

# ESSAYS AND STUDIES

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## VII

### MODES OF MEANING

by J. R. FIRTH

THE study of meaning is a permanent interest of scholarship. It has been pursued in all the languages of the major civilizations and in ancient times especially in Sanskrit, Greek and Latin, including the Latin of the Medieval Scholastics—Duns Scotus, Thomas of Erfurt. In English the obvious phrase “the meaning of meaning” is well-known as the title of a work on the definition of knowledge, a matter which is not under examination in the present essay. There are many other ways of applying the word “meaning” in English, including the usages of logicians, psychologists, sociologists, mathematicians and lexicographers. The use of the word “meaning” is subject to the general rule that each word when used in a new context is a new word.<sup>1</sup> The disciplines and techniques are those of general linguistics which are designed for empirical analysis and do not necessarily have a point of departure in other disciplines such as biology, psychology, literary criticism or in a school of metaphysics. The constructs or schemata of linguistics enable us to handle isolates that may be called language events. These systematic constructs are neither immanent nor transcendent, but just language turned back on itself. The present essay is an attempt to sketch the framework of a language of description in English about English for those who use English, to illustrate what I understand by linguistic analysis, and especially to show the dangers of an over-facile superficial use of the word *stylistics*, without an adequate logical syntax or even without considering the essential pre-requisites of linguistics. The disciplines and techniques of linguistics are directed to assist us in making statements of meaning. Indeed the main concern of descriptive linguistics is to make statements of meaning.<sup>2</sup>

Every scientific worker must mark out his field in accordance with the resources of his disciplines and techniques and develop them in the

<sup>1</sup> For further contexts see my “Personality and Language in Society” in *The Sociological Review*, vol. XLII, Section II, Year 1950, pp. 6, 8–14; and my “Technique of Semantics”, *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 1935.

<sup>2</sup> See “Personality and Language in Society” (as in previous note).

handling of his chosen material. The linguist studies the speaking person in the social process. It has been said<sup>1</sup> that two persons taking part in the continuity of repetitions in the social process offer material for most branches of linguistics in making statements of meaning. The linguist deals with persons habitually maintaining specific forms of speech or writing which can be referred to dialects or languages operating in close or open social groups.<sup>1</sup>

The study of linguistic institutions is thus more specific and positive and on the whole less speculative than the sociological study of societies. Sociologists and social anthropologists are much bolder than linguists in what they find it possible to state in general human terms. To what lengths sociological abstraction can be extended is well exemplified in Pareto's theory of residues and derivations.<sup>2</sup>

There are, however, indications that students of human biology, neurology, acoustics and electrical communications are beginning to converge on certain aspects of man as a speaking animal. It is extremely difficult at present to get any detailed picture of the general physiology of utterance which must comprise the whole of the respiratory tract and all the relevant musculature and innervation and, moreover, the processes of the nervous system and especially of the brain. Acousticians are limited to a small fraction of the bodily energy (probably less than twenty per cent) given to speaking. Any sort of measurement or assessment of speech energy by acoustics principally affects the hearing, and, as the Vedanta philosophy would remind us, mention of the hearing implies the

<sup>1</sup> The techniques of linguistics have not been developed to deal with language in general human terms. De Saussure stated his opinion that "le langage", that is, language in its most general sense, was *inconnaissable*. What he really meant was that "linguistique" as he knew it in the early years of this century had little or nothing technical to say of language in general human terms. That is still true. What is commonly called general phonetics merely codifies the results of detailed study of personal and social dialects. There are no acceptable definitions of word, sound or syllable in general human terms. Neither are the various phoneme concepts of universal application to human speech in general, whatever that might mean. Theories of sound symbolism in general human terms are nowhere taken seriously. Phonology, too, in spite of the labours of the Prague School and its followers, is exemplified by systematic studies of particular languages. General or universal grammar has no meaning in any of the recognized branches. Semantics is concerned with studies of the meaning and changes of meaning of specific language forms.

NB: The term "General Semantics" was used by the late Alfred Korzybski for a kind of linguistic therapy quite unrelated to technical linguistics.

<sup>2</sup> Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society*, 4 vols., Jonathan Cape, London, 1935; see especially III, 990-1119.

hearer of the hearing of the heard. What is the energy of listening? Of comprehension? Of aesthetic enjoyment? Besides, a man finds nothing worth listening to, if he cannot speak to himself. It is easier to analyse what happens in the air when we listen, than what goes on in the body when we speak.

If I am to use the word "language" without article to describe a main characteristic in general human terms, it could be linked with a general physiology of utterance (if one existed) and of its perception and also with the urges and drives in our human nature which impel us to make use of sounds, gestures, signs and symbols. The only mode of meaning assignable to language in this most general sense might be vaguely called communicativeness or the word *vox* might be used for it. It may eventually be shown on general musical grounds that human language has a phonetic and phonological mode of meaning. But at present not even music itself can be said to have a general mode of meaning. If mathematics may be said to have general modes of meaning, we are still lacking a general calculus of language.

Let us therefore apply the term linguistics to those disciplines and techniques which deal with institutionalized languages or dialects as such. A statement of the meaning of an isolate of any of these cannot be achieved at one fell swoop by one analysis at one level. Having made the first abstraction by suitably isolating a piece of "text" or part of the social process of speaking for a listener or of writing for a reader, the suggested procedure for dealing with meaning is its dispersion into modes, rather like the dispersion of light of mixed wave-lengths into a spectrum. First, there is the verbal process in the context of situation.<sup>1</sup> Social and personal commentary is especially relevant at this level. The technique of syntax is concerned with the word process in the sentence. Phonology states the phonematic and prosodic processes within the word and sentence, regarding them as a mode of meaning. The phonetician links all this with the processes and features of utterance. Such processes are characteristic of persons, of social groups, even of nations. Moreover, the general feature of voice quality is part of the phonetic mode of meaning of an English boy, a Frenchman or a lady from New York. Surely it is part of the meaning of an American to sound like one.

Even in a dictionary, the lexical<sup>2</sup> meaning of any given word is

<sup>1</sup> See my "Personality and Language in Society", and *Tongues of Men*, Watts & Co., London, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> See *New English Dictionary*, vol. I, Preface, pp. xxvii-xxxiv.

achieved by multiple statements of meaning at different levels. First, at the orthographic level the group of letters, *peer*, is distinguished from the group *pier*, and both of these from *pear*, *pair*, and *pare*. Next by means of some kind of phonetic notation the pronunciation is stated, and new identities arise. At least two grammatical designations are possible for *peer*, noun substantive or verb, and by making such statements at the grammatical level a further component of meaning is made explicit. Formal and etymological meaning may be added, together with social indications of usage, such as *colloquial*, *slang*, *nautical*, *vulgar*, *poetical*.

To make statements of meaning in terms of linguistics, we may accept the language event as a whole and then deal with it at various levels, sometimes in a descending order, beginning with social context and proceeding through syntax and vocabulary to phonology and even phonetics, and at other times in the opposite order, which will be adopted here since the main purpose is the exposition of linguistics as a discipline and technique for the statement of meanings without reference to such dualisms and dichotomies as word and idea, overt expressions and covert concepts, language and thought, subject and object. In doing this I must not be taken to exclude the concept of mind,<sup>1</sup> or to imply an embracing of materialism to avoid a foolish bogey of mentalism.

At the phonetic level no case has yet been made out for systematic sound symbolism or onomatopoeia in general human terms.<sup>2</sup> I have myself made experiments with speakers of many languages belonging to all the principal races and have found, with Koehler, evidence of some correlation of sounds with shapes (sense of feeling them or of drawing them).<sup>3</sup> The experiment consisted in drawing two shapes in line, one of a round bellying shape, "clumpy", and the other a sharp angular zig-zag of points prickling in all directions. Two words were then offered in sound and in roughly phonetic spelling as their names, viz. *kikeriki* and *oombooloo*. The only cases when *kikeriki* was chosen as a suitable name for the clumpy figure occurred when someone wished to enliven the proceedings and provide amusement, which he invariably did.

