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Observations in the English prose
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Lecture

by

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NOV 8 1991

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OBSERVATIONS IN THE ENGLISH PROSE;

CLEAR THINKING AND PLAIN WORDS

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Mr. Chairman,

I am most grateful and honoured to be included with the distinguished speakers who are taking part in this seminar on the Languages of Canadian Diplomacy. It gives me pleasure to note also that the pace of this seminar is not so hectic as that of other seminars in which I have taken part, in which a polite but none the less captive audience endured as many as eight or nine lectures in a single day, a point which I hope they may be taking up with those responsible for Collective Bargaining and Grievance Procedures. As for myself, I welcome this occasion. For quite a few years of my life I made a modest living by lifting my voice in university lecture rooms on the limited range of matters with which, at that time, I was familiar, or so I thought. Now, for more than twenty years, I have had a somewhat better living on condition that I say nothing whatsoever in public. Imagine then with what alacrity I leaped at the unwary proposal of Mr. Fortier that I return briefly this morning to the world of the articulate, and I, at least, Mr. Chairman, am looking forward to my observations this morning with the liveliest pleasure.

The formal title of my remarks is somewhat grandiose. First of all, I do not propose to deal with formal diplomatic correspondence, that is to say, with such things as first and third person notes on aide memoire. These matters are dealt with in the Manual of Procedures; and in Chapter IV, Annex C of the Manual of Post Administration, there is a section entitled Le Protocole Epistolaire. A little later on in your careers when you have occasion to write to His Holiness the Pope or to the President of France, you will find there the correct salutations and complimentary closes. I hope you will forgive me, Mr. Chairman, for introducing this modest plug for the Manuals on which, as you know, I spent about two years as writer and editor, and as blackmailer of the departmental divisions. What I propose to do is to point out a number of what seem to me defects in the habitual English prose of the department, and later on to suggest some modest proposals for remedial measures. This bi-lateral approach reminds me of a very distinguished English novelist invited to address the Faculty and Scholars of the Sorbonne when I was working there many years ago. His French was reasonably adequate but, alas, like so many of us, with his very first sentence he fell into what the French call so aptly "les pièges", or "les faux amis". He had been invited to speak on the various stages of his literary career and on the principle influences, so far as he was prepared to admit them, on the content and style of his distinguished novels. His opening words were as follows: "Quand je regarde dans mon derrière, je constate qu'il est divisé en deux morceaux presque entièrement égaux". Other examples of reliance on frail reeds will be familiar to you, such as the masterful translation of "Voici l'anglais de nouveau avec son sang-froid habituel" as "Here's the Englishman again with his usual bloody cold", or again the charming translation by a young English girl of "she married beneath her station", as "Elle a marié au-dessous de sa gare". At the railway station at Newhaven

in the south of England there used to be, and perhaps still is, an enormous sign in the form of an arrow pointing toward the harbour. I have been told that quite a number of French citizens returning to their own country preferred to go by the rather longer Newhaven-Dieppe passage just for the pleasure of observing this sign. On it were inscribed in letters about four feet high the words "AUX BATEAUX", which indeed means to the boats, but of course in a somewhat special sense. This is the final command which the captain of a ship, rapidly foundering, would give to the passengers and the crew; it properly means "to the life boats", and could well be translated as "abandon ship", or perhaps, "every man for himself". Les pièges sont bien traités.

If I may reminisce very briefly, when I first went to France more than thirty years ago I had what would be described as a good knowledge of French, that is to say, I read a great deal and I knew the grammar thoroughly including all the imperfect subjunctives, even tricky ones like *s'asseoir* (*Il aurait fallu que je m'assis*). I was, however, entirely unable to read a menu and for the first few days, because of vanity, I lived very largely on omelets, because it was the only word I could recognize. I ventured boldly on one occasion to ask for a dessert, and chose "gaufrettes", to the astonishment of the waiter, who none the less brought me a saucer of those thin wafers that accompany ice cream. I was much puzzled, too, by the streets marked "sens interdit" which, (and this perhaps indicates a dangerous Freudian symptom) I took to mean that on these streets marked "sens interdit" the gayer young ladies of Paris were not allowed to ply their ancient trade.

My general thesis this morning is that young people come to us from the universities (not all but many of them), capable of writing a clear, simple and direct prose, and that the department very rapidly corrupts them. As a corollary to this outrageous thesis, the young people d'expression française who come to us, follow the lead of their English speaking brothers, and translate into French even the most atrocious examples of our departmental faults. So sweeping a thesis as this would no doubt be difficult to prove, and it would, in any case, be subject to many footnotes which cannot be added here. As appendix "A" to the printed version of my observations this morning you have a memorandum which I prepared some time ago for the Under-Secretary on our telegraphic communications. This has been recently edited and greatly shortened for this occasion. You will find also an Appendix "B", listing some forty or fifty examples of infelicitous expressions widely used in the Department, all of them objectionable, and all of them suitable for inclusion in an Index Verborum Prohibitorum. I have come to the conclusion that, unless we are alert in the department, we shall reduce the vast riches of the English language to a basic jargon of about 300 words: if this process continues, we shall ultimately exchange our views by a series of inarticulate grunts, as has already happened in Liverpool, Glasgow and in the Quartier La Villette of Paris. I should perhaps point out that all the eccentricities illustrated in both annexes are all our own departmental work; these I have been noting for some little time. All of them, also, are dealt with harshly in

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

- (b) We must not and have not time to become maniacs on this matter of vocabulary and style. Our business is to write clearly and accurately on matters in which we can claim competence. There are two tragic figures in literary matters; first, the man who has lived a full, rich, varied, adventurous, and rewarding life but is utterly incapable of setting pen to paper; the second, the man who has spent a life-time in perfecting his means of expression, only to find in his later years that he has absolutely nothing to express. And now for a joyful look at Appendix B.

Part 2

Several thousand words ago, I undertook to make, before the close of this lecture, a few modest proposals designed to strengthen or at least to comfort the ailing prose of the department. This is only fair, since even Old Oligarch, as he is affectionately known to classical scholars, (probably a contemporary of Pericles but this is not certain) a venomous critic of the Athenian Democracy and all its works, remarked in one of the surviving fragments: "It is much easier and more agreeable to point out the ills of a society than to suggest measures for their remedy". How right he was, but let's have a go as promised.

