

Split Infinitive 1

The use of the split infinitive made by your critic has been brought under fire by Mr. A R Little and dubbed monstrous. If the critic is an educated native speaker of English (for most Englishmen would look askance upon a foreigner taking liberties with their language) there is no reason why he should not have the liberty to use the split infinitive if he thinks that by doing so he can express his meaning clearly and crisply.

The use of the split infinitive has been a vexed question; the purists have condemned its use, but eminent writers have continued to use it to this day.. The test for correct English these days, it is considered is not grammatical accuracy, since the dead hand of grammar has been shaken off in the teaching of English, but the clarity and crispness of expression.

Are there not cases in sentence structure where you cannot do without the split infinitive? I shall be grateful to Mr A R Little if he will suggest in what manner I may avoid the error of the split infinitive in the following sentence: 'Our object is to further cement trade relations.' (Nairobi, June 19, 1960)

Split Infinitive 2

It was the spirit of inquiry, I beg to assure Mr E J Stewart, that drove me to ask the question I posed to Mr Little; I did not mean to be acrimonious. My question did occur at the tail of my letter, but every tail should not have the sting of a scorpion in it. If it really had any sting, I must apologise.

Having been an ardent student of English ever since I learnt to read it some 30 years ago, I should, I think, fully appreciate Mr Stewart's remarks, which represent the view of the diehards among conventional grammarians who formulate rules to govern the flow of a living language only to see them give way, one by one, to the inexorable dictates of ease and piquancy of expression offered by new sentence patterns.

Mr. Stewart suggests that a sentence should be recast, remodelled, rewritten in order to avoid using the split infinitive. This will mean your expressing yourself in a circumlocutory way and consequently using more words than are a fit vehicle for your thought. If you did so, you would be guilty of offending against one fundamental rule of good writing: brevity, which they say, is the soul of wit.

If Fowler is, indeed, antiquated and has become a museum-piece, allow me to quote from 'Good English', which was first published in 1938:-

'The Split Infinitive: There is a growing tendency to place the modifying words between the to and the remaining part of the infinitive thus splitting the infinitive. So frequently is the infinitive now split in every-day writing. It is better, indeed, to have a split infinitive than make a very obvious attempt to avoid it, as in this sentence: The nations should combine to forbid flatly hostilities. To flatly forbid is preferable to this distortion...'

Whether Mr. Stewart wills it or not, the use of the split infinitive is becoming more and more current and it is far more in vogue today than it was half a century ago. (Nairobi, July 1, 1960)