. (If this is so.)

In view of the fact that. (As.)

If the weather situation permits. (If the weather permits, or 'weather permitting'.)

Under active consideration. (Being considered.)

This last example is particularly stupid, though in official circles it now seems to have become an accepted cliché. No one has yet been honest enough to say that a matter is under passive consideration.

ACADEMIC: ACADEMICAL. Generally speaking, *academic* has to do with learning or scholarship, *academical* with an academy or place of learning: thus 'an academical institution', but 'academic distinction', 'an academic education', 'a point of purely academic interest'. We speak of *academic dress*, but *full academicals*.

ACCENT. 'In this year's dress shows the accent is on green.' Does this mean any more than 'Green is the most popular colour'? Avoid this use of the word; it has become something of a vogue word of recent years.

ACCENTUATE. 'The steel shortage has been accentuated, and will particularly hit the motor industry.'—*The Financial Times*.

'In America cotton, hessian and paper share the important bagging market. With the first two in short supply, the trend towards paper sacks is accentuated.'—*Ibid.*

These two sentences exemplify a misuse which has become very common in the last few years. 'To accentuate' means to throw into relief or into prominence (e.g. 'The microphone accentuates certain defects of intonation'). It does not mean to increase, to aggravate, to make more acute, and the several related meanings which modern usage (or abusage) gives it.

ACCEPTANCE: ACCEPTATION. We beg a person's acceptance of a gift, a government signifies its acceptance of the findings of a Royal Commission, and the newspapers announce Mr Blank's acceptance of an honour or a position. *Acceptation* is an academic word meaning an agreed interpretation to be placed upon a word, or upon a clause in a document.

ACCORD. The idiom is '*of* one's own accord', not '*on* one's own accord'.

ACCORD: ACCORDANCE. 'In accord with your instructtions' or 'In accordance with your instructions'? It depends on the meaning to be expressed. When the sense is 'following out' or 'obeying' *accordance* is required ('In accordance with your instructions we have suspended work on the heating apparatus'); when it is that of 'agreement', then *accord* is used ('What he has done is not in accord with your instructions').

ACCORDING. This cannot be used as an adverb. 'We will ascertain their wishes, and act accordingly'—not *according*.

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ACCUSTOMED. When *accustomed* is intended to express the notion that something is customary, or is generally done, it is followed by the infinitive ('She was accustomed to sleep for an hour after her lunch'); when it is followed by *to* plus the gerund, it means 'is/was used to, or inured to' ('I am not accustomed to walking long distances'). As a verb, *accustom* is followed by a gerund, not an infinitive: 'You must accustom yourself to getting up early', not 'You must accustom yourself to get up early'.

ACOUSTICS. 'The acoustics of the hall *are* not all that could be desired', but 'Acoustics *is* an important subject in the training of an architect'.

ACQUAINT. We acquaint a person *with* (not *of*) a fact. The expression, however, is best avoided, since it is usually no more than a piece of pretentious English for the simpler *inform, tell* or *let know.*

ACQUIESCE. Followed by the preposition *in.*

ADD UP TO. 'What it adds up to is . . .' A piece of modern jargon for *amounts to, comes to* or sometimes simply *means.* Allowable perhaps colloquially, but should not be used in serious writing.

ADDICTED. The sentence 'He is addicted to drink' has perhaps given rise to the unidiomatic use of an infinitive after *addicted.* 'To drink' is here not an infinitive, but a noun preceded by a preposition. *Addicted* is always followed by *to* plus a noun or a gerund: *addicted to drugs, addicted to gambling,* but not *addicted to gamble.*

ADEQUATE. (i) *Adequate* is always followed by the preposition *to,* not *for*: 'adequate to one's needs', etc.

(ii) Since *adequate* means 'just suffiicent', *adequate enough* is a solecism, and *more adequate* an absurdity. Logically, there is no objection to *more than adequate* ('The time you were allowed for the work should have been more than adequate'), but *more than enough* or *more than sufficient* is to be preferred.

ADHERENCE: ADHESION. *Adhesion* means 'sticking to' in the literal sense (the adhesion of a stamp to an envelope, or of flies to a fly-paper); *adherence* is 'sticking to' in the figurative sense, as adherence to a plan, to one's principles, etc.

The verbal counterpart of both is *adhere*: wallpaper adheres to the wall, and a person adheres to his plans.

Adherence gives the adjective *adherent*, and *adhesion* the adjective *adhesive* (as 'adhesive tape', 'an adhesive plaster'). Both adjectives may be converted to nouns: *adhesives* (paste, gum, etc.), a person's *adherents*.

ADJECTIVE OR ADVERB? (See under ADVERB.)

ADMISSION: ADMITTANCE. When *admit* means 'confess', the noun is always *admission* (the admission of one's guilt, the admission that one was to blame); when it means 'allow in' *admission* is also the more usual word ('Admission one shilling', 'Admission by ticket only'). *Admittance* is more formal or official, and means 'leave or right to enter': e.g. 'No admittance except on business'.

