

Language and Class



1.

Of the laborious and mercantile part of the people, the diction is in great measure casual and mutable; many of their terms are formed for some temporary or local convenience, and though current at certain times and places, are in others utterly unknown. This fugitive cant, which is always in a state of increase or decay, cannot be regarded as any part of the durable materials of a language, and therefore must be suffered to perish with other things unworthy of preservation.

(Dictionary, Samuel Johnson, 1755)



2.

Liberty of speech and freedom of discussion in this House form an essential part of the constitution; but it is necessary that persons coming forward as petitioners, should address the House in decent and respectful language.

(Parliamentary Debates xxx.779)

3.

**TEXT 135a – Petition to Parliament, 1793**

Your petitioners are lovers of peace, of liberty, and justice. They are in general tradesmen and artificers, unpossessed of freehold land, and consequently have no voice in choosing members to sit in parliament; – but though they may not be freeholders, they are men, and do not think themselves fairly used in being excluded the rights of citizens ...

(Parliamentary Debates xxx.776)

4.

**TEXT 135b – Petition to Parliament, 1810**

The petitioners cannot conceive it possible that his Majesty's present incapable and arbitrary ministers should be still permitted to carry on the government of the country, after having wasted our resources in fruitless expeditions, and having shewn no vigour but in support of antiquated prejudices, and in attacks upon the liberties of the subject ...

(Parliamentary Debates xvi.955)

5.

**TEXT 136 – Letter to Oliver Cromwell Esquire, of Cheshunt Park, 27 February 1799**

Whe right these lines to you who are the Combin'd of the Parish of Cheshunt in the Defence of our Parrish rights which you unlawfully are about to disinherit us of ... Resolutions is maid by the aforesaid Combin'd that if you intend of inclosing Our Commond Commond fields Lammas Meads Marches &c Whe Resolve before that bloody and unlawful act is finished to have your hearts bloud if you proceede in the aforesaid bloody act Whe like horse leaches will cry give, give until whe have split the bloud of every one that wishes to rob the Inosent unborn. It shall not be in your power to say I am safe from the hands of my Enemy for Whe like birds of pray will prively lie in wait to spil the bloud of the aforesaid Charicters whose names and places of abode are as prutrified sores in our Nostrils. Whe declair that thou shall not say I am safe when thou goest to thy bed for beware that thou liftest not thine eyes up in the most mist of flames ...

6.

**TEXT 138 – William Cobbett's *The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine*, 1796**

I procured me a Lowth's grammar, and applied myself to the study of it with unceasing assiduity, and not without some profit; for, though it was a considerable time before I fully comprehended all that I read, still I read and studied with such unremitted attention, that, at last, I could write without falling into any very gross errors. The pains I took cannot be described: I wrote the whole grammar out two or three times; I got it by heart; I repeated it every morning and every evening, and, when on guard, I imposed on myself the task of saying it all over once every time I was posted sentinel. To this exercise of my memory I ascribe the retentiveness of which I have since found it capable, and to the success with which it was attended, I ascribe the perseverance that has led to the acquirement of the little learning of which I am the master.

7.

Cobbett was thus convinced of the need to master standard grammar:

Without understanding this, you can never hope to become fit for anything beyond mere trade or agriculture ... Without a knowledge of grammar, it is impossible for you to write correctly; and, it is by mere accident that you speak correctly; and, pray bear in mind, that all well-informed persons judge of a man's mind (until they have other means of judging) by his writing or speaking.

(Advice to Young Men, William Cobbett)