To begin with, we must apprehend language events in their contexts as shaped by the creative acts of speaking persons. Whenever a man speaks, he speaks in some sense as a poet. Poets have often emphasized

<sup>1</sup> See Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*, 1949.

<sup>2</sup> See Bloomfield, *Language*, 1933.

<sup>3</sup> cf. W. Koehler, *Psychologische Probleme*, Berlin 1933, p. 153, and *Gestalt Psychology*, London 1930, pp. 186 f.

that a great deal of the beauty and meaning of the language of poetry is in the sound of it. If that be called the phonological mode of meaning, in poetry, it is a mode impossible of translation from one language into another.

In his dialogue on the critic as artist in *Intentions*, Wilde, who had a fine ear for a phrase, followed the Greeks in the appreciation of the high aesthetic values of language. The test applied by the Greeks, who criticized language more carefully than any other material, "was always the spoken word in its musical and metrical relations. The voice was the medium and the ear the critic." The story of Homer's blindness Wilde liked to think of "as an artistic myth". And he adds, "when Milton could no longer write, he began to sing".

Words have not merely music as sweet as that of viol and lute, colour as rich and vivid as any that makes lovely for us the canvas of the Venetian or the Spaniard, and plastic form no less sure and certain than that which reveals itself in marble or in bronze but thought and passion and spirituality are theirs also, are theirs indeed alone. If the Greeks had criticized nothing but language, they would still have been the great art-critics of the world.

Such was Wilde's figurative realization of a literary approach to language analogous to what with another figure I have called a spectrum of modes of meaning.

The phonological mode of meaning in English is perhaps most easily isolated in nonsense verse such as Jabberwocky:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;  
All mimsy were the borogroves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

The prosodies of the stanza and especially the specific rhymes are English enough. So are the word-processes and most of the phonematic and prosodic processes.<sup>1</sup> *Brillig*, placed where it is, sounds and looks a pattern foreign to current English. *Slithy*, on the other hand, is familiar and undoubtedly pejorative. *Gimble* could probably be classed as an iterative or frequentative verb perhaps with diminutive and picturesque associations.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See "Sounds and Prosodies", *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Tillotson tells me that this stanza, which, was first 'published' in MS. in a private family magazine in 1854, was then entitled "Stanza of Anglo-Saxon Poetry". It was printed in "gothic" characters and with more archaic spelling.



These observations must not be interpreted in the sense of sound symbolism or of onomatopoeia. If we apply the test of frequent use, most native English words with initial *sl* seem to have been associated with pejorative contexts. There is, therefore, an association of social and personal attitude in recurrent contexts of situation with certain phonological features. This association is of course within the given speech community. In previous discussion of this mode of meaning, I invented a word, *phonaesthetic*,<sup>1</sup> to describe the association of sounds and personal and social attitudes, to avoid the misleading implications of *onomatopoeia* and the fallacy of sound symbolism.

Alliteration, assonance and the chiming of what are usually called consonants are common prosodic features of speech, and from the phonological point of view can be considered as markers or signals of word-structure or of the word-process in the sentence. Such features can be so distributed by a writer as to form part of artistic prosodies both in prose and verse.

This kind of phonological meaning in a language may be referred to as the prosodic mode. Really good dialogue in contemporary drama or other forms of modern prose literature requires almost unalterable patterns of stress, emphasis and intonation which are felt to be necessary. Such meaningful features are also in the prosodic mode. Prosodic features extend to the well-known markers and signals, for example, in Edward Lear's limericks. These are so well-known that they may serve as an illustration of the phonetic and phonological modes of meaning, including what I have referred to as the prosodic modes. Once started on a limerick, there are modal expectancies for the initiated at all these levels, at the grammatical, stylistic, and indeed at a variety of social levels. At this point in my argument, still confining our references to the language of limericks, I propose to bring forward as a technical term, meaning by "collocation", and to apply the test of "collocability".

(See S. D. Collingwood, *A Lewis Carrol Picture Book*, 1899, p. 37). Notes on the made-up words were appended, perhaps in mockery of current edited texts. Some of these explanations resemble Humpty Dumpty's in *Through the Looking-glass*, Chapter VI. Examples are:

BRYLLYG (derived from the verb to BRYL or BROIL). "The time of broiling dinner, i.e. the close of the afternoon."

SLYTHY (compounded of SLIMY and LITHE). "Smooth and active.[""]

GYMBLE (whence GIMBLET) "to screw out holes in anything.[""]

<sup>1</sup> See *Speech*, Benn, London, 1930, pp. 49-54, and "The Use and Distribution of Certain English Sounds", *English Studies*, XVII, February 1935, for word lists illustrating phonaesthetic association.

The following sentences show that part of the meaning of the word *ass* in modern colloquial English can be by collocation:

- (i) An ass like Bagson might easily do that.
- (ii) He is an ass.
- (iii) You silly ass!
- (iv) Don't be an ass!

One of the meanings of *ass* is its habitual collocation with an immediately preceding *you silly*, and with other phrases of address or of personal reference. Even if you said "An ass has been frightfully mauled at the Zoo", a possible retort would be, "What on earth was he doing?"

There are only limited possibilities of collocation with preceding adjectives, among which the commonest are *silly*, *obstinate*, *stupid*, *awful*, occasionally *egregious*. *Young* is much more frequently found than *old*. The plural form is not very common.

It must be pointed out that meaning by collocation is not at all the same thing as contextual meaning, which is the functional relation of the sentence to the processes of a context of situation in the context of culture.<sup>1</sup>

In the language of Lear's limericks, *man* is generally preceded by *old*, never by *young*. *Person* is collocated with *old* and *young*. There are only four *old ladies*—of Prague, of France, of Winchelsea, and the one "whose folly" rhymes with "holly". There is only one *girl*, "a young girl of Majorca, Whose aunt was a very fast walker". One of the "meanings" of *man* in this language is to be immediately preceded by *old* in collocations of the type, *There was an Old Man of . . . , Who [or Whose] . . . ,* in which names like *Kamschatka* or *Jamaica* or *the East* frequently complete the "of" phrase. The collocability of *lady* is most frequently with *young*, but *person* with either *old* or *young*. In this amusing language there is no *boy* or *young man* or *woman*, neither are there any plurals for *man*, *person* or *lady*.

This kind of study of the distribution of common words may be classified into general or usual collocations and more restricted technical or personal collocations. The commonest sentences in which the words *horse*, *cow*, *pig*, *swine*, *dog*, are used with adjectives in nominal phrases, and also with verbs in the simple present, indicate characteristic distributions in collocability which may be regarded as a level of meaning in describing the English of any particular social group or indeed of one person. The word "time" can be used in collocations with or without

<sup>1</sup> See "The use and Distribution of Certain English Sounds," *English Studies*, XVII, February 1935.

articles, determinatives or pronouns. And it can be collocated with *saved, spent, wasted, frittered away*, with *presses, flies*, and with a variety of particles, even with *no*. Just as phonetic, phonological and grammatical forms well established and habitual in any close social group provide a basis for the mutual expectancies of words and sentences at those levels, and also the sharing of these common features, so also the study of the usual collocations of a particular literary form or genre or of a particular author, makes possible a clearly-defined and precisely stated contribution to what I have termed the spectrum of descriptive linguistics, which handles and states meaning by dispersing it in a range of techniques working at a series of levels.

The statement of meaning by collocation and various collocabilities does not involve the definition of word-meaning by means of further sentences in shifted terms. Meaning by collocation is an abstraction at the syntagmatic level and is not directly concerned with the conceptual or idea approach to the meaning of words. One of the meanings of *night* is its collocability with *dark*, and of *dark*, of course, collocation with *night*. This kind of mutuality may be paralleled in most languages and has resulted in similarities of poetic diction in literatures sharing common classical sources.

