

Language and Usage Errors to Avoid

A FEW BASIC DON'TS:

1. "Thee," "Thou," and "Thy" are the intimate second person SINGULAR pronouns. They CANNOT, therefore, be plural!
2. Don't say "whyfore." Say "wherefore." "Wherefore" means "WHY." This, of course, should clarify the meaning of Juliet's most famous line ("Oh, Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" She wasn't wondering WHERE he was!
3. Don't say "Nay not" (this is a Ren Faire invention and is NOT a period phrase.) Just say "Nay!" (or "Nay, 'tis not so." or "Nay, I think not.")
4. Don't confuse "and" with "an." "And" is a conjunction and means "and." "An" is a conjunctive adverb and means "if." (I.e., say "An it please you," not "And it please you").
5. Don't confuse "certes" with "certain." "Certes" means "certainly," not "certain." Don't say "I will make certes that this is done."
6. Stafford is NOT a shire; it's a borough. A shire is an entire county (as in "Devonshire," "Lincolnshire," "Staffordshire," etc.)
7. Don't use the phrase "one pence." "Pence" is the plural of "penny." (Say "one penny," but "five pence." "Twopence" and "Threepence" are, of course, pronounced "Tuppence" and "Thruppence.")

A FEW ANACHRONISMS TO AVOID

1. "I guess"

This is an Americanism. Americans in British novels always say "I guess" a lot. That's how you know they're American. At Ren Faire - unless you want our British visitors to mistake you for an American - say "I think me" or "methinks" or "I would conjecture" but don't say "The Queen will be here soon, I guess."

The same holds for "I'm sure" and "I'm through." Both are Americanisms. Say "I am certain" and "I have finished" or "I have done."

2. The following words are period, but have a completely different meaning in Elizabethan English. Until you learn their precise meaning (ask me if you like - or check the Oxford English Dictionary), don't use them at Ren Faire - or at Dickens Faire, either.

Marvelous	Precise
Fantastic or fantastical	Mad
Wonderful	Gorgeous
Nice	Silly
Science	Fond
Genius	[Presently]

3. Delete the following words from your Ren Faire vocabulary. They are simply NOT PERIOD:

a. "Tea" - a Chinese-based word which will not enter the English language until the importation of tea in the mid-17th century.

b. "Lunch" - your mid-day meal is "dinner," not lunch. Your evening meal is, of course, "supper."

c. "Dress" is a collective noun meaning "attire." It does not mean "gown." ("Let thy dress be costly as thy purse can afford.")

d. "Abigail" is a 17th century term (derived from a character in a Jacobean play) for a waiting woman or for what would later be called a lady's maid. The term is NOT Elizabethan.

e. The well-born girl or woman who attends upon a lady or peeress is her "waiting gentlewoman" or "gentlewoman waiter" or simply her "gentlewoman." The use of the word "companion" in the sense of "paid companion" dates from the late 17th century - and even then the preferred term is "gentlewoman" (See the Diary of Samuel Pepys and the O.E.D.) Needless to say, P.A. ("personal attendant" or "personal assistant" is a 19th and 20th century term and should be avoided at Ren Faire.

For obvious reasons, a gentleman waiter (or waiting gentleman) should never be referred to as "my lord's companion."

A LITTLE MORE GRAMMAR:

1. Don't say "Prithee" to someone higher in rank than you. Remember, it's a contraction of "I pray THEE." Similarly, don't use the contraction "Art sad?" to someone higher in rank than you - unless you're very close friends. It means "Art thou sad?"

2. Yes, the Elizabethans did use contractions - dozens of them. Any casual reader of Shakespeare will notice that the Elizabethans used many of our modern contractions and many others that have become obsolete. For the record, here are a few examples:

MODERN CONTRACTIONS ACTUALLY USED IN ELIZABETHAN LITERATURE:

I'm, You're, He's, She's, It's, We're, They're
I'll, You'll, He'll, She'll, We'll, and (surprisingly) Can't

SOME NEAT ELIZABETHAN CONTRACTIONS

I'll to the Queen

I'll away! Go to't. She'll none of him!

We're for you! (Meaning, "We're with you!" "Count on us!")

'Tis, To't, On't ("But the spite on't is no praise is at all due me!")

What's o' clock? or What is't o' clock? Let's to bed.

"What's honour? A word. Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday!"

What is't?

Here's for thy pains! (I.e., You're tipping someone.)

And, of course, "Pox on't!"

TRIVIA: The LHC language handout is wrong about a number of things: "Zounds!" and "'Sblood" are perfectly Elizabethan and "ain't" is neither 18th century nor Victorian. It's used in Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, written in the 1660's.