For a few of our ailing patients such as significant, involved, and presently, first-aid measures, if promptly applied, should be adequate; but for others, including overall, hopefully, consensus of opinion and irregardless, I fear that I can prescribe only painless euthanasia. Less flippantly, if you are not much interested in words, if you don't give a damn about the distinction between disinterested and uninterested, if you are not at your age familiar with either Fowler or Gowers (I speak now to those of you whose mother tongue is English) and were not much interested in the publication a year or so ago of Modern American Usage, you must find it tedious to draft telegrams, memoranda and letters; but this is what our job is about.¹ Diplomacy is the art of persuasion so long as it is furthered by words rather than by explosives, words deftly chosen from a very rich and very well-defined vocabulary. The work of this department requires historians, linguists, philosophers, regional specialists, economists and specialists in management and administration. Whatever their duties and responsibilities, they must be able to communicate skilfully; and their tools

- (1) My medical consultants believe that a further foot-note is required here to the effect that a barrister afflicted by a bad stammer, or a surgeon suffering even mildly from Parkinson's disease, will be severely handicapped.

are words. Sir Ernest Gowers in *Plain Words* (1948) refers to the unknown member of the Staff of the General Post Office in Britain who composed the notice that used to be displayed in British post offices: "Postmasters are neither bound to give change nor authorized to demand it". Apart from warning "customers of what must have been a singularly intractable dilemma" Sir Ernest writes, "Every word is exactly right: no other word would do as well: each is pulling its weight; none could be dispensed with", and he goes on to quote a commentator on Milton's prose: "Fewer would not have served the turn, and more would have been superfluous". "Postmasters are neither bound to give change nor authorized to demand it". To you whose tools are words, this small gem must bring great pleasure.

To get on with the therapy:

- (a) If you do not have them, you should buy for bed-side reading the Second Edition of Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, and Follett's *Modern American Usage*, edited and completed by Jacques Barzun. Somerset Maugham writes of Fowler thus:

"I have read many books on English prose, but have found it hard to profit by them; for the most part they are vague, unduly theoretical, and often scolding. But you cannot say this of Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*. It is a valuable work. I do not think anyone writes so well that he cannot learn much from it. It is lively reading. Fowler liked simplicity, straightforwardness and common sense. He had no patience with pretentiousness. He had a sound feeling that idiom was the backbone of a language and he was all for the racy phrase. He was no slavish admirer of logic and was willing enough to give usage right of way through the exact demesnes of grammar."

- (b) You should prepare almost all your work first in draft, as enjoined on page 1 of the *Manual of Procedures*. It is not true that often you are too hard-pressed; a draft saves time, both for you and for your secretary.
- (c) I come now to the last of the three proposals which I am venturing to make, but I warn you that it is long-winded. What kind of prose do we want? This may seem an odd sort of question, but you will perhaps agree that the style should be appropriate to the subject matter, and should be related to the medium of communication, and to the purpose of the document. Without bothering you with what led me to this conclusion, I believe that the prose of the department, in the rare despatches and in the innumerable numbered letters which we send and receive, should be in general similar to that of the judgements handed down by the highest Appellate Courts in Britain, the United States and Canada.

I propose first simply to read to you a brief example from a judgement by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, a few paragraphs of a widely-known dissenting opinion of the late Oliver Wendell Holmes, Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States and, since we need not go so far afield for what we want, part of a dissenting opinion of Mr. Justice Cartwright, now Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada. Following these excerpts, which I propose to read to you with a brief explanation of what they are about, I hope to be able to suggest fairly clearly the virtues common to these three examples from different countries on different subject matters. I hope to make the point that this is the sort of thing we should be trying to do in style and in vocabulary.

The first example comes from a judgement in 1932, delivered for their Lordships by Viscount Dunedin. The volume from which it comes is entitled Canadian Constitutional Decisions of the Judicial Committee 1930-39, and we have a copy in the Library.

It was an appeal from a judgement by the Supreme Court of Canada concerning the jurisdiction of the Parliament of Canada to regulate and control radio communication. Since, a little earlier, in October of 1931, the Privy Council had determined that the regulation of aviation was a matter for the Federal Government, the advocates for the provinces hardly expected to convince the Judicial Committee that broadcasting was a provincial matter, particularly since Canada had signed a few months earlier an International Convention on Broadcasting, but they tried to make a case for provincial jurisdiction over the reception of broadcasting. Their Lordships dealt with this one, in part, as follows:

"The result is in their Lordships' opinion clear. It is Canada as a whole which is amenable to the other powers for the proper carrying out of the convention; and to prevent individuals in Canada infringing the stipulations of the convention, it is necessary that the Dominion should pass legislation which should apply to all the dwellers in Canada.

At the same time, while this view is destructive of the view urged by the Province as to how ⁽¹⁾ the observance of the international convention should be secured, it does not, they say, dispose of the whole of the question. They say it does not touch the consideration of inter-Provincial broadcasting. Now, much the same might have been said as to aeronautics. It is quite possible to fly without going outside the Province, yet that was not thought to disturb the general view, and once you come to the conclusion that the convention is binding on

(1) The conflict between this and an item in Appendix B is both apparent and real.

Canada as a Dominion, there are various sentences of the Board's judgement in the aviation case which might be literally transcribed to this. The idea pervading that judgement is that the whole subject of aeronautics is so completely covered by the treaty ratifying the convention between the nations, that there is not enough left to give a separate field to the Provinces. The same might at least very easily be said on this subject, but even supposing that it were possible to draw a rigid line between inter-Provincial and Dominion broadcasting, there is something more to be said. It will be found that the argument for the Provinces really depends on a complete difference being established between the operations of the transmitting and the receiving instruments. The Province admits that an improper use of a transmitting instrument could by invasion of a wave-length not assigned by international agreement to Canada bring into effect a breach of a clause of the convention. But it says this view does not apply to the operation of a receiving instrument. Now it is true that a dislocation of a receiving instrument will not in usual cases operate a disturbance beyond a comparatively limited circular area; although their Lordships understand that a receiving instrument could be so manipulated as to make its area of disturbance much larger than what is usually thought ~~of~~.

The argument of the Province really depends on making, as already said, a sharp distinction between the transmitting and the receiving instrument. In their Lordships' opinion this cannot be done. Once it is conceded, as it must be, keeping in view the duties under the convention, that the transmitting instrument must be so to speak under the control of the Dominion, it follows in their Lordships' opinion that the receiving instrument must share its fate. Broadcasting as a system cannot exist without both a transmitter and a receiver. The receiver is indeed useless without a transmitter and can be reduced to a nonentity if the transmitter closes. The system cannot be divided into two parts, each ~~dependent~~ of the other.

Upon the whole matter, therefore, their Lordships have no hesitation in holding that the judgment of the majority of the Supreme Court was right, and their Lordships will therefore humbly advise His Majesty that the appeal should be dismissed. No costs will be awarded, this being a question to be decided between the Dominion and the Provinces.

Although the question had obviously to be decided on the terms of the statute, it is a matter of congratulation that the result arrived at seems consonant with common sense. A divided control between transmitter and receiver could only lead to confusion and inefficiency."