ADMIT: ADMIT OF. (i) *Admit* may take a personal subject, and indeed usually does, but *admit of* (= allow of, leave room for) cannot: e.g. 'I admit breaking the window', 'She admitted having read the letter', but 'The position admits of no delay', 'The regulations admit of no variation'. 'I cannot admit of your doing that' is incorrect (amend to 'I cannot allow you to do that'), but 'The regulations do not admit of your doing that' is perfectly good English.

(ii) 'In spite of all the evidence against him, he refused to admit to the allegation.' *Admit to* something that is charged against one (perhaps on the analogy of 'confess to a crime') is occasionally to be found in modern writing, but it is not yet established as idiomatic, and is best avoided.

ADOPTED PARENTS (FATHER, MOTHER). Sometimes heard in speech, and occasionally seen in print (e.g. 'The Reverend Joseph Evans, the adopted father of Joseph Hunter'), but, strictly speaking, incorrect. It is the child who is adopted by the 'parents', not vice versa. Substitute *adoptive parents* (*father*, *mother*). *Adopted child*, *son*, *daughter* is, of course, correct.

ADULT. The modern tendency is to put the stress on the second syllable, though it is permissible to stress the first.

ADVANCE (Noun): ADVANCEMENT. *Advance* = 'progress' or 'going forward' (or sometimes 'coming on'): the advance of an army, the advance of science, the advance of medical know-

ledge, the advance of old age. *Advancement* = 'promotion' or 'helping forward': to seek advancement, to work for the advancement of a cause, the Royal Society for the Advancement of Science. We say that with the advance (not the *advancement*) of winter the days grow shorter.

ADVERB OR ADJECTIVE? (i) There are some pedantic people who, under the impression that they are being 'correct', insist on changing 'new-mown hay' to 'newly mown hay', and 'fresh-ground coffee' to 'freshly ground coffee'; but the change is not necessary. These adjective-participle combinations (other examples are *new-laid eggs*, *new-won freedom*, *a new-born baby*) are quite idiomatic, and as a matter of fact express a slightly different idea from the participle preceded by the adverb. Fresh-ground coffee is coffee which is fresh because it has just been ground, whereas *freshly* ground coffee is coffee which has been ground afresh (as though it might have been ground before). But 'a newly painted house' is correct, for here the sense is 'painted recently'. 'New-won freedom' is freedom which is new because it has only just been won; 'newly won freedom' is freedom which has been enjoyed before, lost temporarily, and then won anew. There is an obvious difference between an egg which is hard-boiled and one which is hardly boiled.

Note that the adjective-participle combination must have the hyphen. There is normally no hyphen when the adverb is used.

(ii) 'Don't speak so loud' (or *loudly*?). *Loudly* is to be preferred, but *loud* is often used, and can be defended on the ground that it is descriptive of the sound rather than of the manner of speaking. Similarly we might justify 'Speak a little slower', 'No-one can walk quicker than that', 'The bus will get you there as quick as the train'. (See also under QUICKER, HARD, HIGH, TIGHT.)

ADVERTISEMENT. In British English the stress is on the second syllable (*advértisement*). The Americans, however, say *advertísement*, with the stress on the third syllable. A pronunciation with stress on the first syllable (the same as in *advertise*) is common in certain parts of northern England, but it is not accepted as correct by speakers of Standard English.

AFFECT: EFFECT. The verb corresponding to the noun *effect* is *affect* (to produce an effect upon): 'The climate affected his health', 'The increased tariffs recently announced by the Australian government are bound to affect our exports to that

country'. *Affect* also means 'to assume, as a form of affectation', as in the phrase 'to affect a superior air'.

Effect, when used as a verb, means 'to bring about' or 'to achieve', e.g. to effect an escape, to effect a change.

The plural noun *effects* may mean 'results' ('The full effects of the measures have yet to be felt') or it may mean 'personal property or belongings', as in the expression 'one's household effects'.

AFFINITY. There is an affinity *between* two things, or one has an affinity *with* (not *to*) the other. Fowler (*M.E.U.*) condemns 'an affinity *for*', but it is recognised in scientific language. One substance is said to have an affinity *for* another when it has a tendency to unite with it. Outside this rather specialised use, however, 'an affinity for' is incorrect.

AFORESAID. Except in the language of legal documents, an archaic word, which has a slightly absurd or humorous effect (e.g. 'the aforesaid Mr Smith'). Do not use it in ordinary English.

AGENDA. Though strictly a Latin plural (meaning 'things to be done'), in English this word is treated as a singular. Say 'The agenda *has* not yet been drawn up'. Plural: *agenda* or *agendas*, preferably the former.

