

# Speaking Forsoothly

—Honorable Lady Aurelia of Ashton, 1991



So “SPEAK FORSOOTHLY” is to give a period flavor to our language. We practice the art of speaking forsoothly to enhance the period atmosphere of our SCA experience. Hearing colorful period speech around us enriches the sound texture of an event in much the same way that pavilions, beautiful court costumes and other period garb add visual atmosphere, all to further enjoy “The Dream.”

Since our purpose is mutual enjoyment, we do not intend to get pedantic or stuffy about this. Yes, we realize that if you are a 14th Century Moor or an 11th Century Viking you probably would not even be speaking English at all. However, in order to communicate with one another in the Tower of Babel that the Society's populace would authentically represent, we do speak with one another in English. To give that English a period flair, nevertheless, many simple techniques are useful and fun.

In Caid, we've been teaching these techniques a few at a time to make them easier to absorb. Banquets are ideal opportunities: We set aside an area for those who wish to dine in a period atmosphere and practice the conversational arts together, and give the people who sit there a handout covering a few of these techniques. If you'd like to try a similar “Forsoothly Area” at your group's feasts, ask the autocrat to mark off a few tables for the purpose and to mention it in the announcements, or – if the seating is prearranged – to include space on the reservation form for people to indicate if they wish to sit there. Feel free to copy this article for use in handouts.

## **Technique #1: Avoiding Mundane Subjects**

This simple step by itself accomplishes at least half of your goal of sounding “in period,” because it releases you from having to use the mundane terms to talk about mundane subjects.

Instead, you can focus your conversation on historical or Current Middle Ages events, yours and others personas, garb, SCA activities, etc. If you become stuck, remember that you can always ask what the other person thinks of something you observed at that day's tourney. (If they did not see what you mention, you can tell them about it – forsoothly!)

## **Technique #2: Contractions**

The contractions common in our mundane speech are best avoided. It sounds much more period to say “I cannot help but think that ...” rather than “I can't.” Other examples: use “do not, cannot, should not, would not, will not” in place of “don't, can't, shouldn't, wouldn't, won't.”

One contraction can be used that will add a great deal of period flavor all by itself “It” was very commonly contracted thus: “'Is't? 'Tis, 'Twas, 'Twill, 'Twould.”

## **Technique #3: Substitutes for the Ubiquitous Mundanity “ok”**

Avoiding this all-too-automatic bit of modern slant is a challenge, but an effort will worth the while, for its accomplishment greatly enhances one's own consciousness of being in a different time and place. The first step is to examine some of the many different meanings and uses that “ok” has in our mundane speech; this alone will begin giving you alternatives to use.

Sometimes you are saying 'ok' to indicate assent; many colorful alternatives for those exist:

"Yes, I will."	"Right willingly."
"Gladly will I do so."	"Aye, my lord."
"Certainly, Your Grace."	"'Tis as good as done."
"Twill be my pleasure."	"Most assuredly."

Sometimes you are seeking giving approval or endorsement (eg. "Is that ok?" "That's ok"). More period ways to accomplish this include:

"Is that acceptable?"	"Is that all right?"
"'Tis well."	"'Tis fine."
"Aye, I heartily approve."	"All right."
"Doth it meet with your approval?"	

One of the most common SCA situations is an inquiry concerning someone's welfare (eg. "Is he ok?" "I'm ok")

"Are you well, m'lord"	"I am well indeed."
"Is he all right?"	"He is all right."
"They are fine as they are."	

Sometimes ok is just being used like "um," as filler (eg. a teacher saying "Ok, the next step is ..."). You will find that "Now..." or "All right ..." serve just as well. If you are beginning to despair of keeping all of these alternatives sorted out and on the tip of your tongue, we suggest you fasten upon two or three of the simplest "Omnibus" ones that will serve on nearly any situation and are easy to remember. Three of the simplest are: "Gladly." "Alright." "Very Well."

#### **Technique #4: Simple Negatives**

Just add the not at the end of the thought, instead of changing the verb or using don't. Examples:

"I know not what you speak of."	"He fought not this day."
"I saw it not."	"I care not for porridge."
"I like it not."	"I did it not."

#### **Technique #5: Adding Do/Did to Verbs**

This adds emphasis as well as a period flair. Examples:

Present tense:

"I do go."	"You do wear it well."
"I do wish her well."	"They do dance nimbly."
"I do think ..."	"I do love ..."

Past tense:

"I did think it too spicy a dish."	"You did fight well this day."
"He did defeat a duke this morn."	"We did enjoy the repast right heartily."