Examples may be taken almost at random from any English work at any period. *Gorboduc*, for instance; *The silent night, weary day, tender love, deadly strife, hateful strife, cruel wrath, manly breast, deep repentance, hold life in contempt, Is all the world drowned in blood and sunk in cruelty, learn to live in peace*. Or take Blake's *King Edward the Third*, the following verses of which may be made the basis of the guessing game of filling in blanks:

Let Liberty, the chartered right of Englishmen,  
 Won by our fathers in many a glorious field,  
 And these fair youths, the flower of England,  
 Venturing their lives in my most righteous cause,  
 Oh sheathe their hearts with triple<sup>1</sup> steel, that they  
 May emulate their fathers' virtues.

There are many more of the same kind throughout this work, and of course a large number of collocations which have been common property for long periods and are still current even in everyday colloquial. This method of approach makes two branches of stylistics stand out more

<sup>1</sup> The residues of collocations do influence one another as we have seen in the phonaesthetic mode. What is the meaning of "Triple Shell"?

clearly: (a) the stylistics of what persists in and through change, and (b) the stylistics of personal idiosyncracies.

## II

The study of collocation in a more generalized way could be used to describe the poetic diction of, say, Swinburne. Throughout his poetry Swinburne lays general constructions alongside each other, syntagmatically parallel collocations are a feature of verse-form and stanza-form, and often carry parallel phonaesthetic and prosodic features. The following examples are taken from "Before Dawn":

Delight, the rootless flower,  
And Love, the bloomless bower:  
Delight that lives an hour,  
And love that lives a day . . .

Sin sweet beyond forgiving  
And brief beyond regret.

The meaning of the next stanza can be almost completely stated in the lower modes previously illustrated, but especially in parallel grammatical collocations, parallel phonetic and prosodic meaning, all contributing to the verse prosodies:

Ah, one thing worth beginning,  
One thread in life worth spinning,  
Ah sweet, one sin worth sinning  
With all the whole soul's will;  
To lull you till one stilled you,  
To kiss you till one killed you,  
To feed you till one filled you,  
Sweet lips, if love could fill.

In "The Garden of Proserpine" a great deal of the meaning is stated by making use of what I have called the lower or simpler modes at the phonetic, prosodic, grammatical and collocational levels.

Since Swinburne is the most "phonetic" of all English poets, let us apply the prism of linguistics to a few of his verses and examine the lower end of the spectrum stating partial meanings at abstracted levels or in certain modes. Opportunities for such experiments are numerous, and a good beginning may be made with "Quia Multum Amavit" in *Songs before Sunrise*.

Ah the banner-poles, the stretch of straightening streamers  
Straining their full reach out!

This occurs as the third couplet in a consecutive series of six beginning with *Ah the* and ending with a mark of exclamation. There are repeated Swinburnian patterns of collocation and also of grammatical mode. Normal grammatical markers such as *the, their, -ing, -er-s*, make possible a statement of meaning in the grammatical mode. All six exclamatory units, including the present example, are of nominal type, though three make use of finite verbs in dependent clauses. The prosodies of stress and intonation are fairly fixed and the end-words (*streamers* and *out!*) are linked by rhyme with the next end-words (*dreamers* and *doubt!*) Normal junction prosodies marking initials and finals of words in the sentence are there—for example, the sequence of *straightening . . . streamers . . . straining*. The alliterative use of *str-*, which is to be regarded as one initial unit, has been noticed in the mode of verse prosody as well as in the sentence prosodies. It must also be noticed in the phonaesthetic mode.<sup>1</sup> The words and phrases could be described as in the normal phonological mode of meaning. The *str-* words here can be grouped with many more English words often used in collocations and in contexts of situation referring to *long, lengthening, straight, stretched out* phenomena, involving both strength and stretching and a sort of active linearity, and which are used so often that when accumulated in a collocation such as the one quoted have a meaning which can be stated in the phonaesthetic mode. The phonaesthetic meaning of a collocation of several *str-* words of this type is to be taken in contrast with collocations of *cr-* words, *cl-* words.<sup>1</sup>

If the verses have the implication of a Southern English pronunciation, then normal statements can be made at the phonetic level.

At the level of meaning by word collocation, there is the interesting point that, both as a whole and in phrases, the collocations are unique and personal, that is to say, a-normal. In the wider context of the whole poem, even within the context of the six exclamatory units, similar collocations accumulate which must be referred to the personal stylistics of the poet, to what may indeed be called Swinburnese. But its English quality is in what I have called the lower modes, and that enables us to understand the common statement that most of Swinburne's poetry is untranslatable into any other language. This is true even of masses of writing inspired by Greek and Latin poetry, and of some writing inspired by French. In a similar way the modes of meaning of the following verses may be dispersed at various levels of abstraction:

<sup>1</sup> See below, *clogs* and *clings*.

- (i) Ah the noise of horse, the charge and thunder of drumming,  
And swaying and sweep of swords<sup>1</sup>
- (ii) And prince that clogs, and priest that clings<sup>2</sup>
- (iii) As the flash of the flakes of the foam flared lamplike . . . .<sup>3</sup>
- (iv) Welling water's winsome word,  
Wind in warm wan weather,<sup>4</sup>
- (v) By the wind that went on the world's waste waters . . . .<sup>3</sup>
- (vi) And windy waves of woods<sup>5</sup>
- (vii) What wind soever waft his will  
Across the waves of day and night<sup>6</sup>
- (viii) Sleek supple soul and splendid skin?<sup>7</sup>

The *w*-feature is to be noticed at the phonetic, phonological and phonaesthetic levels. At the phonological level it is an initial prosody in the word-process within the sentence, and by correlation with the prosodies of stress and intonation is also the alliterative feature of the verse prosody.

It will be clear that no attempt is made in the present analysis to exclude meaning from the consideration of language events or language isolates at any level. The phrase "lower modes of meaning" has been used to refer chiefly to the handling of meaning at the phonetic, phonological, prosodic and grammatical levels of abstraction. It is, however, to be understood that though the presentation of the scheme of analysis is in an ascending order from phonetics to the context of culture, the total complex, including what may be called the higher levels in the context of situation is a first postulate. The phonaesthetic mode, for example, correlates more closely than the phonetic mode with features of contexts of situation in which the personal and social attitudes are more easily apprehended in the light of ordinary experience.

Returning to Swinburne's poetic diction, further notions of generalized meaning may be applied to the statement of characteristic features in terms of syntax, word-formation and the association of synonyms, antonyms, contraries and complementary couples in one

<sup>1</sup> "Quia Multum Amavit". Phonaesthetic groups of words with *sw*- and certain finals, cf. *swoop*, *swipe*, *swagger*, *swoon*, *swish*, even *swing*, *swill*, *swell*.

<sup>2</sup> Note *cl*-group, alliteration and collocation of *prince* and *priest*, repetition of parallel phrases in the same grammatical phonaesthetic and phonological modes. "The Eve of Revolution".

<sup>3</sup> "Quia Multum Amavit".

<sup>4</sup> "A Child's Laughter".

<sup>5</sup> "A Song of Italy".

<sup>6</sup> "Prelude".

