

Lost for Words – The Mangling and Manipulating of the English Language  
by John Humphrys. Hodder and Stoughton 2004.

Devotees of the Today Programme – I have been listening for 40 years – will be familiar with John Humphrys as a fearless questioner of politicians and a puncturer of the self-inflated. Although one may attempt to read between his words in an effort to discern his views they are usually carefully hidden. In his columns and even more in his books, however, Humphrys is happy to let fly, and to great effect. The Great Food Gamble was a superb and informative rant about the food we eat; Lost for Words considers how we speak and write in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the various ways in which language is used and abused by those who should know better.

John Humphrys takes his subject seriously but his approach to it is humorous, impassioned, and for those with similar linguistic pretensions, deeply satisfying. Whether he aims at politicians, civil servants, journalists or sports commentators, Humphrys unerringly finds his target and the standard that he would set – or to which he would have us all aspire – is one that any educated person could easily attain.

Anyone who revelled in Eats, Shoots and Leaves will adore Lost for Words, which serves all too well – I suspect to the author's chagrin – to cement John Humphrys' place as a star in our national pantheon.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh