

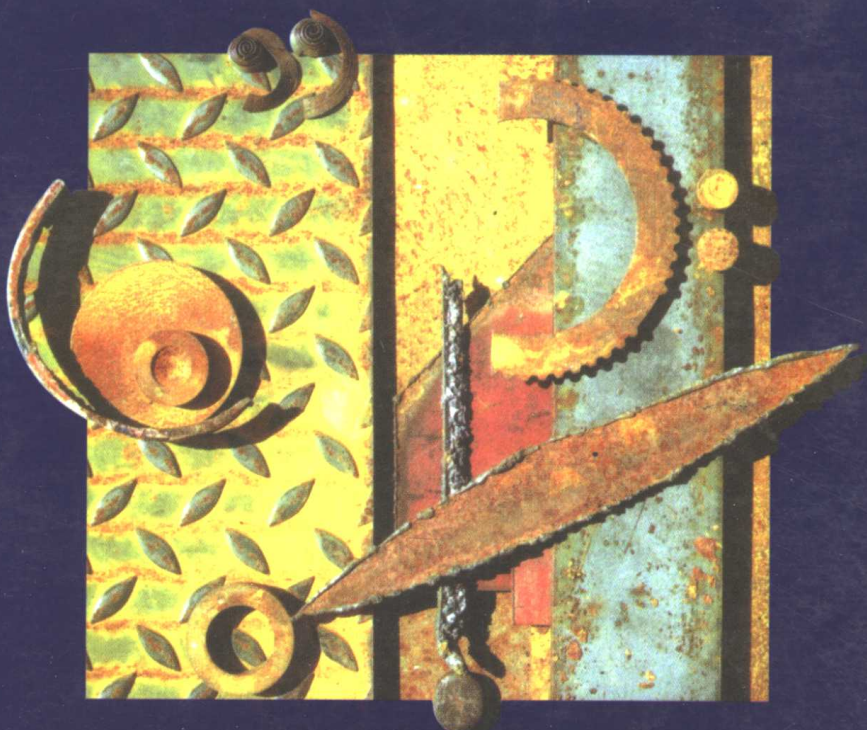


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## FWLER'S MODERN ENGLISH USAGE

### 牛津现代英语用法词典



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Oxford Dictionary of

# Modern English Usage

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H.W. FOWLER

Second Edition

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本社编辑部

## PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

'It took the world by storm' said *The Times*, in its obituary notice of H. W. Fowler, about *The King's English*, published by him and his younger brother Frank in 1906. That description might have been more fitly applied to the reception of *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* which followed twenty years later, planned by the two brothers but executed by Henry alone. This was indeed an epoch-making book in the strict sense of that overworked phrase. It made the name of Fowler a household word in all English-speaking countries. Its influence extended even to the battlefield. 'Why must you write *intensive* here?' asked the Prime Minister in a minute to the Director of Military Intelligence about plans for the invasion of Normandy. '*Intense* is the right word. You should read Fowler's *Modern English Usage* on the use of the two words.'<sup>1</sup> Though never revised, the book has kept its place against all rivals, and shown little sign of suffering from that reaction which commonly awaits those whose work achieves exceptional popularity in their lifetime.

What is the secret of its success? It is not that all Fowler's opinions are unchallengeable. Many have been challenged. It is not that he is always easy reading. At his best he is incomparable. But he never forgot what he calls 'that pestilent fellow the critical reader' who is 'not satisfied with catching the general drift and obvious intention of a sentence' but insists that 'the words used must . . . actually yield on scrutiny the desired sense'.<sup>2</sup> There are some passages that only yield it after what the reader may think an excessive amount of scrutiny—passages demanding hardly less concentration than one of the more obscure sections of a Finance Act, and for the same reason: the determination of the writer to make sure that, when the reader eventually gropes his way to a meaning, it shall be, beyond all possible doubt, the meaning intended by the writer. Nor does the secret lie in the convenience of the book as a work of reference; it hardly deserves its title of 'dictionary', since much of it consists of short essays on various subjects, some with fancy titles that give no clue at all to their subject. What reporter, seeking guidance about the propriety of saying that the recep-

<sup>1</sup> *The Second World War*, v. 615.