<sup>7</sup> "At A Month's End".

collocation. Analogous features may be found in groups of three or more associated words, and there are numerous instances of reversed and crossed antitheses, for example :

- (i) Till life forget and death remember,  
Till thou remember and I forget.<sup>1</sup>
- (ii) The delight that consumes the desire,  
The desire that outruns the delight.<sup>2</sup>
- (iii) Change feet for wings or wings for feet.<sup>3</sup>

As an example of multiple word-polarities in one collocation, we could take two lines from stanza 14 of "The Eve of Revolution" in *Songs before Sunrise* :

. . . . freedom clothed the naked souls of slaves  
And stripped the muffled souls of tyrants bare

Stanza 5 of the poem "A Match" exemplifies many of the linguistic features previously suggested and provides the prosodic pattern of the stanza-form. It illustrates repeated collocations opening and closing the stanza in which there are three polarities. Parallel collocations with features reversed are illustrated in lines 5 and 6 :

If you were April's lady,  
And I were lord in May,  
We'd throw with leaves for hours  
And draw for days with flowers,  
Till day like night were shady  
And night were bright like day;  
If you were April's lady,  
And I were lord in May.<sup>4</sup>

A few examples may now be given to illustrate phrase-formation and the association of words above referred to. The poem "Prelude" introducing *Songs before Sunrise* provides many examples. Throughout Swinburne's writing nouns in strings of two's and three's or even more occur in the same collocation, and the meaning may largely be studied in the modes already indicated :

<sup>1</sup> "Itylus".

<sup>2</sup> "Dolores".

<sup>3</sup> "At A Month's End".

<sup>4</sup> "A Match".

- (i) From eyes and tresses flowers and tears,  
From heart and spirit hopes and fears.
- (ii) With souls that pray and hope and hate. . . .  
And dance and wring their hands and laugh,  
And weep thin tears and sigh light sighs.

The first eight phrases quoted below illustrate another common feature, the use of derivatives of the same base within the same collocation. The last also shows a common Swinburnian polarity:

- (i) . . . . . for a little we live, and life hath mutable wings.<sup>1</sup>
- (ii) So long I endure, no longer; and laugh not again, neither  
weep.<sup>1</sup>
- (iii) She sees all past things pass,<sup>2</sup>
- (iv) And wings of swift spent hours  
Take flight and fly;<sup>2</sup>
- (v) Soft as breathless ripples that softly shoreward sweep,<sup>3</sup>
- (vi) Landor, once thy lover, a name that love reveres:<sup>3</sup>
- (vii) O Garment not golden but gilded,<sup>4</sup>
- (viii) And press with new lips where you pressed.  
For my heart too springs up at the pressure,<sup>4</sup>
- (ix) The life unlived, the unsown seeds,  
Suns un beholden, songs unsung, and undone deeds.<sup>5</sup>

Nominal phrases in which the substantive is preceded and followed by adjectives provide a framework for all the lower modes of meaning. For example:

- (i) And dreams of bitter sleep and sweet,<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Hymn to Proserpine".

<sup>2</sup> "Before the Mirror".

<sup>3</sup> "A Ballad of Bath".

<sup>4</sup> "Dolores".

<sup>5</sup> "Blessed Among Women".

<sup>6</sup> "Prelude".



- (ii) And die beneath blind skies or blue<sup>1</sup>
- (iii) Of barren delights and unclean,<sup>2</sup>

From the point of view of linguistic criticism there is sufficient evidence to show that much of the Swinburnese vocabulary, embedded in his typical collocations with their prosodies, takes its form from his patterns of opposition, requiring such phrases as "Mis-trust and trust,"<sup>1</sup> He had to use such words as "miscreate,"<sup>1</sup> "misconceived,"<sup>3</sup> "misbegotten,"<sup>4</sup> "disengirdled,"<sup>1</sup> "discrowned,"<sup>1</sup> "undisbranched,"<sup>4</sup> and hundreds of adjectives in "-less," — "With footless joy and wingless grief, And twinborn faith and disbelief,"<sup>1</sup> "red pulseless planet"<sup>5</sup>, "The shameless nameless love,"<sup>5</sup> "flowerless rose,"<sup>6</sup> "plumeless boughs,"<sup>6</sup> "dim green dayless day."<sup>7</sup>

As a further example of parallel collocations and regular patterns of repetition in the verse prosodies, the six opening and concluding distichs of the six stanzas of "A Match" are tabulated below :

*Lines 1 and 7*

<i>Stanza</i>	<i>First Place</i>	<i>Second Place</i>	<i>Third Place</i>	<i>Fourth Place</i>
1	if	love	were	what the { rose is words are life, my darling thrall to sorrow April's lady queen of pleasure
2		I		
3		you		
4				
5				
6				

Twelve pieces for twenty-four places.

*Lines 2 and 8*

<i>Stanza</i>	<i>First Place</i>	<i>Second Place</i>	<i>Third Place</i>	<i>Fourth Place</i>
1	and	I	were	like the { leaf tune [were] death page to joy lord in May king of pain
2		love		
3		[I]	your love	
4		I	were	
5				
6				

Twelve pieces for twenty-four places, twenty-two pieces for forty-eight places.

<sup>1</sup> "Prelude".

<sup>2</sup> "Dolores".

<sup>3</sup> "The Triumph of Time".

<sup>4</sup> "Tenebrae".

<sup>5</sup> "Faustine".

<sup>6</sup> "A Vision of Spring in Winter".

<sup>7</sup> "Félice".

In stanza 5 there are three pairs of polarities in the opening and concluding distichs.

A detailed study of the words and pieces of Swinburne's poetry would be laborious, and most scholars would be satisfied to guess the probable result. I offer a few examples of (1) pieces employing the participial forms *clothed*, *clad*, *girt*: "Clothed round with the strength of night", "Clothed with delight, by the might of a dream," "One warm dream clad about with a fire," "Clothed with powers", "Clothed with the wind's wings," "Clothed about with flame and with tears," "girt about with," "Intolerable, not clad with death or life;" and (2) participial compounds:

White-eyed and poisonous-finned, shark-toothed and serpentine-  
curled.<sup>1</sup>

Commenting on this verse in terms of the lower half of the spectrum, the first item is notice of the two parallel collocations, and then to add the prosodic features marking the two pairs of participial compounds, themselves described at the grammatical level, completing the picture in the phonaesthetic mode and finally stating the congruence of all these in the verse prosody.

All this should be done after the contextual study of the whole poem has been attempted by the methods of linguistics.

Swinburne's verse should also be criticized by those concerned at the higher levels of the spectrum. This would mean its examination within the culture context, which includes what is offered by biography and history. To the scheme already outlined further categories may be added at the levels of grammar, word-formation or descriptive etymology, and also of collocation or phrasal stylistics, a few of which have been exemplified. Even a casual reader of Swinburne will soon appreciate that he is in a strange world in which contrast and concord are one and contraries divine. *Life and death, night and day, vices and virtues, waves sand sea and foam, fire and flame, deserts and blossoms, seeds and flowers, deaths births and ghosts, wine poison and blood, snakes and fangs, kisses and hisses, fervent and frigid, sterile barren and fruitful, heaven and hell*, commonly occur together (as grouped by the punctuation) in the same collocation.

I may end these notes on Swinburne by remarking that "the philo-

<sup>1</sup> "Pan and Thalassius", "Recollections", "Hesperia", "Félice", "Sapphics", "A Ballad of Bath", "Who Hath Given Man Speech", "Hymn to Proserpine".

sophy of Swinburne's poetry" forms no part of a linguist's technical language. Not that philosophers have a language for this either. The statement of his philosophy by a philosopher would be almost impossible without a previous analysis of Swinburne's language. The philosopher might then agree with the linguist that there was nothing more to be done, for clearly Swinburne had nothing to say as a philosopher in the language of philosophy.

On the basis of half a dozen poems,<sup>1</sup> a sort of poet's philosophy could be expressed in other words and imputed to Swinburne. We might call it a kind of holism supported by pan-humanism and worship of

The earth-soul Freedom, that only  
Lives, and that only is God.<sup>2</sup>

Before leaving Swinburne the victim of analysis at the lower end of the spectrum, it must be understood that no aesthetic or literary valuation has been attempted. Since I have not employed the language of literary criticism and since I have not even implied any criticism of such language, I should like to quote from the leading article in a well-known weekly,<sup>3</sup> to illustrate a quite different type of language about Swinburne. The first quotation applies almost exactly to what has happened to the present writer:

The mind, therefore, which returns to Swinburne in middle life is not entirely unprepared for the discovery that its early doubts about the quality of the master's thought were well founded. A great deal of what he wrote is seen to be nonsense—and pernicious nonsense at that. Perhaps some part of the blame is to be imputed to the reader,

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, "Hertha", "Genesis", "To Walt Whitman in America", "Tenebrae", "Tiresias".

