

# Noblesse Oblige Revisited

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# *Noblesse Oblige* Revisited

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## Prologue

Since 1955 there has been a great deal of controversy concerning Miss Nancy Mitford's publication entitled "The English Aristocracy"<sup>(1)</sup> in *Encounter*. Her essay in *Encounter*, a magazine with a distinctly upper middle-class appeal, created extraordinary public interest, forcing the editor to publish a special reprint of her article. At about the same time on the other side of the Atlantic, a similar publication, *Etiquette*,<sup>(2)</sup> was published in the United States by Mrs. Emily Post, although it did not stir the public nearly as much as its English counterpart. Mrs. Post's *Blue Book of Social Usage*,<sup>(3)</sup> the American counterpart of Miss Nancy Mitford's *Noblesse Oblige*, came out in 1955 (though this was the ninth edition). A comparison of these two separate English and American attempts to look at the subtle problem of social class distinctions is to be made in this paper. Further, this paper will introduce the two publications on the problems of linguistic usage in the two countries, although they deal with the matter in quite different manners. This paper purports to get a general idea of the native responses to class indicators, which are specially selected words for making class distinctions.

Certain types of pronunciation and certain expressions are preferred by non-upper class people in England, while the upper classes dislike and even abhor them. This is a result of not only the problem of usage levels but is also the effect of the undercurrent antagonism which has existed deep within the minds of the people of different social classes.

The adoration of upper-class speech by non-upper classes can be blamed partly on the existence of snobs, which makes the matter even more complicated for outsiders to understand. Even in a country where there is very little social mobility, there are always those who are anxious to move up to a higher echelon. Naturally, everybody wants to speak and communicate in the same form of English without linguistic exclusions and isolation. Of course, everybody cannot speak the same language. Idiolects differ from person to person, but similar idiolects constitute a speech community where people speak almost the same type of language, in other words, a dialect. The language of the upper classes, whether it is standard English or not, (though it is far from it, in fact) is only one of many varieties of English spoken in England. The same can be said about the language of the non-upper classes. One thing that must be clarified here from the onset is that the usage of English by the upper classes can not be imitated as standard speech, nor can the usage of English by the lower classes be looked down upon as non-standard English. We have to look at the varieties of English objectively and try to see them as they really are.

Apart from regional varieties, upper-class speech (one of the social class dialects of English) has been a topic not easily broached in England. There seemed to be subtle barriers which prevented common people from climbing into the ranks of the U-speakers. Since language is the most habitual form of human behavior and details of usage often become class markers, some tried to improve their social status by modulating their voices and

by employing U-words and expressions. Englishmen have always been aware of the existence of upper-class English, but strangely enough, they have been reluctant to bring the matter into the light. Of course, some ridiculed and made fun of words or pronunciations which were different from their own. Some endeavored, in vain, to acquire upper-class speech patterns, because they regarded the acquisition of certain forms of usage and pronunciation as an indication of social status, though at present upper-class speech has lost much of its glamor. Upper-class speech, or the so-called Oxbridge accent, is, as Professor A. S. C. Ross points out, something that ordinary adults cannot acquire unless they have gone through the public schools during their impressive and formative years.<sup>(4)</sup> This has long been a favorite topic of conversation but no one has dared to write on the differences of speech between U and non-U speech until Professor Alan Ross took up this problem in a Finnish philological journal in 1954.

### **A. S. C. Ross and Nancy Mitford**

Professor Alan S. C. Ross held the chair of Linguistics at the University of Birmingham when his “U and Non-U: An Essay in Sociolinguistics”<sup>(5)</sup> was first published under the title of “Linguistic Class Indicators in Present-Day English” in *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, a Finnish academic periodical published by Uusfilologinen Yhdistys. Two months after the publication of Miss Nancy Mitford’s article in *Encounter*, Professor Ross’s scholarly study—with some of the too-technical phonetic sections omitted and abridged by himself for lay readers—was reprinted in the same magazine. Though in condensed form, Professor Ross made a survey of the common words and their pronunciations and tried to draw a clear demarcation line between U (upper-class speech) and non-U (non-upper class speech). In other words, he tried to categorize people into classes by examining their words,

phrases and pronunciation.

At the beginning of his essay he mentions that there are still three social classes in England, although it has now become difficult to distinguish people by education, appearance or dress.<sup>(6)</sup> According to Professor Ross: "It is solely through their language that U-people can be distinguished from non-U people."<sup>(7)</sup> His paper is divided into two sections: the Spoken Words and the Written Words. In the latter section he enumerates the class-indicating words. Some of these are quoted in Nancy Mitford's "*The English Aristocracy*" and she also has added several more of her own U and non-U indicators.

