

ELT-27

**Teaching English: A Magazine
Devoted to the Teaching of
the English Language in India,
Volume 1 Number 4**

Milestones in ELT

Milestones in ELT

The British Council was established in 1934 and one of our main aims has always been to promote a wider knowledge of the English language. Over the years we have issued many important publications that have set the agenda for ELT professionals, often in partnership with other organisations and institutions.

As part of our 75th anniversary celebrations, we re-launched a selection of these publications online, and more have now been added in connection with our 80th anniversary. Many of the messages and ideas are just as relevant today as they were when first published. We believe they are also useful historical sources through which colleagues can see how our profession has developed over the years.

Teaching English: A Magazine Devoted to the Teaching of the English Language in India, Volume 1 Number 4

This January 1955 issue of a magazine published in New Delhi is a revealing window on English language teaching relationships the British Council had formed with post-Independence India. The Editorial highlights work being done with the state governments of Madras and Bombay on structural syllabi, while subsequent articles illustrate some of the guiding principles that were being advocated by the British Council at the time. Among the topics addressed in FL Billows' opening article are: the need for sympathetic encouragement of learners; discouragement of the use of the mother tongue and the translation method; development of pupils' self-discipline and critical faculties; and the importance of the teacher being a linguistic and social role model. Subsequent articles deal with poetry and grammar, while Bhandari makes the case for going at the students' pace, 'one thing at a time'.

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TEACHING ENGLISH

*A magazine
devoted to the
Teaching of the English
Language in India*

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EDITORIAL

A HOPEFUL SIGN of a change in attitude towards the problems of teaching English in India comes in the shape of the recently published Appendix to the Syllabus in English for Secondary Schools (Standards 8-11) in Bombay State. The Appendix is in fact a detailed and graded list of the structures to be taught in the first year of a High School course in English, and closely resembles the Madras Syllabus which was exhaustively described by Dr. Jean Forrester in Volume I, No. 2 of this magazine. Like the Madras syllabus, the Bombay publication not only lists the structures, but also deals with vocabulary, and comments on special points of interest arising from the structures.

It is indeed encouraging that now two large Indian States, in both of which the importance of English studies is well appreciated, should have adopted this new approach to the problem, and it is greatly to be hoped that it will not be long before other States follow their lead in devising syllabuses which treat English as a foreign language.

That there will be opposition to such methods is inevitable. Text-book writers, faced with the real difficulty of writing interestingly within not only a limited vocabulary, but also a limited range of structures, will, in some cases, be hostile to this type of syllabus. Many teachers, accustomed to older methods involving a judicious combination of grammar and translation, will proclaim that the new method does not work. To such teachers and critics we would recommend study of the principles underlying the method and suspension of judgment until it has been given a fair chance to prove its worth. The authorities concerned should also use all the means available to explain the principles involved and to give teachers advice on how to implement a syllabus of this kind.

In countries where foreign languages have been taught for a long time, writers have in the process of time been able to produce text-books, which, based on actual classroom experience, in themselves constitute a syllabus. But this is not yet the situation in India, and there is, therefore, a great need that a syllabus should be as detailed and specific as possible, in order that it may offer the maximum guidance possible to teachers and writers, not only about what to teach but also about how to teach it.

The Bombay first-year syllabus represents an excellent response to the needs of the moment. It is to be hoped that every effort will be made to see that it achieves the success it deserves.

EDUCATIONAL AIMS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

BY F. L. BILLGWS

Education Officer, the British Council, Madras

WHEN WE TEACH a boy to play football, some of the results we expect from his learning to play it are that his body will develop ; his legs and arms will get strong and agile ; he will learn to co-operate with others and he will learn to react and think quickly. But while we are teaching him we don't have these results in mind as the aim of our teaching ; we just do our best to teach him to play football well, and we help him to learn agility and co-operation, and to react and think quickly, with the sole aim in view of his being a good footballer.

It is the same in teaching a language : the qualities and skills which the learning of a language develop are best not cultivated consciously for their own sake, but as subordinate to the one overruling urgent task of learning the language. On the other hand, between courses, when we are not actually teaching, we do well to think over our educational aims in language teaching and make sure that we are expecting from language learning only what it can give : we should never forget that we are teachers as well as specialists and that the education of people is our profession, not just the drilling in certain skills. And yet in watching some teachers at work I have sometimes thought : "I wish they would stop thinking they are educating the young, and just teach the language for a change." This is because some of the most conscientious teachers, determined at all costs to train their pupils' minds, to teach them to think logically, to give them practice in abstract reasoning, train their minds by exercising them in a way which is not appropriate to the material.

