

Fowler¹ or Barzun² (Modern American Usage). It is not, I think, unrealistic to expect that I shall be able to bring this number up to sixty or more. I am encouraged in this belief by the alacrity with which many members of the department have adopted the most recent blight on our rich language, and are using the adverb "hopefully" in sentences where this new scourge cannot possibly be defended. Many of you will remember too that at one time we referred to "the image" of Canada in international affairs, and that this was succeeded a little later on by the fashionable word "posture"; I believe now that the vogue word is "the stance of Canada, in international affairs".

Before proceeding to my modest proposals for remedial measures which might be taken to improve the standard of English prose in the department, I suggest that we have a brief look at the Annexes A and B, although most of the queries which may arise from these annexes could be dealt with more conveniently in the question period, for which I trust there will be time, if I am not too long-winded. Annex A contains a number of observations on the illiteracy and on the foolishness of many of our telegrams, and this I think we shall leave for the moment. Annex B deals with those infelicities in English which appear to be most current in the department. This Annex B does not profess to present a complete anthology of our misfortunes, but does give a list of our more grievous errors, or in the fashionable language of the department, it gives the "highlights". First, however, there are two points to bear in mind:

- (a) The English language is a living, growing and changing instrument of communication perhaps incomparable in its richness, versatility, imagery and, if we wish it so, in its precision. Without an Académie Anglaise to restrain it, English has borrowed freely from all languages, although some of its borrowings have later been abandoned. For an example of change, the first edition of Fowler's Modern English Usage in 1926 violently rejected "contact" used as a verb (I'll contact you at six). The revised edition, however, by Sir Ernest Gowers in 1965, accepts this usage, because of its usefulness and its almost unanimous acceptance. I say "almost" because A. P. Herbert (Sir Alan Herbert) fought a stout rear-guard action against it until his death. "Ten thousand times more loathsome", he wrote, "is the verb to contact. My brothers, let this verb be sabotaged by every possible avenue".

- (1) Modern English Usage, Second Edition, H. W. Fowler (revised by Sir Ernest Gowers, Oxford 1965)
- (2) Modern American Usage, (Edited and completed by Jacques Barzun) Wilson Follett, Hill and Wang/New York 1966