Her examples are, as was pointed out in the letter-to-the-editor column in *Encounter*, simply words of her own choice. Nancy Mitford herself was a Hon (actually she was a daughter of an earl) and was supposed to know much about the usage of her peers in fashionable society. As Evelyn Waugh admitted, unlike most other members of the upper classes, Miss Mitford was the right person to take the task since she had a host of friends in every class. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that she did not adopt a systematic research technique, but rather simply jotted down and labeled words that she did not like as non-U, and words that she herself used or heard around her as U words.

Nancy Mitford was the eldest daughter of the fiercely eccentric Lord Redsdale. At the age of twelve her father succeeded to his peerage after her uncle's death in World War I. She has written several novels, edited two books of Victorian letters, and has translated a couple of books from the French. Miss Mitford claims that she never received any formal education, but that she was taught how to speak French in a large, remote country house. In 1948 she went to Paris to live, and spent the rest of her life there, where she found it quite safe to publish her insider's view

of the English aristocracy.

Her "The English Aristocracy" is written in plain, simple, delightful English, and is adorned with humorous touches. Her aim was to arouse the public's attention to the problem of U-usage, which England was blissfully unconscious of. It was one of her "notorious teases." For that reason she chose to write a humorous and fascinating portrait of an English noble family. Throughout her article her talent is clearly manifested in the depiction of the life of a typical upper-class family. The highly idiosyncratic behavior and opinions of Lord Fortinbras in her article are just superb.

One of the reasons why these two articles dealing with class indicators, became popular only a few months after publication in *Encounter* (Professor Ross's article on U and Non-U came out two months after Nancy Mitford's) is that Miss Mitford herself has exceptional journalistic abilities and she has also been able to expose as an "agitator of genius" the inner life of a unique English noble family, arousing and stimulating her readers by mentioning that the English aristocracy is just "like a chicken whose head has been cut off; it may run about in a lively way, but in fact, it is dead."<sup>(8)</sup> Toward the end of her article, she also insinuates that the English aristocracy is somewhat disgusting and not even worthy of existence, "like the appendix in the human body."<sup>(9)</sup> She must have employed these caustic epithets purposely to provoke the desired responses from her readers. Writing about class distinctions in England has long been a taboo, but Miss Mitford dared to break it—and the repercussions are still being felt.<sup>(10)</sup>

A quick comparison of the styles employed by Professor Ross and Miss Mitford reveals that Ross has treated the matter seriously and academically, while Miss Mitford's treatment, although very delightful reading,<sup>(11)</sup> is humorous

and dogmatic and as pointed out by Evelyn Waugh,<sup>(12)</sup> Miss Mitford's examples are not always backed up by sufficient evidence. Whatever prompted Miss Mitford to adopt this delightful style, it seems that she does not agree with Ross's serious scientific style. But of course, Miss Mitford is a novelist and Professor Ross a linguistic scholar.

### A. S. C. Ross's (Nancy Mitford's) U and Non-U

The portion of Professor Alan Ross's article which appealed most to *Encounter* readers was undoubtedly Section II: Spoken language; Vocabulary. By using this convenient yardstick, the readers, after checking themselves out and feeling good at the outcome can proceed to the interesting party game of pigeonholing people into U and non-U groups. But how can they wander into the world armed only with a rather incomplete list of words (U and non-U indicators) and try to make class distinctions? All they could really accomplish is to prove how common or non-U they themselves are.

The following examples illustrate Ross's U and non-U words:<sup>(13)</sup>

*article* (non-U)/*pot*, *jerry* (U), *take a bath* (non-U)/*have one's bath* (U), *civil* (U), *coach* (non-U)/*bus* (U), *crust*, *crumb* (non-U), *cultivated*, *cultured* (non-U)/*civilized* (U), *cycle* (non-U)/*riding* (U), *lounge* (non-U)/*hall*, *dining room* (U), *mirror* (non-U)/*glass* (U), *preserve* (non-U)/*jam* (U), *radio* (non-U)/*wireless* (U), *serviette* (non-U)/*table napkin* (U); *toilet-paper* (non-U)/*lavatory-paper* (U), *wealthy* (non-U)/*rich* (U)... To these Miss Nancy Mitford has added the following :

*sweet* (non-U)/*pudding* (U), *denture* (non-U)/*false teeth* (U), *glasses* (non-U)/*spectacles* (U), *Britain* (non-U)/*England* (U), *wire* (non-U)/*telegram* (U).<sup>※</sup>

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※As to the list of U and non-U pronunciations, refer to "Notes on Noblesse Oblige" in the *Journal of Humanities* (No. 12) published by the School of Business Administration, Meiji University.