#### **Technique #6: You/Thou/Thee/Thy/Thine/Ye**

You/Thou: Thou is the familiar form of you (singular), similar in function to the Spanish tu or the German du. Use thou when addressing family, close friends, children, servants and social inferiors. You can also use thou in addressing social equals in formal or intimate circumstances. Thou appears in prayers

presumably because you're on intimate terms with the deity. Do not use thou forms in addressing the King or Queen. Use the more formal you when addressing anyone above you in social status and even those of equal status if they are strangers or the setting is formal.

Thou/Thee: Use thou when it is the subject of the sentence: use thee when it is the object. Examples:

Subject	Object
Thou art my love.	I love you.
Thou hast given it to me.	I gave it to thee.

Ye: The plural of thou.

Examples: "O ye gods of little fishes!" "Ye shall all be well rewarded."

Thy/Thine: These are the possessive forms of thou. The difference between thy and thine is used where the following word begins in a vowel sound.

Examples:

Thy sword.	Thine arrow.
What is thy name?	Defend thyself.
Eat thine apple.	

Also use thine when no noun follows.

Examples: "She is thine." "A friend of thine."

### Technique #7: Conjugation Verbs

The major differences are in the thou and he forms:

Singular	Plural	
I ride	We ride	
Thou ridest	You/Ye ride	You ride
He/she/it rideth	They ride	
I love	We love	
Thou lovest	You/ye love	You love
He/she/it loveth	They love	

Contractions developed for none of the conjugated forms.

Examples:

I have	We have	
Thou hast	You/Ye have	You have
He/she/it hath	They have	
I do	We do	
Thou dost	You/ye do	You do
He/she/it doth	They do	

The irregular verb to be differs only in its thou form.

I am	We are
Thou art	You/ye are
You are	He/she/it is
They are	

With practice, this becometh second nature.

### **Technique #8: Double Negatives and Double Comparisons**

Double negatives: A more subtle and elaborate way of saying someone is kind is to call them “not unkind.”

Other examples:

pretty = “not unlovely”

shapely = “not ill-formed”

likely = “not unlikely”

Double comparisons: The most famous example of this period form is emphasis on Shakespeare's “the most unkindest cut of all.” Other examples:

“’Twas the most unseemliest remark I did ever hear.”;

“A more prettier lass I did never see.”

### **Technique #9: Greetings and Salutations**

There are many more period-sounding ways than “Hi!” we can use when greeting friends at tourney, etc.

Try “Good morrow!” “Good day!” “Fair day!” “How dost thou?” “Save thee ...” “How now, lass/lad?” “God ye good den.” “Good even!” “Fare you well!” “Adieu!”

### **Technique #10: Little Words that Add a Lot**

Aye/Nay = yes/no

Anon = soon, a little later (“I shall return anon!”)

Aught/Naught = anything/nothing (“Is aught more required, milord!” “Naught else?”)

Perchance = perhaps, maybe

Prithee = I pray (beg) thee; please

Dearth = insufficient amount (“There be a dearth of wine.”);

### **Conclusion**

Total Immersion Sources: One way to get comfortable with period dialog is to read lots of it. Shakespeare is excellent for this, especially one of the annotated editions with the period word explained in footnotes. Shakespeare's Baudy by Eric Partridge (Dutton paperback. 1969) contains both essay material and an extensive glossary emphasizing the more risqué aspects of the Bard's works. The Lisle Letters, edited by Muriel St. Claire Byrne (1 volume abridgment selected and arranged by Bridget Boland, University of Chicago Press, 1983) offers you an excellent compilation of the letters of one family and their agents, servants, etc. in the years around 1530-1540. My personal favorite immersion source is The Home, ed. by M. St. Claire Byrne (Methuen & Company limited. London, 1949), a collection of dialogues from the conversation manuals of two French teachers of Elizabethan London. This delightful and humorous little book not only presents priceless vignettes of period home life but contains conversations so painlessly memorable that, by my troth. I warrant you will speak Forsoothly passing well are you complete it.

**A Final Word:** Prithee, forget not that we are in the Current Middle Ages to enjoy them as well as to learn, and that Courtesy ranks amongst our highest ideals. I pray you all, do remember to be kind to one another; impose neither obscure Forsoothly nor blatant Mundanity upon those who are otherwise inclined.

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The Honorable Lady Aurelia wrote this article from handouts she and Lord Goldwyn of Britian prepared for a series of feasts in Caid. Linda Abrams is an attorney specializing in constitutional and administrative law