AGGRAVATE. Commonly misused in the sense of 'to annoy, to irritate': 'Don't aggravate your aunt in that way', 'It is very aggravating to be constantly interrupted when you are engaged on an important piece of work'. The mistake is a very old one. Jerry Cruncher, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, it may be recalled, referred to his wife as 'an aggrawater'. The only legitimate meaning is 'to make worse something that is already bad'. 'The measures designed to remedy the situation only aggravated it.'

AGO. 'It is ten years ago since his father died.' This sentence illustrates a very common mistake. *Ago* normally takes the past tense; it refers to a point of time in the past, and reckons backwards from the present. It cannot, therefore, be combined with *since*, which reckons *from* a point of time in the past *up to* the present (e.g. 'I have not seen him since last Christmas'). The alternative constructions are: (i) It was ten years ago that his father died, (ii) It is ten years since his father died, (iii) His father died ten years ago.

'Is it only ten years? It seems longer ago than that.' Here the present tense *seems* is justified, since the sentence is an ellipsis of 'It seems *that it was* longer ago'.

AGREE. (i) To agree *with* a suggestion or a course of action is to regard it with approval; to agree *to* it is to give consent to it. Thus we may agree *to* something without agreeing *with* it: e.g. 'He was forced to agree to the proposals, though he did not like them'.

(ii) 'The Inspector of Taxes has now agreed your claim for expenses.' This transitive use of *agree* has now become firmly established in accountancy, and it ill becomes a layman to criticise it there. The accountants are entitled to use the idiom of their profession. Unfortunately, however, it is beginning to creep into the newspapers and into official announcements, where it is not recognised: e.g. 'The committee have agreed wage increases for nurses and hospital staffs'. If they have accepted increases that were already proposed, then they have agreed *to* them; if they have discussed them with representatives of the nurses and the hospital staffs, and have finally reached agreement, then they have agreed *on* them. In the active voice at least the transitive use should be kept within the strict bounds of accountancy; outside these bounds it sounds unnatural and is unidiomatic, though the passive 'wage increases have been agreed' or 'the terms have now been agreed' is less objectionable — perhaps because the preposition would come at the end, and since it is an insignificant word its absence is not noticeable.

AGREEMENT OF VERB AND SUBJECT. The rule is that a verb must agree with its subject in number and person. The following points should be noticed:

(i) When a subject consists of two singular words co-ordinated by *and* it normally becomes a plural subject and must take a plural verb: 'Your aunt and uncle *have* arrived'. But combinations like *bread and butter, fish and chips, whisky and soda* are singular.

(ii) Alternative subjects to the same verb each apply to it separately; if each of the alternatives is singular, therefore, the verb is singular ('Either John or James *is* the culprit') but if the alternatives are each plural the verb is plural ('Neither the boys nor the girls *have* done well in the examination').

(iii) When there are alternative subjects which each demand a different verb form, the form used is that which is appropriate to the subject which comes immediately before it: 'Either you or I *am* to go', 'Neither Sheila nor her parents *were* there'.

(iv) Care is necessary when a singular subject is separated from its verb by a plural enlargement (e.g. *a bunch of grapes*), or when the verb is followed by a plural complement. The verb must still be singular, though there is a tendency for it to get attracted into the plural. The following example comes from the *Birmingham Post*: 'The price of easier-flowing and safer traffic are the sights of the old Bull Ring—the hawkers, the orators, the flower-bedecked stalls and the fascinating crowds'.

(See also under SINGULAR OR PLURAL? and THERE (*Formal Subject*).)

AGRICULTUR(AL)IST. *Agriculturist* is to be preferred. Similarly *horticulturist*.

AIM. The idiomatic construction is 'aim at doing something'. *Aim to do* is gaining ground, but it is not yet recognised as Standard usage. Say 'This book aims at giving a general out line of the subject', not 'This book aims to give a general outline of the subject'.

AIRPLANE. Some English newspapers seem to have adopted this spelling, but though it is normal in America it is not generally accepted in British English. Use *aeroplane*.

ALARM: ALARUM. The second word is the one regularly used in the expression 'alarums and excursions', and some people may prefer to speak of an 'alarum clock' rather than an 'alarm clock'. For all other purposes use *alarm*.

ALIAS. In Latin *alias* means 'at another time'. In English it is used to indicate an assumed name by which a person is known for a certain part of his life or in certain circles (William Arthur Jenkins *alias* Samuel Henderson). It may also be used as a noun, with the plural *aliases*: 'He had had several aliases'. It must, however, be confined to names: it cannot be used of a disguise or an assumed character, an incorrect use which is exemplified in the sentence 'He gained admission to the premises under the alias of a police officer'. Amend to 'under the guise of' or 'by posing as'.

ALIBI. *Alibi* is a Latin adverb meaning 'elsewhere'. In legal language an accused person proves an alibi when he is able to show that at the time when the crime with which he is charged was committed he was elsewhere. The word does not mean an excuse, a justification, extenuating circumstances and the

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