<sup>2</sup> S.V. ILLOGICALITIES.

tion was held 'at the bride's aunt's', would think of looking for it in an article with the title 'Out of the Frying-Pan'?

There is of course more than one reason for its popularity. But the dominant one is undoubtedly the idiosyncrasy of the author, which he revealed to an extent unusual in a 'dictionary'. 'Idiosyncrasy', if we accept Fowler's own definition, 'is peculiar mixture, and the point of it is best shown in the words that describe Brutus: "His life was gentle, and the elements So mixed in him that Nature might stand up And say to all the world This was a man." One's idiosyncrasy is the way one's elements are mixed.'<sup>1</sup> This new edition of the work may therefore be suitably introduced by some account of the man. The following is based on a biographical sketch by his friend G. G. Coulton published in 1934 as *Tract XLIII* of the Society for Pure English.

He was born in 1858, the son of a Cambridge Wrangler and Fellow of Christ's. From Rugby he won a scholarship to Balliol, but surprisingly failed to get a first in either Mods. or Greats. After leaving Oxford he spent seventeen years as a master at Sedbergh. His career there was ended by a difference of opinion with his headmaster, H. G. Hart (also a Rugbeian). Fowler, never a professing Christian, could not conscientiously undertake to prepare boys for confirmation. Hart held this to be an indispensable part of a housemaster's duty. Fowler was therefore passed over for a vacant housemastership. He protested; Hart was firm; and Fowler resigned. It was, in Fowler's words, 'a perfectly friendly but irreconcilable' difference of opinion. Later, when Hart himself had resigned, Fowler wrote to Mrs. Hart that though Sedbergh would no doubt find a new headmaster with very serviceable talents of one kind or another, it was unlikely to find again 'such a man as everyone separately shall know (more certainly year by year) to be at once truer and better, gentler and stronger, than himself'.

Thus, at the age of 41, Fowler had to make a fresh start. For a few years he lived in London, where he tried his hand as an essayist without any great success, and attempted to demonstrate what he had always maintained to be true—that a man ought to be able to live on £100 a year. In 1903 he joined his brother in Guernsey, and in 1908, on his fiftieth birthday, married a lady four years younger than himself. The brothers did literary work together. Their most notable productions were a translation of Lucian and *The King's English*. The great success of the latter pointed the road they were to follow in future.

When war broke out Henry was 56. He emerged from retirement to

<sup>1</sup> S.V. IDIOSYNCRASY.

take part in the recruiting campaign. But he found himself more and more troubled by the thought that he was urging others to run risks which he would himself be spared. So he enlisted as a private in the 'Sportsmen's Battalion', giving his age as 44. His brother, aged 45, enlisted with him. Their experiences are fully told in letters from Henry to his wife, now in the library of St. John's College, Cambridge. It is a sorry story, summarized in a petition sent by the brothers to their commanding officer in France in February 1916.

[Your petitioners] enlisted in April 1915 at great inconvenience and with pecuniary loss in the belief that soldiers were needed for active service, being officially encouraged to mis-state their ages as a patriotic act. After nine months' training they were sent to the front, but almost immediately sent back to the base not as having proved unfit for the work, but merely as being over age—and this though their real ages had long been known to the authorities. . . . They are now held at the base at Étaples performing only such menial or unmilitary duties as dish-washing, coal-heaving and portering, for which they are unfitted by habits and age. They suggest that such conversion of persons who undertook purely from patriotic motives the duties of soldiers on active service into unwilling menials or servants is an incredibly ungenerous policy. . . .

This petition secured Fowler's return to the trenches, but not for long. Three weeks later he fainted on parade, and relegation to the base could no longer be resisted. This seemed the end. 'By dinner time', he wrote to his wife shortly afterwards, 'I was making up my mind to go sick and ask to be transferred to a lunatic asylum.' This drastic measure proved unnecessary, for in a few days he was to go sick in earnest. He was sent back to England, and after some weeks in hospital was discharged from the Army, having spent eighteen dreary months in a constantly frustrated attempt to fight for his country.

After their discharge the brothers returned to Guernsey, but the partnership only lasted another two years; Frank died in 1918. In 1925 Henry and his wife left the island to live in a cottage in the Somersetshire village of Hinton St. George. There he remained until his death in 1933, occupied mainly with lexicographical work for the Clarendon Press and on the book that was to make him famous. An exceptionally happy marriage ended with the death of his wife three years before his own. The unbeliever's memorial to her was, characteristically, a gift of bells to the village church.