The author's rough generalizations in connection with U and non-U caused a flood of letters from readers to pour into the editor's office. Among these were retorts, denials, corrections, and suggestions, while others were commendations. Miss Mitford's article, however, is a very delightful and witty piece, but in some parts provocative, thus making the issue all the more controversial. Columnists from various periodicals started quoting Miss Mitford and began using her "formula" in their columns and within a few months the *U and non-U* formula had found its way into the literary vocabulary. Evelyn Waugh, Strix, Christopher Sykes and other men of letters jumped onto the controversy bandwagon and the U and non-U storm raged all over England and even crossed the Atlantic to the United States.

Most of the letters to the editors were attempts to correct Professor Ross and Miss Nancy Mitford's U and non-U indicators. The contributors may have checked out their references on themselves and some of their acquaintances and classified them as U or non-U. Their suggestions and corrections are to be greatly valued since they are based on their personal observations.

Here are some of the points made in the letter-to-the-editor column in *Encounter*: "*Corsets* (non-U)/*stays* (U) is an outmoded distinction. They seem to be called something else now." (Wayland Young)<sup>(14)</sup> "I should say *bedspread* is current U and *counterpane* ever so (U very) slightly non-U. I hotly deny the non-Uness of *potting to baby*. *Hall* or *dining-room* (U) for *lounge* (non-U) is surely a simple error." (Wayland Young) As to the best-known of all class indicators *serviette* (non-U)/*napkin* (U), Olive Loyd-Baker insists that "that was certainly the case twenty years ago."<sup>(15)</sup> "*Note-paper*," Dominik Salteena writes, "is different from writing paper."<sup>(16)</sup> According to him, a *note-paper* is a small single sheet for notes and a

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※The discussion of U and non-U mores and pronunciations is omitted here.



*writing paper* is a folded sheet of four pages for letters. Another response to the term *note-paper* is from Michael Dugdale. From his memory he claims that he “can assert that *note-paper* raised fewer eyebrows in good society than non-U would have done, had such a locution ever been<sup>(17)</sup> heard.”

All of the contributors to the column insisted on their own standards based on their limited experiences. They of course were playing it by ear and not using their eyes to verify their assertions without probing deep into this controversial issue. The only literary evidence cited was from Shakespeare (Too old, Nancy Mitford would say) which was taken from a dictionary of quotations. This citation was used to rebut Miss Mitford’s extraordinary claim: *looking glass* (U)/*mirror* (non-U). To quote the example in the introduction by Russell Lynes in the American edition of *Noblesse Oblige*, where he introduces Mr. Philip Toynbee’s quotation from *Richard II*:<sup>(18)</sup>

*King Richard*: An if my word be sterling yet in England,  
Let it command *a mirror* hither straight...

*Bolingbroke*: Go some of you and fetch *a looking-glass*.

(Italics are mine.)

As for the “*King’s*” English, Mitford replies, “It is probable that Richard II, like many monarchs, was non-U.”<sup>(18)</sup> Concerning this, George Mikes, who claimed to have heard many instances of upper-class people employing non-U words, says in his correspondence to *Encounter*. “You can imagine my pained surprise bordering on indignation when he (a more U-ish baron) started talking of a *wealthy* industrialist, an *ill* uncle, and a *mental* aunt. To add insult to injury he asked me whether I would go and spend the next *week-end* at his house in the country.”<sup>(19)</sup> According to Professor Ross’s classification, ‘wealthy, ill, mental and week-end’ are all non-U words, while ‘rich, sick, mad and Friday-Monday’ are U-words. Therefore, Mikes

wondered, "Am I to take it that our aristocracy is definitely non-U?"<sup>(20)</sup> He suspects that it might be one of those "*wily old bird's*" intrigues to betray and confuse the lower orders lest they should get to know how to be U-speakers. To be sure the vogue or storm which Miss Mitford created was extremely appealing to the general public. However, it must be kept in mind that it is next to impossible to classify people by the use of superficial U and non-U litmus-type tests. Professor Ross and Miss Mitford are not asserting that the person who utters a U-word belongs to the U-society. Even a non-U person can employ a U-word, and vice versa. This is what Miss Mitford is afraid of in her article. She points out that "the issue is sometimes confused by U-speakers using non-U indicators as a joke."<sup>(21)</sup> Moreover, language is so personal, as well as social, that all members of the same community do not always speak the same language. The same thing can be said of the regional and historical varieties of speech.