If we think how much abstract reasoning we learned before we were six, we can realise that abstract reasoning is not normally bound up with language learning, and indeed there are plenty of people with a fluent knowledge of several languages who seem not to be able to reason logically at all. Too much reasoning about why language forms are used as they are, or too much thinking about the exact shade of meaning meant to be expressed by a particular tense of the verb is often a handicap to the correct usage of them. We know that native speakers of English can seldom explain when or how they use the Present Perfect Tense in English, yet they never make a mistake in using it, nor in

reacting to it correctly when it is used. In learning Turkish I had trouble with a tense which was called the Optative in my grammar book, and which a note under the paradigm explained should on no account be confused with the Subjunctive, which was quite different. Some sentences were given to illustrate the use of both, but I couldn't distinguish the two. I asked Turkish friends to explain the difference ; none of them could. At last one rainy evening I started making statements with first the one and then the other form. Some of them made my friends laugh and others were possible ; but they couldn't really think of the form—or rather in the form—without having a particular situation in mind, and I found—what I ought to have known before—that I had to use them in sentences related to the rainy night and going home, to get my friends to the point of using them, and even then their own analysis of how they were using them wasn't any use to me. My logical thinking about the two forms had only been an attempt to fit them into a framework based on English grammar. My trying to understand how these forms were used had delayed my using them or listening to them carefully ; from now on I was able to have a Turkish attitude to them instead of an English one ; I began to develop an instinct for them which I would have found hard to account for or explain, but which made it possible for me to use them more and more with greater and greater confidence : living my way into them as a plant lives its way into a pot.

Language can only be used as an instrument for practising the discipline of abstract reasoning and logical thinking, analysis and synthesis, and the precise rendering in words of fine shades of meaning, when the language has been learnt, and can be used skilfully and fluently. The danger of too much logical explanation of speech forms, of paraphrasing and similar linguistic exercises, is, that one set of word symbols is substituted for another, and the whole process may take place outside the consciousness of the pupil. We have to learn the multiplication tables before we can start mathematics ; we learn them by heart by saying them over to ourselves. Language is a tool, a way, a skill, that has to be acquired and practised before it can be used ; only when a pupil has learnt a language thoroughly, in association with real situation and action, can we trust him to use it with full consciousness as an instrument of thought.

Literature can be approached through language ; but not language through literature. This does not mean that we have to wait till the end of the course before we can touch literature ; we can approach each sample of literature for its own sake by way of the language, as the culmination of

stages of the journey. Literature should be a pleasure, and the children should love it ; each sample, though integrated to the course, should lure them on to more. But it is an incident on the journey or the goal, not the journey itself. Literature should be the enticing treasure they sometimes sample, that urges them on with a thirst for more ; but we can't take the study of literature into account as one of the educational disciplines that can be cultivated in the process of language learning. We can't decide what use our pupils will make of the language when they have learnt it ; but we have to give them an all-round knowledge of it that they can improve on in any direction later ; but—perhaps even more important—we have to give them skills and habits of learning, or attitudes towards language that will make it easy and natural for them to learn language—not necessarily the one we have taught—afterwards. Then they can develop their little capital of knowledge, skill and experience in any direction they like : to study literature, scientific or technical subjects, to carry on trade, to take up a political life or represent their country abroad, or perhaps just to move about the world—in spirit if not in person—or even to get a knowledge of another language quickly and economically because good attitudes to language have been built up.

For all this we need to plan very carefully what we teach, and economize time and effort ; we also need to recognize certain psychological factors. One of these is that the intellect is not necessarily important in language learning : we all know quite unintellectual people, who have picked up and speak fluently and easily several languages. The unintellectual child has a chance to do well in language learning ; the musical child picks up sounds easily ; the intellectually precocious child can be given a chance to rest his intelligence during a good deal of the language learning process and learn a useful skill that will help him later in advanced studies. The second psychological factor to bear in mind is the incubation period needed by words and speech forms, before they can fructify in our minds and become ripe enough for speech or writing. Too many teachers expect an immediate response or reproduction of what they have taught, forgetting how many years they spent in listening and even understanding before they began to speak, and also how cautious they are now, as educated adults, in using words in speech, that they have only recently come across. Thirdly, although it is possible to absorb a good deal of language material without conscious attention, the process is accelerated if we are fully conscious of what we are learning, and especially if we can associate or work in the speech forms we are learning with action, with situation or

with learning something else. Fourthly, the children, when they learned their first language, were helped by their isolation to an overpowering urge to communicate, and by the effervescence of their high spirits to utter sounds—if not words. This can be made use of in the learning of a new language by reproducing artificially the sense of isolation, in that no word of their first language is used in the classroom. Only in this way can they get the practice they need in learning not to feel bewildered in strange surroundings, to feel their way into a strange language.

Yet when we have recognized these factors ; when we have excluded literature from our consideration, as something that follows rather than contributes to language learning ; when we have realized that teaching our pupils to think logically, to reason their way through problems, are better learnt through other subjects or left till the language has been learnt ; there are still valuable disciplines to be cultivated, which may be different, but are not necessarily inferior to those cultivated in learning other subjects. First of all there is observation, and we do well to cultivate this consciously in listening—or, shall we say ?—in ear-training, and in accurate reading, which is eye-training. We should cultivate too our pupils' powers of observation of real things, and never give them pictures of what they ought to observe for themselves in their home surroundings ; they only need pictures of what they can't see otherwise. If we show that we want them to talk about life as they really see it and not as we should like them to see it, we shall teach them to look at life calmly, to observe accurately and also to take their language lessons seriously.