<sup>2</sup> The poetical languages of English writers on autumn were recently brought to my attention by "The Transit of Autumn", a middle article contributed by Lord Dunsany to *The Observer*. Applying the scheme of analysis exemplified above, I found the results were in general terms similar. You must use the words *spring*, *summer*, *autumn* and *winter* and a stock of collocabilities. Having announced in the second paragraph that "Autumn" is "a queen although not yet crowned", you string out the range of meaning by collocation through the remaining six paragraphs—*robed*, *glory*, *crowned*, *resplendent*, *no singers go before her*, *prophets*, *the old regime*, *the reign*, *allegiance to new queen*, *proclaims*, *gold*, *throne*, *bodyguard*, *treasure*, *dynasty*, *court*, *the last dance of the leaves*.

<sup>3</sup> "On Re-reading Swinburne", *Times Literary Supplement*, November 17, 1950.

since what is good reading for a man at one age may be fairly poor at another. That is a truth from which critics are apt to shrink.

My second quotation employs a different sort of language about language from that normally used in linguistics, including usages which have the features of value judgments, though here and there such words as *alliterations*, *inversions*, *chime*, *rhyme*, *couplet*, *stanza*, *words*, *phrases*, necessarily appear:

Swinburne . . . whose eloquence is so often mere rhetoric, and whose loves and passions have no more reality than that of a deliberately induced mood . . . The old magic of words is still, in many passages, there, so that sixty goes about murmuring a couplet or a stanza over and over again a whole day on end, just as did twenty. The foaming torrent of alliterations, double-rhymes, and Greek names may be sheer literary violence—but it still carries the reader away. The juggling with a small group of phrases or rhymes may be a trick—but with what grace and skill the juggler throws and catches them in every conceivable sequence and combination, and how exquisitely balanced and contrasted are his inversions. . . . The gloomy magnificence of . . . can escape the ear no more than the simpler, languorous, melancholy charm of "Rococo". . . . The chime of the words—first read so long ago and since half-forgotten—rings once more incessantly in the mind, soaking through the hide and limbs of middle-age to the heart. Time is cast away, the world is forty years younger, and manhood back at its fresh, unknowing, unreasoning dawn.

It is entirely suitable that the somewhat impersonal experience expressed in the concluding paragraph is expressed anonymously. Can this also, like so much more, be "mere rhetoric" having "no more reality than that of a deliberately induced mood"? A linguist, as I have already said, is not at home in such idiom, and though I have raised the question by quoting the article, I have no means of answering it.

The examination of Swinburne's poetic diction has emphasized the idiosyncrasies which make it so personal that it can be called Swinburnese. It has been found possible to do this without reference to the higher levels of the spectrum of meaning, such as those provided by the biographical and cultural contexts.

## III

Let us now turn to linguistic material of a very different kind, which requires the application of the categories of the context of situation,<sup>1</sup> in order to complete the statement of meaning by collocation. A cursory examination of certain letters of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries<sup>2</sup> clearly shows collocations which will be recognized as current for at least two hundred years—that is as part of the common stock of what we may call recent modern English.

In studying the extracts we note that many collocations are still generally current. In setting them out I have enclosed in brackets “pieces” which to me seem glaringly obsolete.

The first extract is from Dr. Johnson’s letter to the Earl of Chesterfield, dated February 7, 1755:

(i) [To be so distinguished is an honour, which, being very little accustomed to favours from the great, I know not well how to receive, or in what terms to acknowledge.]

(ii) [When, upon some slight encouragement, I first visited your Lordship, I was overpowered, like the rest of mankind, by the enchantment of your address, and could not forbear to wish that I might boast myself *Le vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre*;—that I might obtain that regard for which I saw the world contending;]

Applying the categories of the context of situation and of meaning by collocation, it will be seen that very little survives that could be considered current today.

Applying similar categories it will be agreed that the language used by William Wilberforce to the Earl of Galloway in a letter from the House

<sup>1</sup> See works previously quoted, especially “Personality and Language in Society”, *The Sociological Review*, vol. XLII, Section II, 1950, p. 7: “a group of categories forming a schematic construct for application to typical repetitive ‘events’ in the social process. A. The Relevant features of participants: persons, personalities. (i) The Verbal Action of the Participants. (ii) The Non-verbal Action of the Participants. B. The Relevant Objects. C. The Effect of the Verbal Action.”

<sup>2</sup> For convenience I have drawn them from (a) *English Letters of the XVIII Century*, edited by James Aitken (Pelican), and (b) *English Letters of the XIX Century*, edited by James Aitken (Pelican). The study of letters, if it is to be a scientific study, requires an examination of the MSS.—that is, of the material before it has been tampered with by editors and printers.

of Commons on December 3rd, 1800, is much nearer to contemporary usage:

(iii) Through the medium of the great clubs, Etc., one set of opinions manners, modes of living, Etc., are diffused through a vast mass [of the higher orders.] Domestic restraints, and family economy, and order, [are voted bores,] [while, from the nature of our constitution,] aided by the increasing wealth and the prevailing sentiments of the age, whatever ways of thinking, speaking, and acting become popular [in the higher classes,] soon spread through every other.

What Wilberforce has to say in the above quotation is relevant to one of the purposes of the present essay, which is to draw attention to the stylistics of the letters of upper class society in the eighteenth century and to similar features in what is today considered good standard English for everyday use in polite society. The great Doctor did not belong to the class which developed modern polite colloquial style, as the following extracts from his more familiar letters will illustrate.

(iv) Apologies are seldom of any use. We will delay till your arrival the reasons, good or bad, which have made me [such a sparing and ungrateful] correspondent.

(v) I went away from Lichfield ill, and have had a troublesome time [with my breath;] for some weeks I have been [disordered by a cold,] [of which I could not get the violence abated till I had been let blood three times.]

(vi) [The usurpation of the nobility, for they apparently usurp all the influence they gain by fraud and misrepresentation,] I think it certainly lawful, perhaps your duty, to resist. What is not their own, [they have only by robbery.]

In the above extracts the English is dated, at almost all levels, and in a systematic study of all Johnson's letters as well as of similarly dated material the linguistic features would have to be stated.

The following interesting sentence from a letter to Mrs. Porter in 1782 is almost contemporary at the level of collocation:

(vii) I have, by advertising, found poor Mr. Levett's brothers in Yorkshire, who will take the little he has left;

Since the above has the implication of utterance, we must know whether Mr. Levett is dying or already dead, before we read the last clause. If he

is still alive, then we may stress both the words *has* and *left*, but if the reference is to a will,<sup>1</sup> then *has* must be unstressed. From the point of view of present-day English "by advertising" should begin the sentence, or better, be replaced by some reference to the newspapers. In a full statement of the elements of the context of situation, Johnson's method of advertising would have to be known.

The two following sentences make use of the word "want" which at the grammatical level of meaning is a verb. The meaning by collocation stands, but differs in situations.

(viii) I want every comfort.

(ix) I can only recommend a rule which you do not want; give as little pain as you can.

The first sentence could quite well be used in talking to a reception clerk at a first-class hotel. But by extending the collocation, and by reference to the situational context, the meaning is seen to be very different.<sup>2</sup>

There are of course a large number of collocations in Johnson's letters which are clichés of present day writing, such as:

(x) Begin again where you left off.

(xi) Let me have a long letter from you as soon as you can.