Miss Mitford agrees wholeheartedly with Professor Ross's firm assertion that non-U adults cannot become U-speakers, however hard they may try. It has been asserted by the professor that even if a non-U speaker pretends to be a U-speaker, "one word or phrase will suffice to brand an apparent U-speaker as originally non-U, for U-speakers themselves never make mistakes."<sup>(22)</sup> Miss Mitford also claims that there are non-U speakers among the nobility in England since one can become an aristocrat overnight simply by making political, commercial or other contributions to the king or queen. A U-speaker, in Ross's and Mitford's classification, is not necessarily a titled person, but a man who speaks the typical upper-class language. Therefore, even King Richard II, who must have spoken the "*King's*" English, is regarded as a non-U speaker by Miss Nancy Mitford.

Everyone who jumped on this bandwagon blew his own trumpet without

any musical scores. The typical attitude toward this U and non-U rhapsody is clearly expressed in Miss Nancy Mitford's comment on one of her reader's letters. She replies, "I don't know because I've never heard anybody say it."<sup>(23)</sup> It is true that she has written an enlightening article and helped to make a picture, hitherto vague and blurred, clear, but she has not indicated correct usage. She has merely presented the readers with an account of what she has heard or observed in a particular section of society. As was suggested in one of the letters in the magazine, it might be that the professor—and maybe even Miss Mitford—was a little out of date, and his paper seems to have had the effect of proving that "there are no completely U or non-U speakers,"<sup>(24)</sup> still less U and non-U words.<sup>(25)</sup>

### Never-Say and Say-Instead Words

In addition to Professor Alan Ross's U and non-U designators, an American version of U and non-U appeared in *Etiquette*, sub-titled *the Blue Book of Social Usage* authored by Emily Post. Mrs. Post has long been considered somewhat of an authority on U-speech and behavior in the U-society, if there is any, of the United States, where the people are proud of their "classless" society. In chapter 5 of her social usage book, she discussed **THE WORDS WE CHOOSE AND HOW WE USE THEM**. Needless to say, U-speech in England and the preferred way of speaking in the United States are quite different. But there seems to be a common denominator in the selection of U-words or "better words." In other words, both type of U-speakers—i. e. in the United States and in England—seem to prefer the same type of words. The reason for this preference may be that the upper classes in the United States were originally British U-speakers. Another factor may be that they have purposely fostered a peculiar way of talking to differentiate themselves from non-U speakers.

The treatment of the two parallel words and expressions NEVER SAY (the equivalent of U) and SAY INSTEAD (the equivalent of non-U) is very similar to Professor Ross's. To quote an example from Mrs. Emily Post's *Etiquette*, it is non-U to say "I desire to purchase," while on the other hand, "I would like to buy," is labeled as its U equivalent. <sup>(26)</sup> Although Mrs. Post is making her own judgment as to the usage level, it must be pointed out that she is not treating the U and non-U designators in American English in the same way that Professor Ross and Miss Mitford treated them in their analyses of British English. All that she is trying to do in her book is to recommend a better way of speaking ignoring the regional differences. Besides, there is no such thing as standard English in the United States; in every regional dialect there is a cultivated standard speech for that district.

Mrs. Post writes: request (NS)/ask (SI), permit me to assist you (NS)/let me help you (SI), converse (NS)/talk (SI), partook of liquid refreshment (NS)/had something to drink (SI), ascertain (NS)/find out (SI), residence (NS)/house <sup>(27)</sup> (SI). One glance at this list of U and non-U words and expressions (NS and SI words and expressions) is enough to show us that most of Mrs. Post's U (SI) words are simple, short and emphatic Anglo-Saxon words, while most of the non-U (NS) words are big Latin-based words. The same thing can be said concerning Ross's U and non-U words. Quite contrary to our expectations, upper-class people both in England and in the United States do not prefer long, fancy words and expressions. This may sound a little strange, since the upper-class language and the official language in England right after the Norman Conquest in 1066 was the speech of the Landed Gentry, while Anglo-Saxon was spoken by the conquered. It has always been, and still is, the middle class people who are struggling to get out of their present status and climb up to the upper classes. They are

eager to accept new words to keep up with the progress of modern technology. On the other hand, U-speakers are too exclusive and conservative to adopt words or expressions new to them; this also holds true of lower-class people. In some respects, fashionable people stubbornly refuse and reject anything foreign in order to protect their established status. In this sense, anything new or modern might repulse them or make them reluctant to employ it. They like to stick to the old traditions, stick to their old language, and stick to their old manners and customs. Therefore, both in England and in the United States, the U-speakers are conservative, preferring old, simple, plain words, whereas non-U speakers, especially those of the marginal middle classes, are more up-to-date, preferring words of affectation and pretence.