Next we may cultivate imitation : all early education consists of imitation and, in fact, in after life a great deal of our thought is devoted to picking good models to imitate. One of the most useful tricks we can teach our pupils is the accurate imitation of sounds and intonation and the correct and intelligent copying of written material ; this is essential for further language learning ; the self-effacement involved is the essential preliminary for all good creative work, but, apart from that, living happily in society depends on our adapting ourselves to other people and imitating the behaviour of the best people. If we can teach our pupils to discriminate between the best people and those who only appear to be so, we are perhaps going rather beyond our mandate ; but training in imitation includes training in what to imitate, and our language teaching should certainly in its later stages include some training in taste—or at least in the perception of fraud in words.

Then we should train our pupils in the use of analogy—particularly rendering them watchful against false analogy—and the consciousness of words and the part they play in thought. It is

only as we begin to live our way into a language, which is quite outside our own language group, and developed by people who live in a different way, that we begin to be able to see our own language and culture objectively. I needed to learn Turkish—even a smattering of Arabic helped—before I could do it. Latin, French and German were not enough.

We should teach promptness of reaction to speech stimuli, and see that we quicken reflexes and fluency. Allowing long pauses between question and answer and unnecessary fussing over mistakes retard children's general development, as well as their fluency and self-confidence in speech. Speech defects are usually the result of emotional and nervous disturbances in early childhood; indistinct and inaudible speaking are often the result of a repressive or critical attitude in parents or teachers. A language teacher can help a great deal to clear up such defects by seeing that there is a cheerful and unconstrained atmosphere in the classroom, and by helping his pupils to give correct answers rather than incorrect ones; if an answer to his question doesn't come at once, the teacher should help to give it, and then ask the question again, so that both question and answer become thoroughly familiar. He should show his pupils how they can work together to increase their fluency and readiness in speech. The whole attitude of the language teacher should be the attitude of a friend who is trying to help his pupils with their difficulties, rather than a spy or inquisitor who is trying to catch them out. It goes without saying that the repressive, sarcastic, fault-finding teacher is a bad language teacher; we should remember that he is also an unhappy man; we shall be helping him to be happier, if we can show him a way of teaching that nourishes the children's self-confidence and builds up in them the joy of difficulties overcome with his help. Some teachers seem to think they lose prestige if they are polite and helpful to their pupils; yet where shall the pupils learn courtesy and sociable living, if not from their teachers, and especially from their language teacher, who has to communicate the use of language in its character of social cement, as much as the use of language for communication? If children learn to associate politeness and consideration with their language learning, they will also come to associate politeness and consideration with their dealings with strangers. And why should children regard their teacher as a natural adversary, always engaged in setting traps for them, always enjoying his superiority and skill, and continually reminding them of their inferiority and clumsiness. Fluency and quick reaction to speech stimuli are a kind of skill, and a skill that can only be acquired by careful practice in association with others; the skills of language don't depend on constant efforts of

memory or frequent bursts of enlightenment. They depend on self-forgetfulness and conscientiousness, patience and cheerful co-operation with teacher and fellow pupils ; the learning of language should be practice in social living and should be focussed, as it were, or embodied, in the growth of a common skill.

Concentration is perhaps the most important quality that education can develop ; the power to concentrate is the most notable mark of the educated man ; yet if we don't train our pupils in concentration with appropriate exercises we shall find that we have only changed their inability to concentrate on objects into an inability to concentrate on books and the spoken word. Ear-training, especially in the form of dictation, in which as far as possible complete sentences are dictated at nearly normal speaking speed, is a most valuable training in concentration ; beside this the teacher should vary the tone and speed of his speaking and change the angle of approach to his topic every few minutes, in the same way as a cinematograph camera varies the angle of its shots constantly. A child learns to concentrate by continually finding himself absorbed in a subject, not by continually finding his attention wandering. The amount he can be expected to concentrate on can be progressively increased, but not beyond his capacity. If once a child learns, and comes to expect, failure in his language learning ; if once the difficulties seem too great for him to master, and no help seems to be near ; if once we have taught his attention to wander from what is too dull or too difficult or too simple ; we shall have made his whole after life more difficult and less interesting for him, and we may have made it nearly impossible for him to learn another foreign language, because of the expectation of defeat we shall have built up in him.

