Colloquialisms and Adjective/Adverb Errors

1. **Colloquial Speech Errors (Coll.)**
2. **Adjective and Adverb Errors (Adj.) (Adv.)**

Just a bit more review of grammar errors addressed through the year. The first of these is an error marked **Coll.** on your work. Coll. is an abbreviation for *colloquialism* or *colloquial language*. Another word used to describe colloquial language is what we often refer to as "slang."

The term *colloquial language* describes words and phrases that might be acceptable in day to day speech, or in non-academic settings, but that are not acceptable in academic writing. Thus for instance, in the sentence:

He was dissing me big time.

the expressions *dissing* and *big time* are both colloquialisms-- language that should not be used in formal writing. Instead the statement shown above should be written:

He was making fun of me a lot.

It might be argued that *making fun* is actually a colloquialism also. In some settings, on legal documents for instance, it might be better to use a statement like:

He repeatedly swore at me and made slanderous remarks about my mother.

So what's right? When is a colloquialism a colloquialism, and when is it appropriate language? It really depends on the context. Language that might be appropriate to the parking lot--the "dissing me big time" statement for instance--is not appropriate to the formal essay because it includes language that is pretty group specific and can't be guaranteed to communicate effectively with the mixed, academic audience--your peers and your teachers--that an essay is directed toward. To communicate with this audience you need to use a vocabulary that, while it might not be as colourful, can nonetheless be guaranteed to communicate with this group; thus the "He was making fun of me a lot." version. At the same time while, realistically, your English teacher probably understands what you mean with the *dissing* version, using the more academic sentence shows that teacher that you are capable of using Academic English--the *lingua franca*[1] of universities and colleges; and, after all, part of your teacher's job, is to determine if you are ready and able to take on the academic challenge of university or college.

But if "Coll." errors are context-sensitive (if it depends on where you are, and what's appropriate in that context) how do we know when an expression is colloquial? At

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[1] **lingua franca**
n : a common language used by speakers of different languages [syn: koine]

times this is not a problem--we all seem to be aware, for instance, that swearing is pretty much out of the question in Academic English, more as a matter of decorum this time around than it is a matter of clarity (another reason why we avoid colloquialisms). As the example shown above suggest though, at times that which is considered "colloquial" is a bit of a judgment call. As a rule of thumb you might try the following: *if you're not sure that the expression you are wondering about is a colloquialism, but know of a way of saying the same thing that is clearly not colloquial, then use the latter.*

So what kind of writing is " Academic English"? When is writing other than "Academic?" In class, essays and reports are generally considered to be academic writing and should use Academic English. If you feel that a particular colloquialism is absolutely essential to a piece of academic writing then you should place this expression in quotation marks. Sometimes the use of such language can do a better job of conveying things like emotional content, i.e.:

Clearly the students felt "ripped off" at the lack of adequate warning before the test.

Such cited material should be used sparingly though. Poetry and creative writing, to the extent that these forms attempt to convey some facet of day to day life, will, of course, make use of colloquial language: it's pretty hard to reflect who we are outside of our academic setting without using the language that shows up in these parts of our lives.

Adverb/Adjective Errors:

Adjectives should not be used as adverbs and vice versa. Thus, for instance, adjectives should not be used as intensifiers in front of adverbs and adjectives. Intensifiers, as you may recall, are really a form of adverb. As such, using adjectives as adverbs is inappropriate, so that, for instance, it is not correct to say things like:

~~He was real good at playing baseball.~~

in formal writing. The word "real" is an adjective, as in "it was real fruit in the bowl, not fake plastic stuff." The adverbial form of the word "real" is "really" (remember how we discussed the way that the most adverbs are formed by adding "ly" to the adjectival form). Thus the sentence shown above should be written:

He was really good at playing baseball.

The error shown above would be marked "**ad.**" in an essay.

Another comparable error involves doing the opposite of that just outlined, i.e. an adjective is used where an adverb should be used. For example the sentence:

He drove quick.

includes the adjective quick (as in " the quick student") where an adverb should be used, i.e.:

He drove quickly.

Exercise:

The following passage contains a number of grammatical problems. Circle the location of each problem you find, number it, and, on a separate sheet of paper use the number to describe the nature of the problem. Finally, after having identified and described all problems provide a corrected version of this passage.

This is a real easy exercise and I am going to do, like, real well on the exam although I'm not quite sure if I'm going to screw up on the grammar part of the exam because Jones will probably try to jerk us around and then I'll like tank the exam and bomb the course. I do grammar stuff real slow, I hate it. But I gotta do it I guess A good place to start is this exercise which is actually real hard now that I'm looking at it more closely and full of lots of mistakes.