The most prominent element in Fowler's idiosyncrasy was evidently

what the Romans called *aequanimitas*. He knew what he wanted from life; what he wanted was within his reach; he took it and was content. It pleased him to live with spartan simplicity. Coulton quotes a letter he wrote to the Secretary of the Clarendon Press in reply to an offer to pay the wages of a servant. Fowler was then 68 and the month was November.

My half-hour from 7.0 to 7.30 this morning was spent in (1) a two-mile run along the road, (2) a swim in my next-door neighbour's pond—exactly as some 48 years ago I used to run round the Parks and cool myself in (is there such a place now?) Parson's Pleasure. That I am still in condition for such freaks I attribute to having had for nearly 30 years no servants to reduce me to a sedentary and all-literary existence. And now you seem to say: Let us give you a servant, and the means of slow suicide and quick lexicography. Not if I know it: I must go my slow way.

So he continued to diversify his lexicography with the duties of a house-parlourmaid and no doubt performed them more scrupulously than any professional.

He has been described by one who had been a pupil of his at Sedbergh as 'a man of great fastidiousness, (moral and intellectual)', and he is said to have shown the same quality in his clothes and personal appearance. Coulton compares him to Socrates. Though not a professing Christian, Fowler had all the virtues claimed as distinctively Christian, and, like Socrates, 'was one of those rare people, sincere and unostentatious, to whom the conduct of life is *ars artium*'.

Such was the man whose idiosyncrasy so strongly colours his book. The whimsicality that was his armour in adversity enlivens it in unexpected places; thus by way of illustrating the difficulty there may be in identifying a phenomenon he calls 'the intransitive past participle', he observes that 'an angel dropped from heaven' has possibly been passive, but more likely active, in the descent. The simplicity of his habits has its counterpart in the simplicity of diction he preaches. The orderly routine of his daily life is reflected in the passion for classification, tabulation, and pigeon-holing that he sometimes indulges beyond reason. Above all, that uncompromising integrity which made him give up his profession rather than teach what he did not believe, and to go to the battlefield himself rather than persuade younger men to do so, permeates *Modern English Usage*. That all kinds of affectation and humbug were anathema to his fastidious mind is apparent on almost every page. Perhaps it was this trait that made him choose, as his first literary

enterprise, to try to introduce to a wider public the works of that archetypal debunker, Lucian.

Much of *Modern English Usage* is concerned with choosing the right word, and here the need for revision is most evident, for no part of 'usage' changes more quickly than verbal currency. To a reader forty years after the book was written it will seem to be fighting many battles that were won or lost long ago. 'Vogue words' get worn out and others take their place. 'Slipshod extensions' consolidate their new positions. 'Barbarisms' become respected members of the vocabulary. 'Genteelisms' and 'Formal words' win undeserved victories over their plainer rivals. 'Popularized technicalities' proliferate in a scientific age. Words unknown in Fowler's day—*teenager* for instance—are now among our hardest worked.

Articles on other subjects have better stood the test of time, but many call for some modernization. One or two have been omitted as no longer relevant to our literary fashions; a few have been rewritten in whole or in part, and several new ones added. About those that deal with 'grammar' in the broadest sense something needs to be said at greater length.

There were two sides to Fowler as a grammarian. In one respect he was an iconoclast. There was nothing he enjoyed debunking more than the 'superstitions' and 'fetishes' as he called them, invented by pedagogues for no other apparent purpose than to make writing more difficult. The turn of the century was their heyday. Purists then enjoyed the sport of hunting split infinitives, 'different to's', and the like as zestfully as today they do that of cliché-hunting. The Fowlers' books were a gust of common sense that blew away these cobwebs. It was refreshing to be told by a grammarian that the idea that *different* could only be followed by *from* was a superstition; that to insist on the same preposition after *averse* was one of the pedantries that spring of a little knowledge; that it is better to split one's infinitives than to be ambiguous or artificial; that to take exception to *under the circumstances* is puerile; that it is nonsense to suppose one ought not to begin a sentence with *and* or *but* or to end one with a preposition; that those who are over-fussy about the placing of the adverb *only* are the sort of friends from whom the English language may well pray to be saved; that it is a mistake to suppose that *none* must at all costs be followed by a singular verb; that it is futile to object to the use of *to a degree* in the sense of *to the last degree*; that to insist on writing *first* instead of *firstly* is pedantic artificialism; and that to forbid the use of *whose* with an inanimate antecedent is like sending a soldier on active service and insisting that his tunic collar shall be

tight and high. If writers today no longer feel the burden of fetters such as these they have largely the Fowlers to thank.