The second excerpt to which I should like to direct your attention is from a dissenting judgement of Mr. Justice Holmes in 1919, after the Supreme Court of the USA had confirmed sentences of twenty years imprisonment on the two appellants for

publishing leaflets held by the lower courts to violate legislation restricting freedom of utterance during 1917-18, when the USA was engaged in war abroad, and in hysteria at home. In his dissenting opinion, in which he was supported by Mr. Justice Brandeis, Mr. Justice Holmes had this, together with much more to say:

"I do not doubt for a moment that by the same reasoning that would justify punishing persuasion to murder, the United States constitutionally may punish speech that produces or is intended to produce a clear and imminent danger that it will bring about forthwith certain substantive evils that the United States constitutionally may seek to prevent. The power undoubtedly is greater in time of war than in time of peace because war opens dangers that do not exist at other times.

But as against dangers peculiar to war, as against others, the principle of the right to free speech is always the same. It is only the present danger of immediate evil or an intent to bring it about that warrants Congress in setting a limit to the expression of opinion where private rights are not concerned. Congress certainly cannot forbid all effort to change the mind of the country....

In this case sentences of twenty years' imprisonment have been imposed for the publishing of two leaflets that I believe the defendants had as much right to publish as the Government has to publish the Constitution of the United States, now vainly invoked by them. Even if I am technically wrong and enough can be squeezed from these poor and puny anonymities to turn the color of legal litmus paper; I will add, even if what I think the necessary intent, were shown; the most nominal punishment seems to me all that possibly could be inflicted, unless the defendants are to be made to suffer not for what the indictment alleges but for the creed that they avow -- a creed that I believe to be the creed of ignorance and immaturity when honestly held, as I see no reason to doubt that it was held here, but which, although made the subject of examination at the trial, no one has a right even to consider in dealing with the charges before the Court.

Persecution for the expression of opinions seems to me perfectly logical. If you have no doubt of your premises or your power and want a certain result with all your heart you naturally express your wishes in law and sweep away all opposition. To allow opposition by speech seems to indicate that you think the speech impotent, as when a man says that he has squared the circle, or that you do not care wholeheartedly for the result, or that you doubt either your power or your premises. But when men have realized that time has

upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas -- that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out. That at any rate is the theory of our Constitution. It is an experiment, as all life is an experiment. Every year if not every day we have to wager our salvation upon some prophecy based upon imperfect knowledge. While that experiment is part of our system I think that we should be eternally vigilant against attempts to check the expression of opinions that we loathe and believe to be fraught with death, unless they so imminently threaten immediate interference with the lawful and pressing purposes of the law that an immediate check is required to save the country. I wholly disagree with the argument of the Government that the First Amendment left the common law as to seditious libel in force. History seems to me against the notion. I had conceived that the United States through many years had shown its repentance for the Sedition Act of 1798, by repaying fines that it imposed. Only the emergency that makes it immediately dangerous to leave the correction of evil counsels to time, warrants making any exception to the sweeping command, "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech." Of course I am speaking only of expressions of opinion and exhortations, which were all that were uttered here, but I regret that I cannot put into more impressive words my belief that in their conviction upon this indictment the defendants were deprived of their rights under the Constitution of the United States."

As observed earlier, we do not need to leave Canada to find examples of pure judicial prose. What I am going to read to you now is part of the dissenting judgement of Mr. Justice Cartwright on an appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada from the Exchequer Court of Canada in the matter of an estate tax imposed on an inheritance bequeathed as an absolute gift to the Medical Alumni Association of the University of Toronto. The appeal was allowed, with Mr. Justice Cartwright dissenting as follows:

"I agree with the conclusions of the learned trial judge that the Medical Alumni Association was not at the date of the death of the testatrix an organization constituted exclusively for charitable purposes and that it was not shewn that all or substantially all of its resources were devoted to charitable activities. I am in substantial agreement with the reasons of the learned trial judge for reaching these conclusions.

What I have said above is sufficient to dispose of the appeal but before parting with the matter I venture to express

my agreement with the submission that the result, at which I feel bound by the words of the statute to arrive, is anomalous. The residue of the estate of the testatrix is given on a valid charitable trust. It is clear that it can never be used for any purpose other than the charitable one to which it is devoted. It is axiomatic that a validly constituted charitable trust will not be allowed to fail for lack of a trustee. In *Re Schechter*, the majority of this Court cited with approval the following sentence from the judgement of Lord Macnaghten in *Dunne v. Byrne*:

'It is difficult to see on what principle a trust expressed in plain language, whether the words used be sufficient or insufficient to satisfy the requirements of the law, can be modified or limited in its scope by reference to the position or character of the trustee.'

I find it difficult to suggest any reason why the answer to the question whether a fund validly and irrevocably committed to solely charitable purposes should be exempted from the payment of estate tax should depend on the nature of the other activities carried on by the trustee who happens to be appointed to administer the fund. However, the words of the legislation are unambiguous and the anomaly, if anomaly it be, would seem to be intended by Parliament to exist; attention was focused upon it as long ago as the decision of the Judicial Committee in *Minister of National Revenue v. Trusts and Guaranty Company* [1940]. In dealing with a similarly worded provision in the Income War Tax Act Lord Romer said:

'Had the Dominion Legislature intended to exempt from taxation the income of every charitable trust, nothing would have been easier than to say so.'

Speculation as to the possible reason for enacting a piece of legislation is of no assistance in its construction if the words used are plain.

I would dismiss the appeal with costs."

After noting these three excerpts, we are faced with the two-fold question of what they have in common, and of why they might be properly regarded as suitable models on which the prose of this department might be based. As for the first point, these judgements are complete and final, there is nothing unnecessary, and nothing has been left out. We come back to our Postmaster again who is "neither bound to give change nor authorized to demand it". The first quality, then, is sparseness, or an economy of words which say everything essential, with no extraneous adornment, or blemish. The second quality stems from the circumstances of these judgements. Mr. Justice Holmes and Mr. Justice Cartwright, having failed to convince their brother judges,

made public the texts, as is customary, of their persuasive arguments, and these are eloquent examples of the art of persuasion, combined with reliance on precedent. The third quality is the complete relevance of the judgement, whether in the majority or in the dissenting views. There is nothing extraneous; and all three judgements were based upon an immense background of juridical learning to give them weight. Finally, these three passages are alike in their unmannered eloquence and in the strength and the grace of the language; complex but clear conclusions are expressed in plain and even homely words. You will note also that these servants of the law who use English as a surgeon uses his instruments, are aware that although the grammar of the English language is fairly simple, obedience to its structure and to its principles is imperative. Observe also that these judgements make no concession to fashionable or vogue words: there is nothing similar to what is so distressingly frequent in our department's prose, which relies so extensively on the horrors noticed in Appendices A and B. These judgements were delivered by scholarly and well-disciplined jurists who, not by instinct, but by hard work acquired their elegant propriety in the art of English. There are no loose ends: there are no curious interlopers such as overall, under immediate reference, in this same connection, hopefully, significant, in the last analysis or involve; none of them found it necessary to use dynamic, peruse or deem.