And it is interesting to notice that an old-established part of the meaning of *neglected* is collocation with *criminally*:

(xii) You are not to think yourself forgotten, or criminally neglected.

Johnson's English in all his prose styles examined objectively and statistically in connexion with a biographical study of his personality would give

<sup>1</sup> He died the following year.

<sup>2</sup> See also *English Synonymes* explained by George Crabb, 3rd edition, 1824:

{ WANT, *v.* Poverty.

{ To Want, Need, Lack.

To be without is the common idea expressed by these terms; but to WANT is to be without that which contributes to our comfort, or is an object of our desire;

From the close connexion which subsists between desiring and *want*, it is usual to consider what we *want* as artificial, and what we *need* as natural and indispensable:

tender people *want* a fire when others would be glad not to have it;

He who *wants* nothing is a happy man: he who *needs* nothing, may be happy if he *wants* no more than he has; for then he *lacks* that which alone can make him happy, which is contentment.'

us a statement of stylistics in a social setting which would mark it off sharply from the English of such letter writers as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Mrs. Delany, Horace Walpole, Fanny Burney and Lord Byron. A linguistic study of the letters of the upper class seems to show persistent features of what we call the King's English in modern times, and these features have been shared by increasing numbers of writers and speakers in the nineteenth century and up to the present time, largely perhaps as a result of the influence of the big public schools, the older universities, and the snob value of the aristocratic. The Johnsonian styles at a fairly high social level have of course, been common, and so have other styles suggesting that the speaker or writer had "swallowed a dictionary", or spoke "like a school book". We frequently ask people to say what they mean in words of one syllable, and there is much talk today about plain English.<sup>1</sup> As George Orwell's satire<sup>1</sup> suggests, Oldspeak is perhaps being replaced by Newspeak. Should the snob value of Newspeak establish itself, the spectrum of meaning analysis might then describe the new language at all levels from pronunciation through word distribution in collocations to the study of the processes of the newer contexts of situation.

Turning to the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to the Countess of Mar, the Countess of Bute and others of her friends and perhaps equals, we find a number of characteristics of the King's English which are still promoted by a good family upbringing, and by education at a good school. The written use of *don't* and the collocations of the participles in *-ing* are especially to be noted.

(xiii) In my opinion, dear S., I ought rather to quarrel with you for not answering my Nimeguen letter of August till December, *than to excuse my not writing again* till now. I am sure there is on my side a very good excuse for silence, having [gone such tiresome land-journeys,] though I don't find [the conclusion of them] so bad as you seem to imagine.

(xiv) Those dreadful stories you have heard of the *plague* have very little foundation in truth.

(xv) To reconcile myself to the sound of a word which has always given me such terrible ideas, though I am convinced there is little more in it than in a fever. As a proof of this, let me tell you that we passed through two or three towns [most violently infected.]

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Sir Ernest Gowers's *Plain Words*, 1948, and George Orwell's *Nineteen eighty-four*, 1948.



- (xvi) Luckily for me. . . .
- (xvii) who are very fond of speaking of what they don't [know].
- (xviii) If you don't like my choice of subjects, tell me what you would [have me write upon;]
- (xix) which I don't think so bad as you have perhaps heard it represented. I am a very good judge of [their eating,] having lived three weeks in the house of an *effendi* at Belgrade, who gave us very magnificent dinners,
- (xx) and I am extremely glad I was so [complaisant.]
- (xxi) I am willing to take your word for it,
- (xxii) I am satisfied I have been one of the *condemned* ever since I was born; and in submission to the divine justice I don't at all doubt but I deserved it in some pre-existent state. I will still hope that I am only in purgatory; and that after whining [and grunting] a certain number of years, I shall be translated to some more happy sphere, where virtue will be natural, and custom reasonable; that is, in short, where common sense will reign. I grow very devout, as you see, and place all my hopes in the next life, being totally persuaded of the nothingness of this. Don't you remember how miserable we were in the little parlour at Thoresby? we then thought marrying would put us at once into possession of all we wanted.<sup>1</sup> Then came being with child, etc., and you see what comes of being with child. Though, after all, I am still of opinion, that it is extremely silly to submit to ill fortune.
- (xxiii) Every thing may turn out better than you expect.

Further extracts from the letters of Mrs. Delany and Fanny Burney, Madame D'Arblay, will confirm the impressions gained from those of Lady Mary. Burke remarked in a letter to Fanny Burney that he hardly dare tell her his opinion of her place "in an age distinguished by producing extraordinary women".

(xxiv) then we start up, run away, and here I am, brimful of a thousand things to say to you, but have no time to write them, and that you know is a sad case. You and I perfectly agree in what you say of Sir John Stanley and my brother.

(xxv) I don't find that the troubles of the times have given any check to gay doings in this part of the world.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Johnson's use of *want*, p. 137 above.

(xxvi) but it is something like [*inoculating for the small pox*], one does not care to *advise either for or against*;

(xxvii) I don't think there can be anything wrong in your writing to Mr. R. about poor H. Viney, if you think he will not mention the writing to anybody, but one of the crying sins of this world is the laxity of the tongue. How few people understand the perfection of silence on most occasions.

(Note again the participle *-ing* preceded by a conjunct personal pronoun.)

(xxviii) God forbid you should *stop your hand* when correction is necessary! and surely it must be so on such an occasion as that was, though I don't suppose the dear child meant the harm she did;

It is clear that the prosodies are very like those of present day speech and emphasis falls on *must, that* and *meant*.

(xxix) To Mrs. Dewes, Bath, 28 Oct. 1760.

I have just been hunting the shops, and am not half equipped. Surely this is the busiest idle place in the world, and yet I have not once been in the Rooms, only one morning for three minutes at Wiltshire's.

(xxx) I did not expect to hear [you lost your giddiness at once,] but [I hope in God] it will by degrees wear away; however, all means should be tried, and I hear so much from everybody of the great efficacy of the Bristol waters, that I hope you will take it into consideration; and if the doctors are not against your trying it, lose no time.

(xxxi) well taken care of,

(xxxii) Mr. Sloper . . . has been much offended that his daughter was not taken out to dance; she was the first night, and a sensible, clever woman whose daughter was taken out after her *refused* to let her dance; this put a stop to Miss Cibber's being asked again; and on Sunday night, [in the midst of the Rooms], Mr. Cibber collared poor Collet, abusing him at the same time, and asking if he had been the occasion [of the affront put upon his daughter]; he said it was '*by Mr. Nash's direction*'—the poor wretch is *now* wheeled into the Rooms;

(xxxiii) Yesterday I had a letter from Lady Weymouth, who had [but] just heard of our being at Bath: she comes here for a day or two on purpose to see me, and dines with us today.

(xxxiv) I cannot sit down in my usual place without thinking of my

dear little Portia, tho' not so selfish as to wish her skipping about me, tho' *that* would be very pleasant; but her dear mama has the first claim.

The collocation *taken out to dance* could still be used, but in a different context of situation, and in a background of very different manners. The use of an emphatic *was* in *she was the first night*, is another indication of the persistence of characteristic prosodies over long periods of time. Note four further examples of the *-ing* participle, and three with preceding genitive.

(xxxv) Another of his confessions was this:—

(xxxvi) 'Luckily for me,' said he, 'I have no occasion to speak till about two o'clock, when we dine, for that keeps me fresh. If I were to begin earlier, I should only be like skimmed milk the rest of the day.'

(xxxvii) Mrs. Astley, however, assured me she was pretty well.

(xxxviii) She took the time the Queen so considerately gave her for deliberation, and she consulted with some of her old friends. They all agreed there must be no refusal, and, [after many circumstances] too long [for writing], though otherwise well worth knowing, [Lady Weymouth was made the messenger of] her Majesty's offer being accepted.

(xxxix) would there be any harm in my using it to make a visit to Twickenham?