On the other hand, Fowler has been criticized—notably by his famous contemporary Jespersen—for being in some respects too strict and old-fashioned. He was a ‘prescriptive’ grammarian, and prescriptive grammar is not now in favour outside the schoolroom. Jespersen, the ‘grammatical historian’, held that ‘of greater value than this prescriptive grammar is a purely descriptive grammar which, instead of acting as a guide to what should be said or written, aims at finding out what is actually said or written by those who use the language’<sup>1</sup> and recording it objectively like a naturalist observing the facts of nature.<sup>2</sup> Fowler, the ‘instinctive grammatical moralizer’ (as Jespersen called him and he welcomed the description), held that the proper purpose of a grammarian was ‘to tell the people not what they do and how they came to do it, but what they ought to do for the future’.<sup>3</sup> His respect for what he regarded as the true principles of grammar was as great as was his contempt for its fetishes and superstitions. He has been criticized for relying too much on Latin grammar for those principles. In part he admitted the charge. ‘Whether or not it is regrettable’, he said, ‘that we English have for centuries been taught what little grammar we know on Latin traditions, have we not now to recognize that the iron has entered into our souls, that our grammatical conscience has by this time a Latin element inextricably compounded in it, if not predominant?’<sup>4</sup> At the same time he had nothing but contempt for those grammarians whom he described as ‘fogging the minds of English children with terms and notions that are essential to the understanding of Greek and Latin syntax but have no bearing on English’.<sup>5</sup>

The truth is that the prime mover of his moralizing was not so much grammatical Grundyism as the instincts of a craftsman. ‘Proper words in proper places’, said Swift, ‘make the true definition of a style.’ Fowler thought so too; and, being a perfectionist, could not be satisfied with anything that seemed to him to fall below the highest standard either in the choice of precise words or in their careful and orderly arrangement. He knew, he said, that ‘what grammarians say should be has perhaps less influence on what shall be than even the more modest of them realize; usage evolves itself little disturbed by their likes and dislikes’. ‘And yet’, he added, ‘the temptation to show how better use might have been made

<sup>1</sup> *Essentials of English Grammar*, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Enc. Brit.*, s.v. GRAMMAR.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *SPE Tract XXVI*, p. 194.

<sup>5</sup> s.v. CASES 2.

of the material to hand is sometimes irresistible.<sup>1</sup> He has had his reward in his book's finding a place on the desk of all those who regard writing as a craft, and who like what he called 'the comfort that springs from feeling that all is shipshape'.

He nodded, of course. Some of his moralizings were vulnerable even when he made them; others have become so. Some revision has been necessary. But no attempt has been made to convert the instinctive grammatical moralizer into anything else. In this field therefore what has been well said of the original book will still be true of this edition: 'You cannot depend on the Fowler of *Modern English Usage* giving you either an objective account of what modern English usage *is* or a representative summary of what the Latin-dominated traditionalists would *have it be*. *Modern English Usage* is personal: it is Fowler. And in this no doubt lies some of its perennial appeal.'<sup>2</sup>

Anyone undertaking to revise the book will pause over the opening words of Fowler's own preface: 'I think of it as it should have been, with its prolixities docked. . . .' He cannot be acquitted of occasional prolixity. But his faults were as much a part of his idiosyncrasy as his virtues; rewrite him and he ceases to be Fowler. I have been chary of making any substantial alterations except for the purpose of bringing him up to date; I have only done so in a few places where his exposition is exceptionally tortuous, and it is clear that his point could be put more simply without any sacrifice of Fowleresque flavour. But the illustrative quotations have been pruned in several articles, and passages where the same subject is dealt with in more than one article have been consolidated.