There is another word-list of U and non-U indicators. Professor E. D. Baltzell at the University of Pennsylvania compiled a table of upper-class and middle-class usage, which Vance Packard quoted in *The Status Seekers* <sup>(28)</sup> and added, like Miss Mitford, a few more examples to the list. Professor Baltzell's examples also follow the same tendency as was evident in Professor Ross's and Mrs. Post's word lists. According to Professor Baltzell, *wash, sofa, long dress, rich, What?, I feel sick, live in a house, toilet, porch, library* are all upper-class words, while the corresponding middle-class words are *launder, davenport, formal gown, wealthy, Pardon?, I feel ill, reside in a home, lavatory, veranda, den or rampus room*. To these Vance Packard has added the following as class indicators: *sweat, pants, job, legs* and *go to business* (middle-class words); *perspiration, trousers, position, limbs, and go to work* (upper-class words). Listing class-indicating words is not so difficult a task, since in the United States the choice of words rather than accent is more indicative of status. The middle-class words or non-U words quoted above are also characterized by

pretension and vanity as contrasted with the straightforward plain, upper-class words. To U-speakers, as can be well imagined, some of the more up-to-date non-U words might be somewhat disgusting and provocative. Surprisingly, Baltzell's list is so much like that of Professor Ross that no one would argue the point, even if one were to insist that the above classification was actually Ross's classification.

There seem to be no reliable methods for choosing so-called U and non-U words in Mrs. Post, Professor Baltzell and Vance Packard. The choice of U-words by the American authors surprisingly coincides with Professor A. Ross's findings. Mrs. Post says: "In best society no one *arises*, or *retires* or *resides* in a *residence*."<sup>(29)</sup> She recommends that these words be changed into "shorter, simpler, and preferably Anglo-Saxon words."<sup>(30)</sup> The use of big words will make the utterances sound pretentious or affected to the ears of the fashionable. The preferred way of speaking recommended by Mrs. Post is "One *gets up*, *takes a bath*, *goes to bed*, and *lives in a*<sup>(31)</sup> house." Incidentally, to *take a bath*, according to Professor Ross, is non-U; the U expression for this is to *have one's bath*,<sup>(32)</sup>

Of course, the contrasts between British and American speech must be taken into account when we make a comparison of the 'class indicators' cited by these pioneers in the field. In the United States upper-class people copy the British model. Some of them are very careful in their pronunciation. In spite of the fact that there is the Harvard or Proper Bostonian accent, which is the equivalent of Oxbridge accent, most people—except the marginal U—do not care what types of English they speak as long as they can communicate. In this respect, both upper-class and lower-class members tend to share the same tendency. To be sure, the constant use of plain, simple words, which is recommended by Mrs. Post,<sup>(33)</sup> will add a U-ish touch to communication, but may run the risk of be-

coming clumsy and awkward in some cases where they are strung together. The extreme case of the indiscriminate use of 'get' and the constant use of 'two-word verbs' is to be found in the daily conversation of lower-class people.

## Pronunciation

Like Professor Ross, Mrs. Emily Post lists some examples of the pronunciation of "the illiterate and the highly cultivated."<sup>(34)</sup> In the United States there are no U-pronunciations or received pronunciations as one finds in England, but there are generally accepted pronunciations or "highly educated pronunciations," which can be distinguished from uneducated pronunciations. Non-U pronunciation in the United States has much to do with non-standard American English, one of the regional or cultural varieties of English. However, it must be emphasized that non-U pronunciation should not be considered as a deviation from norm. It is quite old-fashioned to discuss U and non U pronunciations in a country where everything—social class particularly—is decided in terms of wealth and the regional differences are considered much more important. The main purpose here is not to discuss what is standard American English or what type of pronunciation should be recommended as standard English, but to compare Mrs. Emily Post's "illiterate and cultivated pronunciations" with Ross's U and non-U pronunciations in England.

The following illiterate, exaggerated pronunciations, as listed in Mrs. Emily Post's *Etiquette*, are not used by highly cultivated people in the United States.