That a pupil can learn patience in the learning of a foreign language needs no stressing ; a good deal of the actual memorizing is dull ; he has to learn to work on, even when improvement seems disappointingly slow, and the goal too distant and imperfectly understood to seem worth striving for ; he has to learn to practise unremittingly the sounds that seem at first too difficult and strange to be worth taking seriously ; he has to learn to listen patiently to strings of sounds that seem to have no meaning or relation to one another and do it for a long time ; he has to learn to hold on tenaciously to each word or expression that is unfamiliar to him, and build up patiently a full consciousness of their meaning and use, through experience he has to learn to reserve judgment. Yet few teachers realize that they are missing an important educational opportunity when they yield to their pupils' impatient insistence on having everything explained in the mother tongue ; they don't see it as a lack of self-control, equivalent to the reading of the last

pages of a detective story before beginning it, or of insisting on knowing the answer to a mathematical problem before starting work on it.

If we feel that these disciplines and qualities are worth cultivating in our pupils, we should see that we help them to develop a patient awareness of and receptivity to speech stimuli, with skill in selecting and laying hold of the essentials of what they hear ; to practise co-operation with others in acquiring and developing skill ; a sense of personal responsibility for work done ; the power of suspending judgment ; practice in living in and finding land-marks in a foreign environment ; and finally, we should use the language course to help them to develop their imagination, ensuring that the words and expressions they use have been learnt in association with real experience and concepts that are real to them, so that they are a reliable means for apprehending what they have not experienced, but can and should imagine. The more I think over the problems of teaching a language, the more I see the importance of cultivating in our pupils the power of suspending judgment ; if they learn not to make up their minds too quickly about the meaning and uses of a word, not to make up their minds too quickly about the significance of and use of idioms ; if they learn a wise watchfulness, a healthy scepticism when faced with new speech forms, they will learn to meet ideas also with a wise watchfulness and a healthy scepticism that will protect them against the wiles and assaults of advertising and unscrupulous political propaganda. What better equipment can we give them to go out into life with, to help them exercise their rights and duties as citizens ?

These considerations are neither final nor complete ; many more will occur to everybody who reads them. Even as I begin this conclusion further points crowd into my own mind ; in particular one of the traditionally acknowledged uses of language learning, that perhaps needs restating as a development of the power to suspend judgment : training in a careful and exact use of words. No one who has not learnt to look at words questioningly and get experience of them by listening, before beginning to use them, can be expected to use words skilfully and wisely ; fastidiousness with words develops as a whole and gradually. It is perhaps better that words should be used fluently and even in- exactly at first, than that the flow of speech should be inhibited by an excess of caution. But pupils should not be allowed to make those meaningless flourishes of idiom and stale metaphor that play such a distressing part in so much public speaking, and make one think of a madman shaking a dead geranium. They should be trained to say what they mean and say it simply ; they should

not be allowed to rant about what they have no first-hand knowledge of.

But this problem really only comes into prominence when the language has been acquired. I have been trying to point out new directions in which the language teacher should look, unnoticed disciplines he should cultivate, unregarded skills he should develop. So far I have been trying to reconsider what we really do or should do, when we teach a language, what we expect the actual discipline of language learning to do for our pupils, leaving out of account what we hope them to be able to do with the language when the language has at last been acquired. That is a separate subject and has been discussed often enough ; I shall do no more than touch on it now. What is the cultural value of a language ? It is entirely what the user makes of it : he may use it for study or to write literature, to approach art or science or to communicate valuable experience : the language itself is neutral. Yet if the learner relates his new set of words and language forms to the thought and culture of the people who have developed the language, he will find his consciousness growing, his capacity to think increasing, as new ways of thinking and looking at the world become natural to him ; his thinking will be less and less tied to the limitations of language. The proverbs and witty sayings of a strange language will come to him like a flood of unexpected light on the familiar riddles of human conduct. He will seem to climb out into a wider world, as a chicken climbs out of its shell, or as a man climbs out on to the roof of a tall narrow house in a city. One can lose one's narrow parochialism or one can keep it ; but a new language makes it seem less precious, helps one to lose it, makes it possible for us to develop an international community of thought and interest, which needs to be developed in this world, if we are to make proper use of the press, the film, the radio, and the aeroplane, those mechanical devices which have made distance and difference of position on the world's surface seem so unimportant.

POETRY IN SCHOOL

BY NORMAN E. WILLIAMS

Education Officer, the British Council, Delhi Region.

The first of two articles on the place and the teaching of English poetry in the school curriculum.

THE REASON why there is no easy or satisfactory definition of poetry, although everyone thinks he knows what it is, is that its appeal, status and intention vary from generation to generation, and within generations are differently seen by individuals. Because, in spite of its widespread acceptance, it has no satisfactory accepted definition, its place and purpose cannot easily and generally be discussed. It is recognized as an important branch—perhaps the greatest branch—of literature : the beauty, ingenuity and force of its language are acknowledged and enjoyed : and, rightly, children are introduced to it at school.

In Britain we may, perhaps, divide a child's education into two parts—the earlier years in which he is introduced to life and his enthusiasms guided and encouraged ; and the later years in which he must absorb knowledge in such a way that his possession of it may be tested, in examination at long range, by people he has never met, and to whom he may not be even a name.