The decisions of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, of the Supreme Court of the United States, and of the Supreme Court of Canada are readily available. I do not of course suggest that consistent reading of these examples of disciplined, sparse and expert prose will produce by some sort of contagion similar writing in the department; but it does seem to me that these and the thousands of other judgements by Appellate Courts would provide suitable standards against which our own efforts to acquire at the same time strength and elegance in our prose, might be measured.

Our work in the department demands a certain amount of expert knowledge, but requires even more exactly an ability to express ideas clearly and persuasively. It is evident, first of all, that we must have something precise to say, since untidy prose is very often the consequence of muddled thinking. But we should all, it seems to me, try unceasingly to enrich and to vary and to cherish our vocabularies, and to have a respect for words and even delight in their expert use. I can well believe that those who love English must experience almost a chill of delight on first encountering the epitaph of W. S. Gilbert (of Gilbert and Sullivan) in the small garden overlooking the Thames near the Savoy Hotel. The modest little statue gives only the name, the dates of birth and death, and the following eight words:

"His foe was folly
And his weapon wit."

I trust that many of you will agree that this is English at its most delightful, and at its strongest. Finally, some of you may recall your almost overwhelming pleasure on the first occasion when you came across the work of that nimble genius who produced this inspired definition of an oboe: "An oboe is an ill wood-wind that nobody blows good". And on this note, Mr. Chairman, I fain would close.

ANNEX "A"

TELEGRAPHIC COMMUNICATIONS - NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

"MAY WE PLEASE BE ADVISED AT YOUR EARLY CONVENIENCE IN ORDER THAT STATE MAY TAKE THE GDN POSITION INTO CONSIDERATION IN THE BRIEFINGS OF ITS DEL OR OTHER WISE AS THE CASE MAY BE."

TELEGRAMS - CURRENT PRACTICES

NOTE: This appendix should be read in the knowledge that our Communications Division is now receiving and sending a total of 3,000 messages a day, almost exactly double the traffic in 1962. Many of the points noticed in this study are not particularly important in isolation, but become extremely important and extremely costly if they appear consistently in a large percentage of the 1,092,000 telegrams which we now receive or send each year. It is demonstrably true that any telegram of 300 words or more could be reduced by half and often by much more, and made even less costly by the omitting of needless prepositions, by using the standard abbreviations, and by excising extraneous, trite and illiterate phrases (in this same connection, we are pleased to advise you, we thought that you might like to be informed, etc.) and other countless extravagant eccentricities.

Although this lecture was designed to deal largely with style, rather than with costs, we have here a matter of great importance: the English style, if made appropriate to the medium of communication, can save the department very large sums of money, without loss of clarity.

Finally, the total costs (not overall costs) of our telegraphic communications (training, salaries and allowances of operators, capital investment in machines, leased lines, headquarters and post staffs) are not lower than would be a telegraphic system farmed out entirely to commercial companies.

1. Our telegrams are too long; they are not drafted but dictated; they are inadequately edited, and never (or almost never) revised for telegraphic purposes; many of them, whether in urgency or in content, do not merit telegraphic dispatch but are sent as telegrams on the correct assumption that they will receive wider notice and circulation in Ottawa and abroad than as letters; in fact, they are hastily drafted letters, expensively transmitted. Our telegrams are also marred by space-consuming clichés, trite, dubious or incorrect English, irrelevant detail and repetitions. Our telegrams, in short, are verbose.

2. Verbosity, however, takes many forms. Our own specialities in telegraphic verbosity are now to be discussed and illustrated briefly. In this section of the study, illustrative examples are cited as they appeared at random in many hundreds of telegrams; no mission should feel hurt; all missions have provided examples of all observed defects, and all missions should consider that vicariously they share the distinction of the missions cited or readily identified.

(a) Little Words

3. About twelve per cent of the total words of our telegrams consists of "a", "the", "that", "on", "which" and prepositions and conjunctions which normally can be safely omitted without danger of ambiguity or obscurity.¹ (Legal and technical texts, messages to foreign governments and direct quotations should be sent in full, without abbreviations, clearly marked "No Abbreviations"). Admittedly, telegrams thus drafted, lacking most of the usual articles, prepositions and conjunctions will have a lean and shorn appearance; but capital letters, sparse punctuation, abbreviations (formerly occasions for bloody battles), are now accepted with only scattered rear-guard actions. Consider the following versions, first the original, with 66 words, and then the revision with 52 (20 per cent gone), a small matter in a short telegram, but important in a "normal" telegram of 4 pages, if about 260 words can be safely and happily dropped without loss of clarity or charm:

(ORIGINAL)

WE CALLED ON HEBISH AND KLANRENAAR OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY TODAY TO INFORM THEM OF THE POSITION CDA WOULD BE TAKING IN COUNCIL ON THE STIKKER FORMULA AS SET OUT IN YOUR REFTTEL. THEY COMMENTED THAT THE CDN DECISION WOULD CERTAINLY BE APPRECIATED BY THE GERMAN GOVT, AND ADDED THAT THE THREE CDN CONDITIONS WERE FULLY IN LINE WITH GERMAN VIEWS ON THE PROPOSED NATO DECISION.

(AS REVISED)

WE CALLED ON HEBISH AND KLANRENAAR OF FO TO INFORM THEM OF POSITION CDS WOULD TAKE IN COUNCIL ON STIKKER FORMULA AS IN REFTTEL. THEY COMMENTED THAT CDN DECISION WOULD BE APPRECIATED BY GERMAN GOVT ADDING THAT THE THREE CDN CONDITIONS WERE FULLY IN LINE WITH GERMAN VIEWS ON PROPOSED NATO DECISION.

(1) See Manual of Post Administration 1.3.3.6.4, particularly on "please". It has been carefully estimated that if "please send" could be dropped and "request" were substituted, from this alone there would be an annual saving of \$19,000.

(b) Abbreviations

(See Manual of Procedures 1.3.1.2.3 and Manual of Post Administration 1.3.2.4)

4. Although communicators are instructed to use the abbreviated forms, these should appear in the telegraphic text prepared for the operator by the Secretary or stenographer who types the telegram. The saving in money and time through the proper use of abbreviations is important; with our present traffic, each abbreviation saves about \$15,000 a year; the consistent use of approved and proposed abbreviations will effect an economy of about \$150,000 yearly without intolerable irritation, it is hoped, to the hardened telegram reader.