reely	/rɪ:li/	for <i>really</i>	/iə/→/i:/
het	/het/	for <i>hat</i>	/æ/→/e/
ket	/ket/	for <i>cat</i>	/æ/→/e/

jest	/dʒest/	for <i>just</i>	/ʌ/→/e/
jast	/dʒæst/	for <i>just</i>	/ʌ/→/æ/

The above examples are also found in Ross's U and non-U pronunciation list. According to Professor Ross's classification, the above illiterate pronunciations are branded as U.<sup>(34)</sup> To judge from the pronunciation alone, even a highly cultivated British duke would be considered an illiterate (non-U) speaker in the United States. Other examples on Mrs. Post's list are of sloppy English. The omission of sounds such as :

kep	/kep/	for <i>kept</i>	/t/
strenth	/strenθ/	for <i>strength</i>	/g/
pitcher	/pɪtʃə/	for <i>picture</i>	/k/
artchtek	/ɑ:tʃitek/	for <i>architect</i>	/t/
moon pitcher	/mu:m pɪtʃə/	for <i>moving picture</i>	/k/
tempture	/tɛmptʃə/	for <i>temperature</i>	/ərə/
*Febuary	/fɛbjʊəri/	for <i>February</i>	/r/
*youman	/jʊ:mən/	for <i>human</i>	/h/
*goverment	/gʌvəmənt/	for <i>government</i>	/n/
*wite	/wait/	for <i>white</i>	/h/

\*incorrect pronunciation

and the addition of sounds :

singging	/sɪŋgɪŋ/	for <i>singing</i>	/g/
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are often found in ordinary informal levels of speech. To pronounce *reefined* /rɪ:faind/ with stress on the first syllable is branded illiterate in the United States, but U-speakers in England, according to Professor Ross,<sup>(35)</sup> pronounce it *re faine* /riféin/, which is the typical pronunciation of the Shakespearian period. The notable pronunciations are *earl* /ə:l/ for 'oil' /ɔil/, *pur-runt* /pɜ:rənt/ for 'parent' /pɛərənt/, *cher ce* /tʃəs/ for 'choice' /tʃɔis/. Like most of the sloppy pronunciations, the vowels in the four



examples above have a tendency to become centralized. The substitution by obscure vowels is also one of the characteristics of sloppy English pronunciation. To pronounce *merrige* /méridz/ for 'marriage' /mæridz/, *egg sit* /égsit/ for 'exit' /ékzit/, *abzorb* /əbzó:b/ for 'absorb' /əbsó:b/ are also among "the illiterate, exaggerated pronunciations" or "incorrect pronunciations" cited by Mrs. Post. An examination of the examples of "pretentious pronunciations" reveals that there is, in the pronunciations of 'culture' /káltʃə/, 'issue' /íʃu:/ and, 'precious' /préʃəs/, a tendency (in BAD TASTE pronunciation) to substitute them respectively with /tʃuə/ /sju:/ /sijəs/ sounds. For example, *cult-your* /káltʃuə/, *iss-you* /ísju:/, *press-i-jus* /préʃijəs/ are listed instead under "Pseudo Pronunciation" in Mrs. Post's usage book.

There is not much to discuss concerning U and non-U differences in the pronunciations cited in Mrs. Post's usage guide book. Class differences for individual sounds are not so great as the regional differences. Like in England, the characteristics of U-speech in the United States consist not only in the employment of U words and their pronunciations, but also in the employment of U-voice, with clear enunciation, which is considerably similar to the British U-voice. The discussion of 'changing one's voice' is a rather discouraging topic for non-U speakers, especially for snobs, for there are very few non-U speakers who, through severe phonetic training, have been able to acquire the art of speaking U-speech. U-speech can not be acquired after one reaches maturity but should be fostered at a much younger age.

## Epilogue

The U and non-U craze was prevalent in England when the U and non-U storm hit and swept over the country. Usages change very quickly and it is doubtful whether what Professor Ross and Miss Nancy Mitford pointed out in their essays holds true in present-day England. But when their

articles came out in *Encounter*, many chipped in with contributing examples from their own extensive contact with U-speech and behavior. Some contributed to newspapers and magazines and agreed with Professor Ross and Miss Mitford. Others gave their own views of U and non-U based on their own observations and experiences. Among the contributors were both distinguished writers<sup>※</sup> and interested amateurs. The most “implacable” competitor in this literary competition was Evelyn Waugh, who was personally well acquainted with Miss Nancy Mitford.

Evelyn Waugh's *Open Letter to the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Mrs. Peter Rodd* (as E. Waugh insists on addressing her) was the severest criticism she received. His attack on Miss Mitford's *The English Aristocracy* seems to come partly from his personal objection to English social stratification. He may have been prompted by the urge to correct Miss Mitford's erroneous and naive article. It is no wonder then that Evelyn Waugh's sarcastic *Open Letter* evoked quite a few responses. To some, it was like “a teasing rubuke”<sup>(36)</sup> and “light-hearted affirmations and rebuttals.”<sup>(37)</sup> It may have been that Mr. Waugh could not tolerate Miss Mitford's “gay, pleasing but misleading article.”<sup>(38)</sup> He even went so far as to say in his “critical letter” that both Professor Ross and Miss Mitford had duped English readers by “seriously espousing such dogmatic and even romantic notions.”<sup>(39)</sup>

Since Miss Mitford and Evelyn Waugh were such good friends, a tit for tat might have been something that they both could have laughed away as a joke. Compared with Miss Mitford's light but provocative style, which, as pointed out by Mark B. Carter, has “a manner that has the overtones of both Eve Perrick and Crowfie,”<sup>(40)</sup> Evelyn Waugh's style, especially in his *Open Letter*, is loaded with sharp irony and even aggressiveness. He labels

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※Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, Philip Toynbee, George Mikes, Christopher Sykes and anonymous writer 'Strix,' a regular contributor to *Encounter*.