Again the prosodies are familiar, and a further example of a participial construction in *-ing -ed* preceded by a genitival nominal phrase, *her Majesty's offer*. Note the participial phrase *my using* in an entirely contemporary collocation *would there be any harm in my using it?*

Features we have already noticed appear frequently in the letters of Fanny Burney (1752-1840) from which the following extracts are selected:

(xl) I have for some time seen very plainly that you are [éprise,] and have been extremely uneasy at the discovery.

(xli) *Wednesday*. I broke off and an incapable unwillingness seized my pen; but I hear you are not well, and I hasten—if that be a word I can ever use again—to make personal inquiry how you are.

(xlii) I have been very ill, very little *apparently*, but with nights of [consuming] restlessness and tears. I have now called in Dr. Holland, who understands me marvellously, and am now much as usual; no, not that—still tormented with nights [without repose]—but better.

(xliii) My spirits have been dreadfully saddened of late by whole days—[nay] weeks—of helplessness [for any employment.]

The letters of Horace Walpole (1717–1797) are extremely interesting from the regressive point of view—regressive, that is, in the light of common present-day usage. In the following extensive extracts there are a large number of usual collocations which must have been common in good society both in everyday talk and familiar correspondence:

(xliv) It would have been inexcusable in me, in our present circumstances, and after all I have promised you, not to have written to you for this last month, if I had been in London; but I have been at Mount Edgumbe, and so constantly [upon] the road, that I neither received your letters, had time to write, or knew what to write. I came back last night, and found [three packets] from you, which I have no time to answer, and [but] just time to read. The confusion I have found, and the danger we are in, prevent my talking of anything else. The young Pretender, at the head of three thousand men, has got a march on General Cope, who is not eighteen hundred strong; and when the last accounts came away, was fifty miles nearer Edinburgh than Cope, and by this time is there. The clans will not rise for the Government; the Dukes of Argyll and Athol [are come post to town,] not having been able to raise a man.

Again quite modern at all levels but the social context. Note *prevent my talking of anything else* and *not having been able to raise a man*.

(xlv) that [an express] came last night with an account of their being at Edinburgh to the number of five thousand.

Note again *an account of their being at Edinburgh to the number of five thousand*.

(xlvi) But all this is not the worst!

(xlvii) Against this force we have—I don't know what—

(xlviii) I am grieved to tell you all this; but when it is so, how can I avoid telling you?

(xlix) We expect every moment to hear that . . .

(l) Lord Granville and his faction persist in persuading the King, that it is an affair of no consequence.

(li) Vernon, that simple noisy creature, has hit upon a scheme that is of great service; he had [laid Folkestone cutters] all around the coast,

which are continually relieved, [and bring constant notice of everything that stirs.]

(lii) I confess my own apprehensions are not near so strong as they were; and if we get over this, I shall believe that we never can be hurt; for we never can be more exposed to danger.

(liii) the King has declared publicly to the Ministry, that he has been told of the great [civilities] which he was said to show to her at Hanover; that he protests he showed her only the common [civilities] due . . . that he never intended to take any particular notice of her; nor had, nor would let my Lady Yarmouth. In fact, my Lady Yarmouth peremptorily refused . . . and when she did go with my Lady Pomfret, the King [but just] spoke to her. She declares her intention of staying in England,

These passages contain several familiar clichés and an interesting emphatic *did*.

(liv) I forgot to tell a *bon-mot* of Leheup on her first coming over; he was asked if he would not go and see her? He replied, 'No, I never visit modest women.' Adieu! my dear child! I flatter myself you will collect hopes from this letter.

Note on her first coming over.

(lv) By their not advancing, I conclude that either the Boy and his council could not prevail on the Highlanders to leave their own country, or that they were not strong enough, and still wait for foreign assistance, which, in a new declaration, he intimates that he still expects.

Note By their not advancing.

(lvi) I don't think, considering the crisis, that the House was very full.

(lvii) With all this, I am far from thinking that they are so confident and sanguine as their friends at Rome.

(lviii) You may imagine how little I like our situation; but I don't despair.

(lix) I write you [but short letters,] considering the circumstances of the time; but I hate to send you paragraphs only to contradict them again: I still less choose to forge events; and, indeed, am glad I have so few to tell you.

(lx) though the roads are exceedingly bad and great quantities of snow have fallen.

(lxi) he insists on a declaration of our having nothing to do with the continent. He mustered his forces, but did not notify his intention;

Note a *declaration of our having nothing to do with the continent*, and common collocations.

(lxii) You have bid me for some time to send you good news—well! I think I will.

(lxiii) But what is more astonishing, Sherlock, who has much better sense,

(lxiv) If it was not too long to transcribe, I would send you an entertaining petition of the [periwigmakers] to the King, in which they complain that men *will* wear [their own hair].

An interesting sign of new manners, and a question of the emphasis on *will*.

(lxv) If he dies of it,—and how should he not?—it will sound very silly when Hercules or Theseus ask him what he died of, to reply, 'I caught my death on a damp staircase at a new club-room.'

(lxvi) Sure power must have some strange unknown charm, when it can compensate for such contempt! I see many who triumph in these bitter pills which the ministry are so often forced to swallow; I own I do not; it is more mortifying to me to reflect how great and respectable we were three years ago than satisfactory to see those insulted who have brought such shame upon us. ['Tis poor amends] to national honour to know, that if a printer is [set in the pillory,] his country wishes it was [my] Lord This, or Mr. That. They will be gathered to the Oxfords, and Bolingbrokes, and ignominious of former days; but the wound they have inflicted is perhaps indelible. That goes to *my* heart, who had felt all the Roman pride of being one of the first nations upon earth!—Good night!—I will go to bed, and dream of Kings drawn in triumph; and then I will go to Paris, and dream I am pro-consul there; [pray,] take care not to let me be awakened with an account of an invasion having taken place from Dunkirk! Yours ever,

(lxvii) Mr. Chute tells me that you have taken a new house in Squireland, and have given yourself up for two years more [to port and parsons.] I am very angry, and resign you to the works of the devil or the church, I don't care which. You will get the gout, turn

Methodist, and expect to ride to heaven upon your own great toe. I was happy with your telling me how well you love me, and though I don't love loving, I could have poured out all the fulness of my heart to such an old and true friend; but what am I the better for it, if I am to see you [but] two or three days in the year?

(lxviii) Your wit and humour will be as much lost upon them, as if you talked the dialect of Chaucer; for with all the divinity of wit, it grows out of fashion [like a fardingale.] I am convinced that the young men at White's already laugh at George Selwyn's *bon mots* only by tradition. I avoid talking before the youth of the age as I would dancing before them; for if one's tongue [don't] move in the steps of the day, and thinks to please by its old graces, it is only an object of ridicule, [like Mrs. Hobart in her cotillon.] I tell you we should get together, and comfort ourselves with reflecting on the brave days that we have known—not that I think people were a jot more clever or wise in our youth than they are now; but as my system is always to live in a vision as much as I can, and as vision's don't increase with years, there is nothing so natural as to think one remembers what one does not remember.

(lxix) If you are like me, you are fretting at the weather.

(lxx) My plan is to pass away calmly; cheerfully if I can; sometimes to amuse myself with the rising generation, but to take care not to fatigue them, nor weary them with old stories, which will not interest them, as their adventures do not interest me.

(lxxi) In short, they are a pleasant medicine, that one should take care not to grow fond of.

(lxxii) Good night? You see I never let our long-lived friendship drop, though you give it so few opportunities of breathing.

(lxxiii) But I seem to choose to read futurity, because I am not likely to see it: indeed I am most rational when I say to myself, What is all this to me?