(c) First Paragraph Trouble

5. In common with nervous race-horses at the barrier, drafters of telegrams have occasional difficulty in getting off to a smooth start. One symptom of this difficulty is the repetition of the subject matter and circumstances already covered in the "Subject" heading, or an anxious pawing of the ground and snorting, as follows:

- (i) (Subject) ADDRESS BY PRIME MINISTER OF CONGO (KNSHA)
PRIME MINISTER CYRILLE ADOULA (CONGO (KNSHA))
DELIVERED TO UNGA FEB 2 AN ADDRESS
- (ii) (Subject) UN, KASHMIR AND GOA - PRESIDENTIAL NEWS CONFERENCE JAN 15
AT HIS NEWS CONFERENCE ON JAN 15 THE PRESIDENT WAS
ASKED, WITH REF TO INDIAN FAILURE TO HOLD FREE
ELECTIONS IN KASHMIR, AND ITS RESORT TO FORCE AGAINST
GOA, WHAT USA COULD DO
- (iii) (Subject) DE GAULLES ADDRESS FEB 5 - INTERNAL AFFAIRS
WE ARE SENDING YOU BY BAG FRENCH TEXT OF DE GAULLES
RADIO AND TV ADDRESS FEB 5
- (iv) (Subject) ADENAUER-DE GAULLE MTG: EUROPEAN INTEGRATION
WE HAD HOPED TO OBTAIN AN ACCOUNT OF THE MTG FROM
JANSEN, HEAD OF WEST I DIV, FOREIGN MINISTRY, WHO,
TOGETHER WITH CARSTENS, ACCOMPANIED THE CHANCELLOR
TO BADEN-BADEN AND SAT IN ON THE AFTERNOONS
DISCUSSIONS RELATING TO EUROPEAN INTEGRATION. JANSEN,
HOWEVER, LEFT THIS WEEKEND TO ATTEND THE FOUCHET CTTEE
MTG IN PARIS. IN HIS ABSENCE WE HAD A USEFUL TALK
WITH VOIGT

(d) Hitch-hiking Clauses

6. A wide-spread blemish in English prose is the unnecessary use of conjunctive clauses where participles alone are not only adequate but preferable. In ordinary prose this failing, although slovenly, is not

important since most casual prose contains a fair proportion of filler which no doubt is restful to the reader and author alike. In telegrams, however, this form of prolixity becomes expensive, appearing at least once in almost every telegram and in many telegrams repeatedly; some experts in this curious specialty are not infrequently able to get two examples of their skill into a single sentence. In the following exhibits, a few only of the many hundreds in recent telegrams, the otiose words are underlined:

(i)A BATTLE WHICH IS LIKELY TO BECOME A CENTRAL FEATURE OF THE INDIAN POLITICAL SCENE EARLIER THAN WE HAD EXPECTED

(ii) THEY WERE AWARE OF DAMAGE WHICH HAD BEEN DONE TO DUTCH BY INDONESIAN ATTEMPTS TO INFILTRATE NEW GUINEA WHICH HAD ALREADY TAKEN PLACE.

(e) Superlatives, Diminutives, Nice Gradations

7. Unlike a despatch which produces the exactly desired meaning by an exquisite choice of restrained superlatives, modest diminutives, and finely calculated gradations of emphasis through precise selection of adjectives, adverbs and explanatory parenthetical clauses, a good telegram is brutal. "SAW SUB SANK SAME", "NO", "YES", "AWAIT INSTRUCTIONS" - such telegrams often convey everything immediately needed; but this terseness, however desirable, is seldom appropriate to Departmental communications. This survey reveals, however, numerous examples of unsuccessful efforts to graduate or to define or to limit an over harsh or frail statement by a limited range of modifiers; the most popular are: VERY, MOST, A BIT, SOMEWHAT, BADLY, HIGHLY, FULLY, PRETTY, CONSIDERABLE, SOMETHING, RATHER, SIGNIFICANTLY, GREAT, GENERAL, MERELY, JUST A SHADE, ACTUALLY, and so on, most of them meaningless, and all of them inappropriate in telegrams. The words considered objectionable in the following phrases are underlined; readers are invited to consider whether these underlined words are appropriate, and whether they add precision to the difficult task of accurate communication:

.....THEY HAVE BEEN A BIT DISAPPOINTED; OUR COLLEAGUES SEEM SOMEWHAT HAPPIER; THEY HAVE BEEN VERY SKEPTICAL INDEED; UNLESS OF COURSE REALLY ENCOURAGING SIGNS COME FROM.....; WE ANXIOUSLY AWAIT A FIRM STATEMENT; WE BADLY NEED A DECISION; THIS IS AN AREA ABOUT WHICH PROGNOSIS IS A HIGHLY DANGEROUS TASK;MOVEMENT ABOUT THE COUNTRY IS DELAYED SOMEWHAT BUT BY NO MEANS FULLY IMPEDED (not closed?) ACCESS TO AIRPORT IS VERY STRICTLY CONTROLLED; DISCUSSIONS ARE PRETTY MEAGRE; THIS WAS RECEIVED WITH CONSIDERABLE SURPRISE; THIS MAY SEEM SOMEWHAT ACADEMIC BUT IT NEVERTHELESS MIGHT NEED TO BE ANSWERED FAIRLY QUICKLY;A VERY DETAILED BRIEF; THE FO WAS AT SOMETHING OF A LOSS TO EXPLAIN;DOUBTFUL WHETHER THIS HAS SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED CONFIDENCE; THEY WERE NOT IN A POSITION TO TELL ME ACTUALLY HOW MUCH WOULD BE NEEDED;THE FIRST OCCASION ON WHICH NASSER HAS ACTUALLY ADMITTED THAT THE PUBLIC

(Note: Actually is cherished in our telegrams; it occasionally seems to mean actuellement, but normally it appears to be a survivor, like but definitely, of the slang current ten years ago).