Miss Mitford as “an agitatrix of genius,”<sup>(41)</sup> which is quite right judging from the unexpected general response to her article, and he also accuses her for deceiving her readers with misleading information about the mores and speech habits of the English aristocracy. But Miss Mitford can not be blamed for having galvanized an issue which others had passed off as moribund. Waugh admits, however, that Miss Mitford—with so many acquaintances in every class of society—is the right person for the job. In one respect, she has done an admirable job. As is always the case with a provocative, far reaching issue like this, it is beyond one person’s powers to undertake to find the identifiable characteristics of what Miss Mitford calls “wily old birds who seldom overdo anything”<sup>(42)</sup> in England. In other words, no one person can be an altogether reliable source.

A lot remains to be said concerning Nancy Mitford’s arbitrary judgment of U and non-U words and behavior. Most of her assertions on class indicators are based on Professor Ross’s academic paper. However, she alone seems to have had to face the slings and arrows of objections, both from amateur and professional contributors. Many of the harsh criticisms leveled at her should have been aimed at Professor Ross; criticism of Miss Mitford should have been limited to her rather arbitrary descriptions of U-behavior. Thus, Miss Mitford seems to have been unjustly accused and blamed for arousing the rabble against the behavior of upper-class people; of course, part of the reason was that she tried to identify the English aristocracy with the Mitfords and that she treated a subtle, serious issue like this too lightly and humorously, for which she may well be criticized. But from a different viewpoint, she has done, as has been repeatedly mentioned above, a great deal to illuminate what had once been regarded by outsiders as something shrouded in a mysterious mist and beyond the reach of non-U speakers.

The basis of Miss Mitford's distinguishing of U from non-U is nothing but her own limited observations, even though she may have gathered her information from a wide social circle. This greatly shocked Evelyn Waugh and made him complain in his *Open Letter* that "you (Miss Mitford) fix it (the gulf between U and non-U) where you do definitely, arbitrarily and some would say capriciously."<sup>(43)</sup> This arbitrariness, along with the capriciousness, spurred Waugh to severely attack her article. The lack of objectivity or objective standards, as well as the lack of scientific methods of treatment of her data, explains everything. It is true that it is extremely difficult to grasp the whole picture, since "the standard itself can shift so that one generation's non-U may be the next generation's U."<sup>(44)</sup> With all her careful considerations and precautions, her article fails to mention the area where U and non-U overlap and neglects borderline cases. U-people, feeling secure in their high status, use unpretentious language, but non-U people, especially those of the marginal classes (the marginal U-public) would like to draw the demarkation line just under their heels so as to differentiate themselves from the others. This may be one of the contributing factors for the frenzy generated during the U and non-U controversy. Though her article may be useful and reliable as a source, much more information still remains to be gathered and much more fieldwork still remains to be done.

It is interesting to note that Professor Ross's U and non-U indicators and their counterparts cited by Mrs. Emily Post have many aspects in common. Although Mrs. Post's NEVER-SAY and SAY-INSTEAD words and expressions are cited as the United States counterparts in Russell Lynes's introduction to the American edition of *Noblesse Oblige*, Mrs. Post's purpose was not to classify words and phrases as U and non-U, but as NEVER SAY and SAY INSTEAD. As can be clearly seen from her labels, she is

only recommending a preferred way of speaking, not U-speech, to the general public, since in the United States there is no such thing as U-speech comparable to British upper-class language. Nevertheless, U and SAY-INSTEAD words and phrases coincide in many respects. There is a similar tendency in the choice of words of fashionable people in both countries towards selecting plain, short, blunt words, or more earthy, more spade-calling, more matter-of-fact words. U-speakers are rather conservative and shy away from big, new words. They have a strong liking for the old-fashioned vocabulary and tend to avoid euphemistic expressions. Besides their conservativeness, U-speakers are not bothered by the grammatical aspects of language; that is, they don't seem to mind whether the expressions they employ are grammatically correct or not. What they care about is the functional aspect of language, or whether they are being understood or not. In this respect, upper-class people share a propensity to stubbornness with lower-class people. The trouble is that the middle classes are confusing the problem. It is always the middle classes who are striving to move up and become absorbed into the upper classes.