In the first period he will probably, from his very earliest years, come to know, to shout, chant and enjoy, nursery rhymes, non-sense verse and story poems of form and content really appealing to his age. He will be expected only to know them by heart and be able to repeat them with some show of understanding and, if possible, with real enthusiasm.

In the second period he will be conditioned for the standard response, and not only that, but for a response which a child of his age can, in conditions of haste, stress and anxiety, express clearly, intelligibly and reasonably correctly in a limited number of unemotional words. Now the only response to poetry which is worth anything at all is a highly individual one in which the untrammelled and uninhibited personality reacts in sympathy—in harmony, rather than in unison—to the original (and also individual) intention of the poet. But this cannot be in the classroom, and even if it could it would be impossible to express reactions in anything except another poem.

It is necessary at this stage of education (usually from about the age of twelve or thirteen), having laid the poem before the pupil,

to teach him to answer questions which have really nothing to do with it—questions about the life of the poet, about scansion and rhyme, about the treatment of the subject, and about how other poets have treated the same subject. It is poetry's tragedy that it must be written in words which have their individual meanings and values, and that it can for purposes of "analysis" be broken up into parts, as the feathers can be pulled from a bird. Swift's comment on the skinning of a woman alive—"You would hardly believe the difference it made"—is equally applicable to this verbal plucking of poetry.

The visual arts are more fortunate. Nobody is asked to compare a figure by Henry Moore with one by Picasso and suggest medical reasons for deformities ; no one is asked to analyse chemically the pigments used in any picture or to explain a sudden intrusion of a thumb-smear among brush-strokes. But this is precisely what is asked of children in Britain and elsewhere who are studying poetry for examination purposes. I still remember with respect and admiration the answer of a boy to a question I was being paid to mark—"What is the precise meaning of the lines ?

"Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange."

His answer was "As far as I can make out it means exactly what it says : I am sorry I cannot express it any better."

The trouble, of course, is quite simple. Some things are suitable for examination and some are not. So long as the aim of schools is to push pupils through examinations the examinable things will be taught and the rest will tend to be ignored. Poetry as an artistic expression, an aesthetic experience, a way to a fuller enjoyment of life, will be neglected, and it will be seen principally as "a structure", "a vehicle" and "an exercise."

Poetry has its unassailable place in English literature, and as long as education pays any respect at all to ideals and the great works of mankind, as long as it respects tradition and achievement, poetry will be "taught" in English schools. Probably the time will come when educationists will get round to compiling a list of subjects which must be taught but must *not* be examined. Then poetry will emerge from the amateurish laboratories of the literary analysts and be recognised for what it really is.

The teaching of English poetry in schools in India, however, is a rather different matter. It is no longer taught to very small children, and the incantatory delight of English nursery rhymes is therefore unknown to the average Indian child. But he knows rhymes and poems in his own language, and these are some

preparation for the rhythms of English poetry when he gets to it. But I very much doubt if they get much fun out of it. By the time they are introduced to English poetry most of them are thinking mainly of their examinations : and as far as the rhythms go, they have little charm or intricacy, especially as read in class, to rival the Hindi, Urdu, Tamil or whatever other verse they are really familiar with.

Poetry suffers the misfortunes of always being Literature, often being short, and frequently, though not always, expressing quite admirable sentiments. Didactic and moral verse have a fatal fascination for some school teachers. I once saw three whole classes wrecked and floundering on the rocks of Wordsworth's 'Character of the Happy Warrior' while their teacher bludgeoned them with its ethical content—obscure at the best, and almost entirely meaningless to a child of twelve or thirteen years. But poems are often *so* conveniently short—and poetry is the *very* best English there is ! And so, regardless of its complete unsuitability—its inversions, archaisms, hyperboles and ambiguities—poetry is taught for the sake of language, instead of the reverse.

Possibly it does a little good—giving, as the experts say, 'an illusion of progress', helping to an idea of rhythm, stress and pronunciation. But it is not only possible, but common, for a child to memorise a stanza of poetry, and then to learn its meaning, but never be able to marry the two in his mind. Even the perverted ends of misguided pedagogues are hardly served by such unproductive labours, and yet poetry need not be so badly taught.

So long as there is any belief that literature should have a place in the school curriculum, it must receive attention from the teacher, and there must be a sincere attempt to come to terms with it in class. There are three essential requirements, nevertheless, for its inclusion in the school curriculum : it must be wisely selected, sensitively taught, and, in examination, treated with understanding and sympathy. None of these requirements is excessive or difficult to satisfy.

(To be concluded.)

NOTES ON ENGLISH VERBS

BY J. G. BRUTON

Education Officer, the British Council, New Delhi

I HAVE INDICATED in previous articles the stage at which I feel the Future form of English verbs may be suitably introduced into an elementary English course. It should appear, almost simultaneously with the Past Tense, as soon as pupils are able to handle the Present Continuous confidently, and before the introduction of the Simple Present, for which it should serve as a preparation.

