

GREENWOOD GRAMMAR

DOUGLAS GREENWOOD

Barrie, Ontario, Canada

I don't know whether these (mostly) four-line verses of rhymed couplets deserve to be called recreational linguistics – but it has been fun composing them! There are many more figures of speech which could have been similarly treated; perhaps other **Word Ways** readers would care to try. The quatrains have the named figure of speech built in as an example; I hope the additional comments don't belabor the point too much. My thanks to the editor for improvements on some of the verses.

Walking down the road one day,
A motor car got in my way.
I said, "You dangling participle!
How dare you ambulate and tipple!"

Most of us know about dangling participle modifiers, I suppose, and most of them have an -ING suffix. But there are others. We all know "Sitting on a fence, a bee stung me." But I like the less-obvious dangler about our friend, the bee: "Heavy with honey, it was easy to dodge the bee." (Of course, this makes sense if you are carrying a two-legged honey in your arms!)

When you want to boldly split
A jolly old infinitive,
Do you question (just a bit)
Will Mr. Fowler let you live?

Oh, antecedents worry me:
"He loves his brother and his wife."
I wonder – can it really be
That he lives a double life?

There are some atrocious examples in newspapers: "He came at him with a knife and it was lucky he was able to see him until he got away."

Once I made this proposition
To a passing preposition:
"Could you with me put up?" I cried.
"I'll up with you just put," she sighed.

We all remember Winston Churchill's famous comment "This is the sort of grammar up with which I will not put."

The anti-climax that I met
Was fond of sex, both hot and wet;
She said I'd taken her in sin
And also scratched her with a pin.

The one I like most reads: "He lost his wife, his children, and his watch - all at one fell swoop."

Litotes, why are you so humble?
 "Not bad," you're often heard to mumble,
 When, in truth, you know your biz -
 Your figure's absolutely wiz.

Fowler defines the rhetorical *litotes* as "frugality". Perhaps the Englishman's way of meaning "terrific" when he says "not bad" could justify our tagging litotes as English rhetoric.

Syllepsis, you're a paragon.
 You use one word that, later on,
 Seems not quite right to fit the part:
 "She lost her necklace and her heart."

I also like Fowler's example: "Miss Bolo went home in a flood of tears and a sedan chair."

Zeugma, on you teachers jump;
 "See smith with fire and bellows pump."
 Another word will make it right:
 A fire you do not pump - you fight.

Zeugma is yoked with syllepsis: "Two figures distinguished by scholars but confused in popular use." Fowler clarifies: "What is common to both figures is that a single word is in relations that seem to be but are not the same with a pair of others ... syllepsis is correct grammatically ... in zeugma the single word cannot be applied to the word correctly." His delightful example: "Kill the boys and the luggage!" Destroy the luggage, please!

We want wine and women wry,
 Please don't peer or peep or pry,
 Judge us gently, jury just,
 Alliteration loves low lust.

How alliterative are the poets! "I slip, I slide, I gloom, I glance..." (from Lord Tennyson's "The Brook").

"Deprived of basic social rights"
 Defines a word that leads to fights;
 A euphemism I abhor
 Is "underprivileged" for "poor".

Fowler calls **euphemism** a literary word ("decorous speech"), but I still don't like such words as "passed away" for died. Actually, I don't even care much for "gay" - if you are "out", why hide behind an euphemism?

I myself in person am a rank tautologist;
 In each and every one of you excessive words exist.
 Most pleonasm's reoccur, appear again once more;
 Give each and every one of them the gate, the port,
 the door!

Fowler has a lot to say about words that mean more or less the same thing; one of the pleonasm's I cringe at is "each and

every one."

Music,
 Modern? Classic?
 Superfragilistic?
 It's so hypercatalectic;
 Every line we add another metric
 Foot so now we get an Alexandrine 'roic.

My challenge was to go in rhymed lines from two- to six-foot iambic lines. Fowler points out that a heroic ('roic) line is an iambic hexameter in Greek and Latin verse, but in English it is an iambic pentameter.

Oh, fragrant stench, pork sweet and sour,
 An oxymoron tour de force!
 We grip our chopsticks, bravely cower,
 And, starving, eat another course.

Actually, **oxymoron** derives from "sharp-dull" - or vice versa, of course. Dimwit!

My dear Spill Wooner, foo are runny;
 You lake me maff and tit my splummy.
 And this, I know, is not right quite,
 For Spoonersims should round sight.

That is to say, Spoonerisms should open our eyes wide at this humorous wit. My forthcoming book, Who's Buried Where in England in which Dr. Spooner's grave location appears, is to be advertised in a series of teaser lines such as Who's Worried Bare.

Assonance, your lazy song,
 Croons on in drowsy vowels long,
 As if some soporific spell
 Enforced us on your words to dwell.

Zzz ... zzz ... zzz. Assonance generally appertains to prosody, but some political speeches I have heard ...

If you don't like his speaking out,
 The gerund's what it's all about.
 If you don't like him speaking out,
 It's he himself you hate (the lout!).

The gerund is a "verb equipped for noun work," Fowler says (and says and says!) but I think my quatrain says it all.

Post hoc ergo propter hoc
 (Logic for the common bloke).
 The sun shone bright, the market fell.
 When there's sun, the bears do well.

A term in logic, Fowler says. His example: on Sunday we prayed for rain, on Monday it rained, therefore the prayers caused the rain. Not good logic, but point taken.

Oratio obliqua (speech that's indirect):
 "I support the church," he says. The Times, with

due respect,
 Reports he gives the church support (or words to
 that effect).

It's called "bent speech" by hoi polloi (I find it quite
 suspect).

Oratio recta equals "I support the church", i.e., straight speech
 as spoken, Mr. Fowler would explain.

THE OXFORD COMPANION TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

This book, edited by Tom McArthur, is Oxford's reply to The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language (reviewed in November 1991). Published by Oxford University Press in 1992 for \$45, it is a massive (1184-page) overview of the English language, arranged in an alphabetical series of 3500+ entries ranging from a line or two to essays of several pages. Rather than simply being a dictionary, this book attempts to supply the reader with a logical structure linking the basic entries: each one has cross-references to related entries, and is classified into one or more of a number of "themes" (geography [subdivided into several regions], history, biography, name, literature, style, education, grammar, writing, speech, word, reference, language, variety [dialects], usage, media, and technology). As the Cambridge work did, Oxford views language as an intellectual discipline embedded in a wider culture, and tries to show the many connections to it.

Logology, not surprisingly, occupies only a small part of the corpus (most of the relevant entries being written by Tony Augarde, author of The Oxford Guide to Word Games). The main entry is Word Game (under the theme of Word) which lists forty cross-references of which the most relevant are Acrostic, Anagram, Beheadment & Curtailment, Lipogram, Long Word, Palindrome, Pangram, Rebus, Reversal, Word-Square, and Doublet. There are a number of poetry-oriented cross-references such as Bouts-Rimes, Alliteration, Assonance, Concrete Poetry, Macaronic, Nonsense Verse and Onomatopoeia. There are several parlor games (Charade, Etymorphs, Call My Bluff) as well as Scrabble and Crossword Puzzle. The book has a strongly British flavor, although American developments are not neglected (for example, it was good to see American lexicographers such as Allen Walker Read and Lawrence Urdang included). No book such as this is perfect, but, as Samuel Johnson said in 1755, "...if our language is not here fully displayed, I have only failed in an attempt which no human powers have hitherto completed."