The participants in this controversy who have contributed to *Noblesse Oblige* also deal with this issue lightly and humorously. However, in each of the essays there seems to be an undercurrent of bad temper, though it is a relief that they have not gone too far. Now, so many years after the great frenzy, the problem has almost settled down and a completely new picture of this issue will emerge along with the gradual decline of the English aristocracy. Anyway, it is certainly non-Uish to write about U and non-U.

**Notes :**

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- (2) Post, Emily. *Etiquette, the Blue Book of Social Usage*, Funk & Wagnalls Company, New York, 1955.
- (3) *ibid.*
- (4) Ross, Alan S. C. "U and Non-U," *Noblesse Oblige*, pp. 33-34.
- (5) Ross, Alan S. C. "U and Non-U," *Noblesse Oblige*, pp. 11-36.
- (6) Ross, Alan S. C. "U and Non-U," *Noblesse Oblige*, p. 11.
- (7) *ibid.*
- (8) Mitford, Nancy. "The English Aristocracy," *Noblesse Oblige*, p. 39.
- (9) *ibid.*
- (10) Clemons, Walter. Book Review of Nancy Mitford: A Memoir By Harold Acton, *Newsweek*, May 10, 1976, p. 82.
- (11) Carter, M. B. "U Trivia," *Spectator*, May 18, 1956.
- (12) Waugh, Evelyn. "An Open Letter to the Honble Mrs. Peter Rodd (Nancy Mitford) On A Very Serious Subject From Evelyn Waugh," *Noblesse Oblige*, p. 71.
- (13) Ross, Alan S. C. "U and Non-U," *Noblesse Oblige*, pp. 28-32.
- (14) Wayland Young. "U and Non-U," *Encounter*, Vol. VI, No. 1, p. 73.
- (15) Loyd-Baker. Olive, "U and Non-U," *Encounter*, Vol. VI, No. 1, p. 74.
- (16) Salteena, Dominik. "U and Non-U," *Encounter*, Vol. V, No. 5, p. 62.
- (17) Dugdale, Michael. "U and Non-U," *Encounter*, Vol. VI, No. 1, p. 74.
- (18) Mitford, Nancy. *Noblesse Oblige*, Introduction by Russell Lynes, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1956.
- (19) Mikes, George. "The English Aristocracy," *Encounter*, Vol. V, No. 5, pp. 61-62.
- (20) *ibid.*
- (21) Mitford, Nancy. "The English Aristocracy," *Noblesse Oblige*, p. 44.
- (22) Ross, Alan S. C. "U and Non-U," *Encounter*, p. 33.
- (23) Mitford, Nancy. "Comments," *Encounter*, Vol. V, No. 5, p. 62.
- (24) Wayland, Young. "U and Non-U," *Encounter*, Vol. V, No. 5, p. 62.
- (25) Andor, Gomme. "U and Non-U," *Encounter*, Vol. VI, No. 1, p. 74.
- (26) Post, Emily, *Etiquette, The Book of Social Usage*, Funk & Wagnalls Company, New York, 1955, p. 31.
- (27) *ibid.* pp. 31-33.
- (28) Packard, Vance. *The Status Seekers, An Exploration of Class Behavior in America*, Penguin Books Ltd., 1959, pp. 126-128.

- (29) *ibid.*
- (30) *ibid.*
- (31) *ibid.*
- (32) Ross, Alan S. C. "U and Non-U," *Noblesse Oblige*, p. 28.
- (33) Post, Emily *Etiquette*, p. 31
- (34) Ross, Alan S. C. "U and Non-U," *Noblesse Oblige*, pp. 21—23
- (35) *ibid.* p. 26.
- (36) Walbridge, E. F. *Kirkus*, May 15, 1956.
- (37) Richardson, Maurice. "How Common Are You?" *The New Statesman & Nation*, April 28, 1956.
- (38) Book Review, *New Yorker*, September 15, 1956.
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- (40) Carter, Mark Bonham. "U Trivia," *Spectator*, May 18, 1956.
- (41) Waugh, Evelyn. "An Open Letter to the Honble Mrs. Peter Rodd," p. 37
- (42) Mitford, Nancy. "The English Aristocracy," *Noblesse Oblige*, p. 38.
- (43) Waugh, Evelyn. "An Open Letter to the Honble Mrs. Peter Rodd," p. 73.
- (44) Mitford, Emily. "The English Aristocracy," *Noblesse Oblige*, p. 44.