(f) Itself, Himself, Themselves

8. The extensive use of these intensifying pronouns is a new and unwelcome element in our telegrams; it is hoped that action will be taken to arrest the growth of this new weed. Our learned consultant surmises that there may be two parallel forces producing this phenomenon: the growing awareness in Canada of the French language in which lui-même, elle-même, eux-mêmes occur much more frequently than their English counterparts, and, as the second force, the Gaelic revival, (Is himself at home?). These surmises may be fanciful but, whatever the influence may be, it is already strong enough to produce many curiosities, of which a few examples follow:

...THESE INDIVIDUALS WILL TRY TO ASSUME FOR THEMSELVES SOME SORT OF REP CHARACTER;...TO AVOID ITS ASSEMBLY ITSELF BEING REGARDED AS AN INCIDENT; ...IF THERE WERE AN IMPASSE KOHLER HIMSELF THOUGHT SOME PROBING MIGHT ACTUALLY BE HELPFUL;JUDGEMENT WAS RENDERED ON A POINT OF LAW AND NOT ON THE SUBSTANCE OF THE CHARGES THEMSELVES;WHETHER OR NOT CANADA COULD TURN OVER THIS PAPER TO UNESCO ITSELF FOR ITS....FUND;ELECTORATE SHOULD SUPPORT KRIPALANI IN ORDER TO PRESERVE IDEALS OF CONGRESS PARTY ITSELF;

(g) Excessive Precision: Unflattering Presumption of Ignorance in Ottawa

9. This churlish section stems from a minor sense of injustice among officers in Ottawa who on occasion judge that their colleagues abroad are unnecessarily kind and helpful in providing information which cannot possibly be misunderstood even in Ottawa. A meeting for example is not put forward TO JAN 23 but TO YESTERDAY TUES JAN 23; MAUDLING does not speak in the HOUSE, but UPON HIS RETURN FROM WEST INDIES THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES MR. MAUDLING MADE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON FEB 26. The identity of Maudling is thus clearly established, and Ottawa readily apprehends that Maudling spoke not in a station house, a house of correction, a haunted house but in the HOUSE OF COMMONS where he belongs. Equally helpful clues are given for Brentano, THE FORMER GERMAN FOREIGN MINISTER, and for Mr. Sevigny, HON PIERRE SEVIGNY, ASSOCIATE MINISTER OF DND.

10. It may be useful for officers of the Department to bear in mind the perfect book review drafted by a small girl required to give an account of a volume on Penguins:

"This book contains more information on Penguins than I am interested in knowing about".

There are undoubtedly too many Penguins in our telegrams, as in the following, and in many other examples:

INDEED A MTG TOOK PLACE OUTSIDE COTONOU EARLIER THIS WEEK ATTENDED BY REPS OF GHANA TOGO DAHOMEY. GHANA DEL CONSISTED OF FOREIGN MINISTER MR. AKO ADJET, NANA NKETSIA PROTEM VICE CHANCELLOR OF UNIVERSITY OF GHANA AND CULTURAL ADVISER TO GOVT, AND MICHAEL F. DEI-ANAG OF AFRICAN AFFAIRS SECRETARIAT.

(h) Semi-literacy

11. Earlier sections of this study have been, it is hoped, urbane rather than harsh, and persuasive rather than peremptory. We are now, however, approaching jungle country where ranks must be closed and strict discipline maintained to deal with ADVISORS THAT WOULD BE IN A POSITION TO HELP and others WHO WOULD BE IN A POSITION TO LET US HAVE MORE INFORMATION NEXT WEEK. The information we may expect to pick up will be meagre and it must be regarded with suspicion unless preceded by the passwords WITH REGARD TO, AS REGARDS, WITH RESPECT TO, IN SO FAR AS, IN THIS SAME CONNECTION; there may be sibilant echoes from the darkness that FRANCE WAS AUTHORIZED FOR THE FIRST TWO YEARS TO SET ITS OWN COEFFICIENT IN RESPECT OF EGGS. We must not be surprised TO SEE A MATTER OF CONTROL TACKLED AT A VERY EARLY DATE, nor can we expect INSTRUCTIONS AS TO WHAT REPLY WE should give IN ANSWER TO A DIRECT QUESTION AS TO UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES X.... MIGHT CONSIDER so and so. We must be prepared to encounter natives who have come together FOR THE PURPOSE OF HAVING A RUN-DOWN. We must not forget that our objective is AN OVERALL PLAN FOR THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE and that we must get ASSURANCES CONCERNING OVERALL RETURNS TO FARMERS. We must remember that THERE ARE FOUR MAIN REASONS AS TO WHY we must push on, although ignorant AS TO HOW decisions at home were taken INSOFAR AS GROUND ACTION WAS CONCERNED. We shall soon have difficulty IN THE CASE OF MANY COMMODITIES although this may not be true IN THE CASE OF CANADIAN FERTILIZERS. It is reassuring to know that THEY WERE GIVING ATTENTION TO OUR STUDY IN ANY CASE. If a change in plan is necessary we must consider AS TO HOW we may take action IN SUCH A WAY AS TO HAVE THE AUTHORITIES INFORMED WITH REGARD TO THE PROPOSAL. IN THIS SAME CONNECTION IT IS POINTED OUT THAT we must complete our task AS SOON AS POSSIBLE ensuring AS BROAD AS POSSIBLE PARTICIPATION by the local population, leaving behind us a COALITION AS BALANCED AND STABLE AS POSSIBLE.

12. This mosaic, with the phrases in capitals lifted from their contexts, may appear unjust, but it does not give an unfair or distorted impression of our telegrams. In one telegram alone, WITH RESPECT TO appears fifteen times.

13. A special comment is justified for the "as soon as possible" blight, a parasite which has now found a host in too many of the adjectives and adverbs in our telegrams. It is not enough now to request a reply promptly; the reply must come AS PROMPTLY AS POSSIBLE. A coalition cannot be simply BALANCED AND STABLE; action must be taken TO SEE THAT THE COALITION IS AS BALANCED AND STABLE AS POSSIBLE. Underdeveloped countries are not urged to assume BROAD PARTICIPATION in economic reforms; they must assume AS BROAD AS POSSIBLE PARTICIPATION. What is the measure, and who is the judge of "the possible"?

14. This stylistic malady is now perhaps beyond cure; blights have already destroyed the Ottawa chestnut trees, and are now finishing off the elms, for lack of action in good time, (because therapeutic measures were not applied as soon as possible). Convalescence from this contagion may be long; in Ottawa, we shall be as patient as possible.

(i) Longwindedness (unclassified)

15. So far, eight arbitrary categories of verbosity have been established. There remains, however, a large but ill-defined mass of verbosity not readily classified. It does not seem fair that these massive sentences and paragraphs, sent from all parts of the world by telegraph, should pass unnoticed simply because they do not fall within our arbitrarily established groups. Much of this interesting material, however unsuited for telegraphic communication, has clearly been drafted at leisure and with care, even if the style is not infrequently marred by influences of "the ways and means" and "the real and apparent danger" schools. Unfortunately, within reasonable limits of economy and time, it will be possible to note only one of the scores of examples ready to hand.