The distribution of "shall" and "will" among the various persons, and the complications of the interrogative forms, are a source of trouble to teachers, so that a great deal of time is spent in mastering these difficulties, often to very little purpose. The distinction between "shall" and "will" is one which most native speakers of English would find very difficult to define, and it is, I feel, a distinction which will in course of time disappear. If I remember correctly, H. L. Mencken mentions that for the great majority of American speakers of English the distinction does not exist. The reason for this blurring of the distinction is in part the fact that we commonly make use of other means of conveying future meaning. We very frequently use the Present Continuous for this purpose, and say such things as "I'm seeing him tomorrow," "He's broadcasting next week" or "They're spending their holidays in Kashmir next year." In such examples, it is obviously necessary to include an expression of time, to avoid possible confusion. We also are fond of the expression "going to", and commonly say things like "She is going to do it for me," "Do you think it's going to rain?" and "They're going to arrange it." A further reason is that in normal unemphatic speech we employ the weak forms of both "shall" and "will", saying "I'll speak to him," "It'll be good for you" and "You'll tell him, won't you?" and so on.

I am sure many teachers will strongly disagree with my opinion that it is not worth while spending a lot of time and energy on trying to make beginners aware of this distinction, and, therefore, that we should, at this stage, teach only "will" and introduce the refinement of "shall" later on. Ignoring this opinion, let us assume that we are in fact from the start going to teach both "shall" and "will". I do, however, feel that it is very important, as soon as students are thoroughly familiar with the full forms,

to insist upon the free use of the weak forms in speech, to demand "I'll give it to him" rather than "I shall give it to him." In most writing, the full form will be expected.

The article in the Madras syllabus by Dr. Jean Forrester, published in *Teaching English*, Volume I, No. 2, indicates clearly the stage at which the Future forms should be presented, and the method to be utilised. A calendar for the current month can be employed for teaching the use of "tomorrow", which will enable us to lead on to sentences like "I am here now, and I shall be here tomorrow." We can also produce a number of drills in this pattern :

This is my book
I shall put it on your desk
I am putting it on your desk
It is on your desk now

Another purpose to which the Future may be very profitably put at this stage is that of acting as a substitute for the Imperative, if this is considered desirable. The reason for delaying the introduction of the Imperative is that it is the only English verb form which can normally be used without an expressed subject, and that it is dangerous to introduce it early, as students may get the idea that it is possible in other circumstances to omit to express the subject of the verb. The Future can help us to avoid the Imperative in sentences like "Sita, will you go to the door?" and "Govind, will you come here?"

These uses of the Future offer little difficulty, because, unlike many other English verb forms, its use is very limited. It is, however, very necessary that, when the Simple Future forms have been mastered, pupils should be taught the normal use of the Present Continuous forms as a substitute—that is, "He's coming tomorrow" for "He will come tomorrow."

The forms which convey the idea of intention or promise should not, I feel, be introduced until a good deal later, preferably towards the middle or the end of the second year, by which time it should be possible profitably to point out the distinction. A suitable context would be a situation involving some difficulty and the expression of determination, necessarily in the first person :

- (a) Here is a needle and here is a piece of thread.
I want to push this thread through the eye of the needle.
H'm, the eye is very small. I'll try again.
I *will* do it.

- (b) There is a glass. Here is a piece of chalk.
I want to throw the piece of chalk into the glass.
H'm, it's not easy. Let me try again.
I *will* do it.

With regard to the other persons, the only possibility lies in the introduction of the forms in the course of a narrative, where the implications are obvious. It is not difficult to introduce into a story sentences like "You shall not do it," "He shall die" or "They shall not pass," on which the teacher should comment, pointing out the difference between these forms and those already taught. Too much attention should not be paid to the distinction, and pupils should be taught to use "going to" as a popular alternative for expressing purpose and probability—"I'm going to tell him" instead of "I will tell him." "It's going to rain" instead of "It will rain."

Useful exercise material on all the points dealt with here can be found in W. S. Allen's *Living English Structure* (Longmans Green) and A. S. Hornby's *Exercises in Elementary English Composition* (Macmillans).

TEACHING ONE THING AT A TIME

BY C. S. BHANDARI

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IN MOST, nearly all, of the direct method English readers for beginners one finds question and statement patterns introduced together almost at the very start. One such first reader, one that is being used widely today in a country where English is learnt at school as a second language, the writer has before him at the moment. The very first lesson in this book uses the following structures :

This is a pen. What is this? It's a book. Is that a pencil? Yes, it is. No, it isn't. This is the classroom. Stand up. Sit down.

