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**ON WORDS, PHRASES AND PRONUNCIATION FOR FORMING AND
REFINING YOUR ETIQUETTE**

FROM THE BOOK OF ETIQUETTE BY EMILY POST, 1922

**ETIQUETTE
IN SOCIETY, IN BUSINESS, IN POLITICS
AND AT HOME
BY
EMILY POST**

CHAPTER VIII

WORDS, PHRASES AND PRONUNCIATION

PHRASES AVOIDED IN GOOD SOCIETY

It is difficult to explain why well-bred people avoid certain words and expressions that are admitted by etymology and grammar. So it must be merely stated that they have and undoubtedly always will avoid them. Moreover, this choice of expression is not set forth in any printed guide or book on English, though it is followed in all literature.

To liken Best Society to a fraternity, with the avoidance of certain seemingly unimportant words as the sign of recognition, is not a fantastic simile. People of the fashionable world invariably use certain expressions and instinctively avoid others; therefore when a stranger uses an "avoided" one he proclaims that he "does not belong," exactly as a pretended Freemason proclaims himself an "outsider" by giving the wrong "grip"—or whatever it is by which Brother Masons recognize one another.

People of position are people of position the world over—and by their speech are most readily known. Appearance on the other hand often passes muster. A "show-girl" may be lovely to look at as she stands in a seemingly unstudied position and in perfect clothes. But let her say "My Gawd!" or "Wouldn't that jar you!" and where is her loveliness then?

And yet, and this is the difficult part of the subject to make clear, the most vulgar slang like that quoted above, is scarcely worse than the attempted elegance which those unused to good society imagine to be the evidence of cultivation.

People who say "I come," and "I seen it," and "I done it" prove by their lack of grammar that they had little education in their

youth. Unfortunate, very; but they may at the same time be brilliant, exceptional characters, loved by everyone who knows them, because they are what they seem and nothing else. But the caricature "lady" with the comic picture "society manner" who says "Pardon *me*" and talks of "retiring," and "residing," and "desiring," and "being acquainted with," and "attending" this and that with "her escort," and curls her little finger over the handle of her teacup, and prates of "culture," does not belong to Best Society, and *never* will! The offense of pretentiousness is committed oftener perhaps by women than by men, who are usually more natural and direct. A genuine, sincere, kindly American man—or woman—can go anywhere and be welcomed by everyone, provided of course, that he is a man of ability and intellect. One finds him all over the world, neither aping the manners of others nor treading on the sensibilities of those less fortunate than himself.

Occasionally too, there appears in Best Society a provincial in whose conversation is perceptible the influence of much reading of the Bible. Such are seldom if ever stilted or pompous or long-worded, but are invariably distinguished for the simplicity and dignity of their English.

There is no better way to cultivate taste in words, than by constantly reading the best English. None of the words and expressions which are taboo in good society will be found in books of proved literary standing. But it must not be forgotten that there can be a vast difference between literary standing and popularity, and that many of the "best sellers" have no literary merit whatsoever.

To be able to separate best English from merely good English needs a long process of special education, but to recognize bad English one need merely skim through a page of a book, and if a single expression in the left-hand column following can be found (unless purposely quoted in illustration of vulgarity) it is quite certain that the author neither writes best English nor belongs to Best Society.

NEVER SAY:

CORRECT FORM:

In our residence we retire
early (or arise)

At our house we go to bed early (or get up)

I desire to purchase

I should like to buy

Make you acquainted with	(See Introductions)
Pardon <i>me!</i>	I beg your pardon. Or, Excuse me! Or, sorry!
Lovely food	Good food
Elegant home	Beautiful house—or place
A stylish dresser	She dresses well, or she wears lovely clothes
Charmed! or Pleased to meet you!	How do you do!
Attended	Went to
I trust I am not trespassing	I hope I am not in the way (unless trespassing on private property is actually meant)
Request (meaning ask)	Used only in the third person in formal written invitations.
Will you accord me permission?	Will you let me? or May I?
Permit me to assist you	Let me help you
Brainy	Brilliant or clever
I presume	I suppose
Tendered him a banquet	Gave him a dinner
Converse	Talk
Partook of liquid refreshment	Had something to drink
Perform ablutions	Wash
A song entitled	Called (proper if used in legal sense)
I will ascertain	I will find out
Residence or mansion	House, or big house
In the home	In some one's house or At home
Phone, photo, auto	Telephone, photograph, automobile

"Tintinnabulary summons," meaning bell, and "Bovine continuation," meaning cow's tail, are more amusing than offensive, but they illustrate the theory of bad style that is pretentious.

As examples of the very worst offenses that can be committed, the following are offered:

"Pray, accept my thanks for the flattering ovation you have tendered me."

"Yes," says the preposterous bride, "I am the recipient of many admired and highly prized gifts."

"Will you permit me to recall myself to you?"

Speaking of bridesmaids as "pretty servitors," "dispensing hospitality," asking any one to "step this way."

Many other expressions are provincial and one who seeks purity of speech should, if possible, avoid them, but as "offenses" they are minor:

Reckon, guess, calculate, or figure, meaning think.

Allow, meaning agree.

Folks, meaning family.

Cute, meaning pretty or winsome.

Well, I declare! 'Pon my word!