Only one important alteration has been made in the scope of the book. The article TECHNICAL TERMS, thirty pages long, has been omitted. It consisted of definitions of 'technical terms of rhetoric, grammar, logic, prosody, diplomacy, literature, etc., that a reader may be confronted with or a writer have need of'. The entries that are relevant to 'modern English usage' have been transferred to their alphabetical places in the book. For the rest, the publication of other 'Oxford' books, especially the *COD* and those on English and classical literature, has made it unnecessary to keep them here. The eight pages of French words listed for their pronunciation have also been omitted; a similar list is now appended to the *COD*.

<sup>1</sup> S.V. THAT REL. PRON. I.

<sup>2</sup> Randolph Quirk in *The Listener*, 15 March 1958.

I have already referred to the enigmatic titles that Fowler gave to some of his articles, and their effect in limiting the usefulness of the book as a work of reference. But no one would wish to do away with so Fowleresque a touch; indeed, I have not resisted the temptation to add one or two. I hope that their disadvantage may be overcome by the 'Classified Guide' which now replaces the 'List of General Articles'. In this the articles (other than those concerned only with the meaning, idiomatic use, pronunciation, etc., of the words that form their titles) are grouped by subject, and some indication is given of their content wherever it cannot be inferred from their titles. This also rids the body of the book of numerous entries inserted merely as cross-references.

E. G.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I GRATEFULLY record my obligation to all those who have contributed to this edition with suggestion, criticism, and information; they are too many for me to name them all. I must also be content with a general acknowledgement to the many writers (and their publishers) whom I have quoted, usually because they said what I wanted to say better than I could myself.

As an amateur in linguistics, I am especially indebted to those who have readily responded to my appeals for expert guidance, particularly to Mr. R. W. Burchfield, Mr. G. V. Carey (who contributes an article on the use of capitals), the late Dr. R. W. Chapman, Professor Norman Davis, Mr. P. S. Falla, and Professor Randolph Quirk. Mr. Peter Fleming will recognize his own hand in more than one article. Mr. D. M. Davin, who has been in charge of the work for the Clarendon Press, has been infinitely helpful. To Mr. L. F. Schooling my obligation is unique. He not only started me off with a comprehensive survey of what needed to be done, but has shared throughout in every detail of its execution, fertile in suggestion, ruthless in criticism, and vigilant in the detection of error.

# PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

TO THE MEMORY OF MY BROTHER

FRANCIS GEORGE FOWLER, M.A. CANTAB.

WHO SHARED WITH ME THE PLANNING OF THIS BOOK,  
BUT DID NOT LIVE TO SHARE THE WRITING.

I think of it as it should have been, with its prolixities docked, its dullnesses enlivened, its fads eliminated, its truths multiplied. He had a nimbler wit, a better sense of proportion, and a more open mind, than his twelve-year-older partner; and it is matter of regret that we had not, at a certain point, arranged our undertakings otherwise than we did.

In 1911 we started work simultaneously on the *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* and this book; living close together, we could, and did, compare notes; but each was to get one book into shape by writing its first quarter or half; and so much only had been done before the war. The one in which, as the less mechanical, his ideas and contributions would have had much the greater value had been assigned, by ill chance, to me. In 1918 he died, aged 47, of tuberculosis contracted during service with the B.E.F. in 1915-16.

The present book accordingly contains none of his actual writing; but, having been designed in consultation with him, it is the last fruit of a partnership that began in 1903 with our translation of Lucian.

H. W. F.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS IN THE FIRST EDITION

I cannot deny myself the pleasure of publicly thanking Lt-Col. H. G. Le Mesurier, C.I.E., who not only read and criticized in detail the whole MS. of this book, but devised, at my request, a scheme for considerably reducing its bulk. That it was not necessary to adopt this scheme is due to the generosity of the Clarendon Press in consenting to publish, at no high price, an amount much greater than that originally sanctioned.

On behalf of the Press, Mr. Frederick Page and Mr. C. T. Onions have made valuable corrections and comments.

The article on *morale* has appeared previously in the *Times Literary Supplement*, that on *only* in the *Westminster Gazette*, and those on Hyphens, Inversion, Metaphor, Split infinitive, Subjunctives, and other matters, in *SPE Tracts*.

H. W. F.