And of course, the second person singular verb is often contracted: "Lovest thou me?" is hard to say, so it seems natural to contract it to "Lov'st thou me?" And it's certainly easier to say "Think'st thou?" than to say "thinkest thou." (Or "Thou speak'st cheerfully" instead of "Thou speakest cheerfully."). In fact, if you fail to contract verbs like these, you'll sound like a bad Hollywood costume picture (Parodied in "Ren and Stimpy's" Robin Hood episode with such lines as "Stickest thou up!" and "Thou mayest kisseth the bride").

In general, however, we want to avoid contractions at Ren Faire because we want to sound as archaic as possible in order to transport our customers back into the World of the Elizabethans. We, therefore, want to be as luxuriant in our language as possible and this usually is enhanced by not contracting our verbs.

SUBJUNCTIVES AND CONDITIONALS

Learn to use subjunctives. The Elizabethans adored them. Because Americans seldom use subjunctives today (except in phrases like "If I were President" or "I wish I were back in Paris"), subjunctives sound exotic and archaic. Therefore, we should cultivate them. Here are a few period examples:

Were I King ...

Would I were King ...

I would to God that our nation were one under Jesus Christ!

It were a pity to leave my lady Elizabeth, which followeth God's word and follow my lady Mary, which followeth not God's word.

Oh, Christ, that I were in mine own bed
And my love in my arms again!

If your venture bear no fruit, despair not!

Eldest Sons of Dukes, Marquesses, & Earls My lord - or Lord (title of courtesy)
e.g., He usually takes his father's second title by courtesy, as did Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange. This is not a real peerage - just a courtesy title.

Wives of Eldest Sons of Dukes, Marquesses & Earls Lady (Husband's title) or My lady

Younger Sons of Dukes and Marquesses My lord or Lord (First name)

e.g., Lord George Paulet is the younger son of the Marquis of Winchester.

Wives of Younger Sons of Dukes & Marquesses Lady (Husband's first name) or My lady

e.g., Lady George Paulet. (Note: This form of address is NEVER used for knights' wives.)

Daughters of Dukes, Marquesses & Earls (Unmarried or Married to Commoners) My lady or Lady (First name)

e.g., Lady Katherine Herbert (not Lady Herbert!)

Younger Sons of Earls & the Sons of Viscounts & Barons Master (Last name)

Daughters of Barons & Viscounts Mistress (Last name)

Knights Sir (First name)

Note: We don't do it at Faire, but it's OK to call him "Master (Last name)," too.

e.g., Sir Francis Walsingham (NOT Sir Walsingham)

Note: Military or naval titles come first: "Captain Sir James Lancaster"

Knights' Wives Lady (Last name)

e.g., "Lady Lancaster" or Maud, Lady Lancaster" but NOT "Lady Maud Lancaster"

However, Lady Frances Radcliffe, daughter of the Earl of Sussex, becomes Lady Frances Mildmay when she married Sir Thomas Mildmay.

Get it? Got it? Good.

Sons of Knights and Gentlemen Master (Last name)

Daughters of Knights and Gentlemen Mistress (Last name)

FORMS OF ADDRESS FOR THE MIDDLE AND WORKING CLASSES:

1. Master and mistress are appropriate forms of address for the gentry, including the children of lower peers. By Elizabethan times, they are also being extended by courtesy to the class of people who will later be called "The Middle Class" - professionals and prosperous merchants.
2. As household records indicate, it was also customary to address the upper servants of peers as "Master" and "Mistress." The servants of Baron Stafford should certainly be addressed as such.
3. However, - and this is defying Ren Faire tradition! - yeomen and peasants are NOT addressed as "Master" and "Mistress" at this time but as "Goodman" and "Goodwife" (Goodwife is, of course, often contracted to "Goody.")
4. A young person of the yeoman or peasant class is "good lad" or "good maid" if you're being polite.

MISCELLANEOUS POINTS ABOUT ADDRESS:

1. If you aren't certain how to address a well-dressed woman, say "Madam." That is a perfectly correct way to address any lady from the rank of queen to gentlewoman. And if the woman turns out to be merely middle class, she'll be flattered.

If you're uncertain of the woman's rank, avoid using the stock phrase "Good lady" (and certainly avoid "Good woman"), which sounds condescending.

2. The male equivalent of #1 is "Sir."
3. A very nice linguistic point that we haven't yet used much in St. George's is to refer to a peer or peeress as "My lord Willoughby" or "My Lady Hunsdon" - even in their absence! It's a neat turn of phrase that doesn't become obsolete until the latter part of the 18th century. ("How will my Lord Willoughby respond to this challenge?" "How does my Lady Hunsdon?")
5. Several peers have lengthy titles like "Baron Howard of Effingham" and "Baron Grey de Wilton." Remember not to use the "of ----" when addressing these peers. Lord Howard of Effingham is "Lord Howard" (not "Lord Effingham") while Lord Grey de Wilton is "Lord Grey."

To give you a more famous recent example, Lawrence Olivier, Baron Olivier of Brighton, was correctly addressed as "Lord Olivier" - not "Lord Brighton."

James & Cathleen Myers