An analysis of the structural material cited above shows that the reader introduces in the very first lesson two statement patterns identifying objects in space with the identifiers *this* and *that*, one using the indefinite article *a* and the other the definite article *the*, one command pattern with the adverbs *up* and *down*, one abbreviated sequence sentence pattern in both affirmative and negative forms, using the sequence signal *it*, and two question patterns, one of the specific and the other of the inverted type. The reading and writing of this material, according to the teaching hints given in the teacher's book, is to begin after a few exclusively oral lessons in which the language material presented in this and also in the next three lessons, each of which contains an equally large number of different types of structures of increasing difficulty and a definitely larger content vocabulary, is to be covered. One wonders if this is not a task set for the gods!

The above analysis brings to the fore the basic defect of the approach popularly known as the direct method. It concerned itself mainly with the 'how' problem—the problem of the teaching method, and gave proportionately less thought to the 'what' problem—the problem of the selection and grading of the teaching material. "Direct Method" text-books used all types of apparently 'simple and similar' phrase and sentence structures in the same lesson and the teacher struggled hard to teach them as directed, wasting much time and achieving little. The teacher felt that he required more patience and more time than he had and the pupils found the learning load much too heavy. Unhappily, therefore, a reaction started against the direct method and today we hear many an experienced teacher openly con-

demning this method, and advocating instead the approach through translation and traditional grammar.

In the opinion of the writer, reverting to the translation method will not solve our problem. The solution lies in the proper selection and grading of the language material. Fortunately for the teachers of English as a foreign language, practical linguists like * Fries, Pattison and Noonan, have done a lot of useful work in this direction during the last few years. The results of their researches are available to us and we can take advantage of them. The selected material—structures, words, meanings, forms, sounds, should “build a solid framework to which the entire field of English can cling” and everything selected should fit together so that “the resultant system (may) combine the advantages of a minimum learning load with those of a maximum range of meaning and expression.” In the grading of the selected material, the main points to bear in mind are that every succeeding structure should be dovetailed to the one that has come before it, and the entire material so graded should constitute an interlocking system. The simpler, more easily teachable and more productive items will come earlier and the less productive and difficult ones later.

But all the labour done will go to waste if the teacher is unduly impatient or too ambitious. His motto should be ‘Teach one thing at a time.’ He should never attempt to go on the next item in his teaching programme, until the last one has been well established. The interlocking system will break down if any link is left weak in the chain. Therefore, if in the course of his teaching he discovers that pupils are shaky in their command of an item which has already been taught, he should not hesitate to go back to it and spend the period on fixing it firmly. That is the inevitable price for a graded scheme of teaching one has to pay.

The suggested motto for the teacher, ‘Teach one thing at a time,’ brings the writer back to the structural items reproduced in the first paragraph of this article. It has been indicated that this material is ill-assorted and is too much for one lesson. Why? *This (that) is x* is a very productive and comparatively simple structure. But on the basis of its simplicity one should not assume that it will be ‘automatically’ learnt after a few repetitions. There are two very important teaching points here and they are, in fact, the essential features of the situation in which the structure operates : (1) *This* and *That* both are pointers identifying an object in space and (2) *This* conveys the notion of

* C. C. Fries, University of Michigan, U.S.A.. B. Pattison and J. A. Noonan, Institute of Education, University of London.

nearness (the object must be within touching distance) and *that* of farness. These points must be well established before another structure or a variation of the same structure is taken up. Therefore, in the writer's opinion, the structure *This (That) is Ram, Sita, Mohan, Mr X, Mrs X, Miss X, etc.*, is enough material for one period of forty minutes for a class of 10-11 years old children. *This (That) is a book* is basically the same structure but the indefinite article *a* presents a big semantic difficulty. *A* in the structure has two sides—positive and negative. We are speaking of one of several persons or things and are thinking of them all; and, at the same time, speaking of only one specimen (a book, a boy) we are not interested in any further information about it. The negative idea cannot be grasped by pupils without contrasting *a* with the possessive adjectives (my, your, his, her). These possessive adjectives do not present any semantic difficulty in the structure and if they are taught earlier they pave the way for an effective teaching of the indefinite article. *This (That) is my (your, his her) book, pen, etc.*, should, therefore, be taught earlier. The attempt to teach *a (an)* in the very first lesson is, at any rate, not a wise thing to do. For our children this structure (with *a* or *an*) presents additional difficulty because in our Indian languages we do not have an indefinite article. We simply say, *This is book* (meaning *a book*). Therefore *a book* is very commonly understood and translated by our children as *one book*, which is absolutely wrong.

The definite article *the* presents a much bigger semantic problem. It has several meanings, out of which only one should be selected for teaching at a time, and the teaching of one meaning will take one whole period, maybe more than one. To combine it with other structures in the very first lesson is, to the writer's mind, a great mistake. Because of the difficulty of meaning involved, its teaching should not be undertaken until the more teachable statement patterns using singular and plural nouns and pronouns, possessive adjectives and some simple motion or action verbs have been taught. *It* is a sequence signal and is generally used for inanimate objects. Its teaching can very well be combined with that of *they* (inanimate) at a later stage but to teach it along with *this* and *that* in one lesson, before the latter have been firmly fixed, is to confuse the pupils. Command patterns—*stand up, sit down, etc.*, can be taught at an early stage only as formulas. They should, however, be introduced after a few motion and action verbs, in the present continuous form, have been taught. The argument that because children like activity, command patterns should be taught quite early, will not make much of an appeal to a linguist. The more fundamental structures—struc-

tures which have a wide coverage, must have priority over others.