(lxxiv) By the tenth article of the capitulation, Lord Cornwallis demanded that the loyal Americans in his army should not be punished. This was flatly refused, and he has left them to be hanged. [I doubt] no vote of Parliament will be able [to blanch] such a—such a—I don't know what the word is for it; he must get his uncle the Archbishop to christen it; there is no name for it in any Pagan vocabulary. I suppose it will have a patent for being called Necessity. Well! there ends another volume of the American war. It looks a little as if the history of it would be all we should have for it, except forty millions of debt.

(lxxv) These are certainly the speculations of an idle man, and the more trifling when one considers the moment.

The preceding extracts contain examples of long-standing collocations, though they also carry unmistakable marks of the social context of the eighteenth century.

Walpole died just before the turn of the century. As herald of the nineteenth I have chosen William Wilberforce. Wilberforce wrote a familiar letter to Pitt in September 1804, which provides interesting linguistic material with the highest social sanction. Stylistically, it is more contemporary than what has been shown of Walpole, perhaps less aristocratic.

(lxxvi) Fifthly, and last, not least, let me beg you, my dear Pitt, to have the proclamation issued for stopping the Guiana supply of slaves. If I felt less on that subject, I should say more; but I really do feel [on it] very deeply, and so I know you would also, if your attention were not absorbed by such a number of pressing matters: but it will not cost you half an hour I hope to settle this. I beg you will remember how much I myself am personally concerned in it, if any other excuse be necessary for my boring you so about it than the merits of the subject itself. I cannot doubt that —, and others of his set in abolition matters, will renew the attack they formerly made on me, on account of my not having endeavoured to stop this supply of slaves to the conquered settlements. I trust, however, that I need not assure you that the thing itself, far more than what any one can say on it, weighs on my mind. I repeat it, half an hour would settle the whole—the forms are at hand in the Council Office.

There is another *-ing -ed* participial phrase, *on account of my not having endeavoured to stop . . .* and there are *a number of pressing matters, even the forms are at hand in the Council office*. The earliest citation by the *N.E.D.* of *form* in the sense of 'a formulary document with blanks for the insertion of particulars' is dated 1855. The word as used here may bear this sense.

(lxxvii) Seventhly, I cannot help saying a word or two on a subject on which I have thought, at least daily, for many months—that I mean of the Volunteer command. Surely you will not, if there should be any landing, take your [station] as colonel of the corps, but remember that you are the mainspring of the whole machine, and there is a reason peculiar to the times or the persons [in certain high situations,] which renders it indispensable, both on grounds of duty and character, that you should be [in a station] from which you can issue general orders, applicable to all the parts of the complicated system of measures. You naturally do not hear much concerning



the commander-in-chief, but I do not believe people [think of him half as well as he deserves.] Their chief reason for not being much more discontented than they are, and still more than they [avow themselves to be], is, that they believe if any thing serious really were to happen, *you* would sit in council with him, and they give him credit for a disposition to follow your advice. Let me beg you to destroy this, which I am sure you will ascribe to its true motives, regard for the public interest, and personally to yourself.

I am ever,

My dear P.,

Affectionately and sincerely yours,

W. WILBERFORCE.

Pitt is *the mainspring of the whole machine* and is responsible for the *issue of general orders, applicable to all the parts of the complicated system of measures*. These collocations must have been fairly common at the time. Wilberforce used them rather than invented them. They can still be used to-day.

(lxxviii) There can be no objection to his enlightening the minds of the good people of Holland on the subject of the slave trade.

Clearly set in the nineteenth-century context and familiar in all modes of meaning. Another participial phrase with genitive pronoun as part of a nominal phrase.

(lxxix) . . . you must have had a copy of it, and I hope you read it; it was a very good summary.

(lxxx) Pitt, and you yourself also, are far better judges than I can be, whether it would be proper to go the length of taking any such step as that which Brougham recommends.

(lxxxii) Do you remember my asking you, [by Brougham's desire,] whether you had any objection to his passing through Holland in his way to Vienna, Etc.?

Two participles in *-ing* preceded by genitival pronouns.

(lxxxii) Really, the idea of a war between our two countries is perfectly horrible; and I am happy to say, that I think, in this country, this most just sentiment gains ground. Like all propositions which are founded in truth and reason, it gradually sinks into the minds of men, and, though perhaps slowly and insensibly, by degrees it leavens

nearly the whole mass. It will tend to produce this friendly disposition on your side of the water, if more of your countrymen would come over and live awhile among us. We are not an idle people; we are a busy people, and may not have leisure or disposition to pay all the personal attentions which politeness might prescribe; but I am persuaded that any gentleman of character and moderation, who should visit this country, would meet with such a friendly reception as would show him that the circumstance of our being the descendants [of common progenitors] is not forgotten, or rather, that it is reviving and diffusing itself with increasing force.

Much less familiar but unmistakably democratic and nearer to contemporary modes than Walpole.

(lxxxiii) and really the business of parliament has increased so much of late years, as to render it next to impossible for any man who cannot live for six or seven months, in every year, with a very small proportion of food or sleep, especially the latter, to attend at all, as he would otherwise be glad to do, to domestic or social claims.

With this last emphasis on the arrival of features of life and language well-known to all of us today, I may conclude by indicating once more the main theme of this essay on linguistic description. It is an outline sketch suggesting by hints the sort of language a linguist might develop in order to describe language by making statements of meaning at a series of levels.

The presentation of the linguistic features which I have made above transcends the historical order. At the outset I illustrated as many modes of meaning as possible from the language forms themselves. Licensed to create his own diction, the poet so shapes his composition or design that a great deal of its meaning is the form he gives it. For such form, for such personal usage and style, the choice of Swinburne was for me an inevitable choice. I have made no attempt to show how Swinburne's diction is narrowly dated and determined in nineteenth-century history.

The letters bear the marks of the eighteenth century; but my purpose in presenting them was to view them regressively noticing those linguistic features which seem to persist as normal usage over long periods.

#### IV

Finally I would return to Wilde's dialogue "The Critic as Artist" to emphasize the importance of the application of descriptive linguistics to modern, including contemporary, English by the schools of English in our Universities. Writing of the Greeks and Greek, he reminds us

forcibly "that the material they criticized with most care was language." Turning to England, he puts the case for criticism in his own idiom as follows:

England has done one thing; it has invented and established Public Opinion, which is an attempt to organise the ignorance of the community, and to elevate it to the dignity of physical force. But Wisdom has always been hidden from it.<sup>1</sup>

You have asked me about the influence of Criticism. I think I have answered that question already; but there is this also to be said. It is Criticism that makes us cosmopolitan. The Manchester school tried to make men realise the brotherhood of humanity, by pointing out the commercial advantages of peace. It sought to degrade the wonderful world into a common market-place for the buyer and the seller. It addressed itself to the lowest instincts, and it failed. War followed upon war, and the tradesman's creed did not prevent France and Germany from clashing together in blood-stained battle. There are others of our own day who seek to appeal to mere emotional sympathies, or to the shallow dogmas of some vague system of abstract ethics. They have their Peace Societies, so dear to the sentimentalists, and their proposals among those who have never read history. But mere emotional sympathy will not do. It is too variable, and too closely connected with the passions; and a board of arbitrators who, for the general welfare of the race, are to be deprived of the power of putting their decisions into execution, will not be of much avail. There is only one thing worse than Injustice, and that is Justice without her sword in her hand. When Right is not Might, it is Evil.

No: the emotions will not make us cosmopolitan, any more than the greed for gain could do so. It is only by the cultivation of the habit of intellectual criticism that we shall be able to rise superior to race-prejudices.<sup>2</sup>

Intellectual criticism will bind Europe together in bonds far closer than those that can be forged by shopman or sentimentalist. It will give us the peace that springs from understanding.<sup>3</sup>

The criticism of English in English for all who use English may well prove one of the great educational forces of the age and a source of strength to all who subscribe to the ideals associated with the growth of this vast language community.

<sup>1</sup> "The Critic as Artist" from *Intentions*, by Oscar Wilde, 12th edition, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211-12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.