Box party, meaning sitting in a box at the theater.

Visiting with, meaning talking to.

There are certain words which have been singled out and misused by the indiscriminating until their value is destroyed. Long ago "elegant" was turned from a word denoting the essence of refinement and beauty, into gaudy trumpery. "Refined" is on the verge. But the pariah of the language is culture! A word rarely used by those who truly possess it, but so constantly misused by those who understand nothing of its meaning, that it is becoming a synonym for vulgarity and imitation. To speak of the proper use of a finger bowl or the ability to introduce two people without a blunder as being "evidence of culture of the highest degree" is precisely as though evidence of highest education were claimed for who ever can do sums in addition, and read words of one syllable. Culture in its true meaning is widest possible education, *plus* especial refinement and taste.

The fact that slang is apt and forceful makes its use irresistibly tempting. Coarse or profane slang is beside the mark, but "flivver," "taxi," the "movies," "deadly" (meaning dull),

"feeling fit," "feeling blue," "grafter," a "fake," "grouch," "hunch" and "right o!" are typical of words that it would make our spoken language stilted to exclude.

All colloquial expressions are little foxes that spoil the grapes of perfect diction, but they are very little foxes; it is the false elegance of stupid pretentiousness that is an annihilating blight which destroys root and vine.

In the choice of words, we can hardly find a better guide than the lines of Alexander Pope:

"In words, as fashions, the same rule will hold;
Alike fantastic, if too new, or old:
Be not the first by whom the new are tried,
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside."

PRONUNCIATION

Traits of pronunciation which are typical of whole sections of the country, or accents inherited from European parents must not be confused with crude pronunciations that have their origin in illiteracy. A gentleman of Irish blood may have a brogue as rich as plum cake, or another's accent be soft Southern or flat New England, or rolling Western; and to each of these the utterance of the others may sound too flat, too soft, too harsh, too refined, or drawled, or clipped short, but not uncultivated.

To a New York ear, which ought to be fairly unbiased since the New York accent is a composite of all accents, English women chirrup and twitter. But the beautifully modulated, clear-clipped enunciation of a cultivated Englishman, one who can move his jaws and not swallow his words whole, comes as near to perfection in English as the diction of the Comédie Française comes to perfection in French.

The Boston accent is very crisp and in places suggestive of the best English but the vowels are so curiously flattened that the speech has a saltless effect. There is no rhyming word as flat as the way they say "heart"—"haht." And "bone" and "coat"—"bawn," "cawt," to rhyme with awe!

Then South, there is too much salt—rather too much sugar. Every one's mouth seems full of it, with "I" turned to "ah" and every staccato a drawl. But the voices are full of sweetness and music unknown north of the Potomac.

The Pennsylvania burr is perhaps the mother of the Western one. It is strong enough to have mothered all the r's in the wor-r-

rd! Philadelphia's "haow" and "caow" for "how" and "cow," and "me" for "my" is quite as bad as the "water-r" and "thot" of the West.

N'Yawk is supposed to say "yeh" and "Omurica" and "Toosdeh," and "puddin'." Probably five per cent. of it does, but as a whole it has no accent, since it is a composite of all in one.

In best New York society there is perhaps a generally accepted pronunciation which seems chiefly an elimination of the accents of other sections. Probably that is what all people think of their own pronunciation. Or do they not know, whether their inflection is right or wrong? Nothing should be simpler to determine. If they pronounce according to a standard dictionary, they are correct; if they don't, they have an "accent" or are ignorant; it is for them to determine which. Such differences as between saying wash or wawsh, advertisement or *advertisement* are of small importance. But no one who makes the least pretence of being a person of education says: kep for kept, genelmun or gempmun or laydee, vawde-vil, or eye-talian.

HOW TO CULTIVATE AN AGREEABLE SPEECH

First of all, remember that while affectation is odious, crudeness must be overcome. A low voice is always pleasing, not whispered or murmured, but low in pitch. Do not talk at the top of your head, nor at the top of your lungs. Do not slur whole sentences together; on the other hand, do not pronounce as though each syllable were a separate tongue and lip exercise.

As a nation we do not talk so much too fast, as too loud. Tens of thousands twang and slur and shout and burr! Many of us drawl and many others of us race tongues and breath at full speed, but, as already said, the speed of our speech does not matter so much. Pitch of voice matters very much and so does pronunciation—enunciation is not so essential—except to one who speaks in public.

Enunciation means the articulation of whatever you have to say distinctly and clearly. Pronunciation is the proper sounding of consonants, vowels and the accentuation of each syllable.

There is no better way to cultivate a perfect pronunciation; apart from association with cultivated people, than by getting a small pronouncing dictionary of words in ordinary use, and reading it word by word, marking and studying any that you use frequently and mispronounce. When you know them, then read

any book at random slowly aloud to yourself, very carefully pronouncing each word. The consciousness of this exercise may make you stilted in conversation at first, but by and by the "sense" or "impulse" to speak correctly will come.

This is a method that has been followed by many men handicapped in youth through lack of education, who have become prominent in public life, and by many women, who likewise handicapped by circumstances, have not only made possible a creditable position for themselves, but have then given their children the inestimable advantage of learning their mother tongue correctly at their mother's knee.

EMILY POST

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