16. It would be misleading to suggest that these heroic passages stem from a pleasure in verbosity for its own sake, or verbositas Acherontis gratia. Although, as indicated above, they have no precise literary characteristic in common, most of them share the quality that they were composed and dispatched with almost complete indifference to the reasonable restrictions which telegraphic communications for many reasons should impose. Again, no mission should feel hurt by the distinction of appearing here; the example which follows is unhappily typical of our general telegraphic practices:

5. THE GERMAN AND ITALIAN REPS SUPPORTED THE BELGIAN SUGGESTION THAT THE SEARCH BE CARRIED FURTHER BY THE SEC GEN FOR SATISFACTORY SOLUTIONS WHICH WOULD NOT RPT NOT INVOLVE THE PROLONGED INCONVENIENCE OF CONSTRUCTING A NEW WING. THE UK REP THOUGHT THAT THE CIVILIAN BUDGET CTTEE SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN AN EXTENSIVE INVESTIGATION ABOUT THE USE OF EXISTING SPACE IN THE BLDG. HIS AUTHORITIES WERE NOT RPT NOT SATISFIED WITH THE PROPOSED TEMPORARY SOLUTION WITH THE TURKISH DEL NOR RPT NOR WITH THE IDEA OF A NEW WING WHICH WOULD MEAN ONE YEAR OF INCONVENIENCE AND DISRUPTION TO THE BRITISH DEL. HE THOUGHT IT WAS TOO SOON TO HAVE GOVT VIEWS ON ONE SOLUTION AS AGAINST ANOTHER.

6. THE TURKISH REP INSISTED THAT HIS DEL HAD A PROBLEM OF NATO. HE SAID THAT SOLUTIONS TO THE GENERAL PROBLEM MIGHT TAKE TWO OR THREE YEARS AND THAT HIS AUTHORITIES WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO HAVE TO WAIT THAT LONG TO HAVE THE TURKISH DEL IN THE BLDG. HE HAD AUTHORITY TO ACCEPT THE SOLUTION PROPOSED IN PO/61/934 AND HE HAD ALREADY MET ALL THE CONDITIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF CONCERNING SECURITY AND OTHER MATTERS RELATED TO HOLDING MEETINGS IN THE LARGE COUNCIL CHAMBER. HE THEREFORE PRESSED FOR A SEPARATE DECISION ON A SOLUTION TO THE TURKISH PROBLEM.

7. THE BELGIAN REP REPLIED THAT THE TWO PROBLEMS WERE CONNECTED BECAUSE THE TEMPORARY SOLUTION WOULD NOT RPT NOT MEET THE REAL NEEDS OF THE TURKISH DEL. STIKKER SAID THAT IF IT WAS DECIDED TO BUILD A NEW WING, MANY PEOPLE WOULD HAVE TO MOVE OUT OF THEIR OFFICES AND IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO FIND A TEMPORARY SOLUTION FOR ALL CONCERNED. HE SAID IT WAS THEREFORE NECESSARY TO LOOK AT THE PROBLEM AS A WHOLE AND WHEN A DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN ABOUT A FINAL SOLUTION, THEN TO DECIDE ON A TEMPORARY SOLUTION. THE FRENCH REP SAID WITH ALL RESPECT THAT IT WAS PARTLY THE FAULT OF THE TURKISH DEL IF IT WAS NOT RPT NOT IN THE BLDG BECAUSE IT HAD NOT RPT NOT WANTED TO BE INCLUDED AT THE OUTSET. AS MATTERS NOW STOOD, THE TURKISH DEL DID HAVE OFFICE SPACE (ALTHOUGH NOT RPT NOT IN THE BLDG) WHEREAS OFFICERS IN THE NEWLY CREATED POSITIONS SUCH AS THE 20 GETIS POSTS WOULD HAVE NO RPT NO SPACE AT ALL UNLESS A TEMPORARY SOLUTION WERE FOUND.

PROPOSED REMEDIAL MEASURES

CURRENT PRACTICES

17. All members of the Department responsible for drafting and editing telegrams will, it is hoped, give thought to certain of our current practices outlined in paragraphs 1 - 16 above. This meditation could produce the following results, all considered desirable, both in economy and in good sense:

- (a) most little words (articles, prepositions, conjunctions) can be omitted.
- (b) abbreviations will be consistently used.
- (c) telegrams will begin without nervous preliminaries.
- (d) an unnecessary clause will often be pruned to one sturdy participle.
- (e) sparing use will be made of superlatives, diminutives and meaningless gradations.
- (f) a second look will be taken at the uses of itself, himself, themselves.
- (g) excessive precision in times, dates and circumstances will disappear; officers may properly assume that their colleagues are reasonably familiar with current events.
- (h) it may not be necessary to impose a ban on the horrors in illiteracy and syntax now current, partially illustrated in paragraphs 11 - 14 above.

- (i) there may emerge an alertness and sensitivity to longwindedness, whether detailed or wholesale.

Ottawa - Outgoing Telegrams

18. A telegram of consequence is usually drafted by a junior officer as yet uncontaminated by departmental prose, and still impressed by the cost of the rare telegrams and cables he has sent at his own expense; his draft is revised by the second in command or Head of Division, and often is still to be approved or revised in the office of the Under-Secretary, or, finally, by the Minister - a formidable gauntlet, unlikely, one would think, to leave any telegram unscathed; one would be wrong.

19. In addition to normal sampling, all our outgoing telegrams over three successive days were reviewed. All our old friends were there, sleek and prosperous: NOT YET IN A POSITION TO; UNMISTAKABLY CLEAR; The Hitch-hiking Clauses, The Little Words, The Non-abbreviations, IN VERY NEAR FUTURE; AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, and relatives; AS TO WHERE, and family; AT YOUR EARLIEST CONVENIENCE; MENTIONED IN OUR LETTER UNDER REFERENCE; First Paragraph Trouble; FOR YOUR FURTHER INFORMATION...; MOST SYMPATHETIC CONSIDERATION; AS REGARDS, WITH REGARD TO, the entire clan was there to welcome the timid newcomer: FOR CONVENIENCE SAKE PLEASE CONFIRM...

20. Apart from these blemishes, outgoing telegrams display a generous verbosity, much of it expensive since sent commercially to remote Book Cypher Posts, some of it also vexatious to our colleagues abroad, as in these two samples:

(a)
(Original)

Subject: APPOINTMENT OF AMBASSADOR OF DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
TO CANADA.

THIS TO LET YOU KNOW THAT AGREEMENT HAS BEEN
GRANTED TO APPOINTMENT OF ALBERTO RINCON.
DOMINICAN EMBASSY HERE HAS BEEN INFORMED.

(Cost: \$5.05)

(Proposed Revision)

Subject: AMBASSADOR

AGREEMENT GRANTED RINCON EMBASSY INFORMED

(Cost: \$0.99)

(b)
(Original)

FOR YOUR INFORMATION THE FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF A MESSAGE RECEIVED BY THE MINISTER FROM THE RT. HON. DUNCAN SANDYS, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR COMMONWEALTH RELATIONS. THIS MESSAGE WAS DELIVERED TO MR. GREEN BY LORD AMORY TODAY AND FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT:

(sent OPIMMED CONFD to five posts. Cost: not-computable)

(Proposed Revision)

FOLLOWING MESSAGE FROM SANDYS TO MINISTER DELIVERED TODAY BY AMORY:

(Cost: 23% of not-computable)

21. The intensive survey of all outgoing messages over a three-day period revealed no error, infelicity or misfortune in drafting which could not have been stopped or amended within the Division.

Ottawa - Incoming Telegrams

22. Telegrams from abroad are a responsibility of the Heads of Mission, and, ideally, all malpractices should be avoided or excised at the source. Our Heads of Mission, however, hold widely disparate convictions, stemming from their varied experience, education, judgment and taste; they are normally at odds, in some measure, with Ottawa; and their assessments of malpractice and virtue, as expressed or implied in this survey, will not be unanimous or even general. The Septuagint was a non-recurring miracle.

23. This survey is not concerned with technical matters, but with the content and style of messages; and on this theme it should conclude. In brief, the style of any literary composition is related to the medium of communication. The epigram, on whatever subject, still reveals its origin - an epitaph to be carved in stone; its virtues are brevity, precision and grace. The styles of Marcel Proust or Henry James, however admirably designed for their authors' intentions, are ill-suited for a newspaper; many of the sciences have developed specialized methods of communication not intelligible to the layman; electronic computers respond only to the stimulus of tapes elaborately and accurately prepared; and so on. The virtues of communications systems are speed, accuracy and security, when these are essential to the messages conveyed. It may therefore follow that if diplomatic business is to benefit from new techniques in communications, its content and style must be disciplined to the demands of the new media. To those dismayed by such a prospect, it may be reassuring to bear

in mind that for other purposes the quill pen, the silver sand-box, the stiff parchment and the blackened lamp are still with us, a little dusty perhaps, but never obsolete and never in a hurry.

ANNEX "B"

Words and phrases appearing on this list are widely used in the department; most of them could be happily abandoned. They are trite or illiterate or vulgar and some of them are all three.

Overall. The word is overworked, usually unnecessary and often quite silly. Consider overall target, overall picture, overall plan, overall thinking, overall purpose, and even overall gross national product, and overall contributions to the Community Chest. This word should be banned except in its proper use, for example, in reference to the overall length of a ship (as distinct from the water-line length).

Consensus of opinion. A consensus is a sharing of opinion, so that, in this popular phrase, we share an opinion of opinion, analogous to the River Rio Grande.

Psychological moment. This is an illiterate and ignorant misunderstanding of a phrase invented by Nietzsche in a long treatise on poetic inspiration, which he attributed to the thrust or the urge or the momentum of the soul. (Psychologisches momentum) To use this phrase in reference to something which happens opportunely as, for example, the arrival of a passing wrecking-truck three minutes after your car has gone into a ditch, is wrong. However fortunate this coincidence might be, there is nothing psychological about it.

In many cases. This phrase is much overworked, occasionally with ludicrous effect, "We have already had many cases of Canadian girls arriving with improper identification documents"; "In many cases the film board has been able to establish commercial outlets". It would be better to write "often" or "frequently". Cognate with this is the widespread use of "in the case of". To write, "In the case of Britain, unemployment is certain to increase", is inferior to "As for Britain.....".

By the same token. This seems to be some kind of filler, though what it means is obscure.

With regard to; in respect of; with respect to; as to whether; as to why; as to how. These are cumbersome, if not illiterate phrases, and can readily be avoided by redrafting. A sentence beginning, for example, "The question arises as to why...." leads in a long sentence straight to a hopeless syntactical wilderness.

Enclosed herewith; attached hereto. The herewith and the hereto are otiose, and should be dropped.

Under immediate reference. Since on our message and numbered letter forms a space is provided for Reference, there does not seem much sense in beginning a telegram "Your telegram under immediate reference".

The Undersigned. This seems to be used fairly widely by writers who probably once were told that they should not begin a sentence with the word "I". They were misinformed.

We shall not fail to let you know. This is a piece of unnecessary pomposity.

Presently. Presently does not mean "at present".

In this same connection. This is endemic in the department, and like "by the same token" (above), appears to be simply filler. It appears often in telegrams, and it is grievous to receive this useless phrase, particularly, on occasion, at 91 cents a word.

Hopefully. This latest blight must disappear at once from departmental correspondence, unless it is properly attached to the subject of a sentence. We can face the future hopefully, but it is complete rubbish to write "Hopefully, the postal strike will be over soon". See Follett Modern American Usage

At your earliest convenience; as soon as possible; as early as possible. The first of these phrases seems peremptory and insulting and, like the two other phrases, is meaningless. In our work we should use something like "Reply needed before 10 AM August 15".

Significant. Significant is not a synonym for important. To write "There has been a significant rise in the cost of living" is improper unless it is associated with something likely to follow, such as increased strikes. To write "There has been a significant increase in crime" is to overwork this word, used far too frequently as a packhorse, instead of any one of the many correct options, such as disturbing, important, very great. Those who organized this Seminar have made a timely, or an original, or a valuable, or an

unprecedented contribution to the department; but not a significant contribution. Significant of what?

It would be tedious to continue this process of annotation, but it is suggested that members of the department give second thoughts in their drafting of telegrams and letters before using the following:

Highlights and highlight; in a position to; image; posture; stance; in the very near future; for your information; most sympathetic consideration; irregardless; in the last (or final) analysis; we are pleased to advise you; represents; key-note; involve; prior; prior to; appropriate; by means of; whereby; such (this or these is usually preferable); in such case; by reason of; individuals; so as to; in order that; save (for "except"); dynamic; **peruse; deem.**

Supplementary Note

Many members of the department need to be reminded that "loan" is a noun and "lend" is a verb. "He loaned me \$10 when I was broke at the Woodbine" is suitable at the Woodbine, but not in the department; and a youngster may ask "Can I have the lend of the scissors". Unless at the Woodbine, or in talking with children, writers should use loan and lend conventionally.¹ "Imply" and "infer" should also be used properly; and there is a distinction worth retaining between "farther" and "further". Members of the department should not abandon the struggle to retain the separate identities of "disinterested" and "uninterested", and they should know also the distinction between "comprise" and "include".

- (1) A foot-note may be useful here for those unable or unwilling to claim Toronto as their birth-place. The woodbine is a race-track near Toronto. Whether the business practices of the Woodbine are identical with or only similar to those of the Toronto Stock Exchange is a disputed point. There seems, however, to be unanimity that the end result (or the overall result, as preferred in the department) is usually disastrous.



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Observations in the English prose

clear thinking and plain words

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