And now the question patterns. They are, broadly speaking, of two types ; specific (questions beginning with an asking word) and fixed or inverted (questions beginning with an auxiliary verb). Both these types with their affirmative and negative answers (*Yes, it is. No, it isn't*) find a place in the material of the first lesson under discussion. No one can deny that the combining of questions with statements increases the learning load and is apt to confuse the learner since the structures are different. But it is frequently pleaded that teaching questions and answers (statements) together is the natural way of teaching. The writer finds it difficult to agree with this view. The child does not begin learning his mother's speech by asking her or anybody else questions. For a pretty long time he expresses his needs by making simple statements, which at first consist of just a syllable or a word. Then he learns to make requests and, finally to ask questions. Question-answer procedure is not the natural but the conversational way. But in order to converse in a language, in however simple and elementary a way, a productive command of some 'primary matter' of that language is essential, and that 'primary matter' has to be learnt in its own right before one can venture to indulge in the luxury of conversation.

There is, besides, another point to consider in this connection. When teaching is done by the question-answer method from the very start, the teacher is for most of the time asking questions and the pupils are answering them. In other words, the teacher is practising question patterns and the pupils answers (statement patterns). Half of the time is taken by the teacher's speaking and half of it by the pupils'. This is what actually happens in practice. The writer has observed this happening in the teaching of several really good teachers who knew their job. He has also reflected upon his own teaching in the past and has, after carefully analysing the specific mistakes in the English of his pupils, come to the conclusion that it was not a wise thing to teach question and statement patterns together from the beginning.

Question patterns should constitute separate blocks in the teaching programme and their teaching should not begin until the statement patterns into which the answers fit, have been taught in their own right. It is immaterial whether the specific or fixed questions are taught first. What is important is that pupils should practise them and acquire an active command over them. The two types should not be mixed up, unless the class consists of very bright children. The writer would prefer teaching the fixed questions before the specific ones. The order of the specific questions, in his opinion, should be *what, where, when, who,*

whose, which, how much, and how many (after the number, collective and quantity adjectives and the neutral *there* have been taught) and *why* (after teaching *because* in its own right). The teaching of *how* should be deferred to a much later stage when the adverbs of manner have been taught. *What, where, when, who, whose* and, possibly, *which* can be taught in a separate block much earlier than the others.

The motto here, as in teaching other items, should, however, be "Teach one thing at a time."

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

TEACHERS who are interested in simplified readers should consult the catalogues of the different publishing firms that specialise in books for foreign students of English. The following list, which does not pretend to be exhaustive, includes the names of most of the well-known series of such books :

- THE OXFORD ENGLISH COURSE—Supplementary Readers
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- THE NATIONAL HERITAGE SERIES. *Macmillan & Co.*
- THEY SERVED MANKIND. *Macmillan & Co.*

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING—SUMMER 1954 (published by *The British Council* ; quarterly ; annual subscription 4s. : available from *Orient Longmans Limited*).

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING, which is now in its eighth volume, continues to publish stimulating articles of great interest to teachers of English. In the present number there is an excellent article on "Have Got as a Substitute for Have" by F. T. Wood ; a typically well-knit contribution by Dr. Michael West on "Vocabulary Selection and the Minimum Adequate Vocabulary". Roger Manvell writes on "English Literature and the Film".

A GUIDE TO PATTERNS AND USAGE IN ENGLISH. A S. Hornby.
O. U. P. 8s. 6d.

This book can be unhesitatingly recommended to all those who want a reliable and authoritative approach to the problems of English usage written specifically for the foreign student. The major portion of the book deals with one of the fundamental problems of English as a foreign language—that of verb patterns. The exhaustive treatment of these is an expansion of the material to be found in *The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. A novel feature is the treatment of the verb, not from the point of view of the actual tense form, but from the standpoint of the different tense concepts. Thus, for example, under the heading "The Immediate or Real Present", the ways in which both the Present Progressive and the Simple Present may be used to convey this concept are fully explained: attention is paid to such unusual forms as "Here he comes!" and "There goes the bell!"

POETRY RECORDINGS

Teachers will be glad to know of the existence of a large number of recordings of English poetry, many of them made under the auspices of *The British Council*. Among the authors represented are: Chaucer, Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, Pope, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Kipling, Yeats, Hardy, de la Mare, Day Lewis, Spender and Eliot.

These records are available from The Gramophone Company, Post Box 48, Calcutta. Stocks are held by all the regional offices of *The British Council*, who will normally lend records to recognised institutions.

QUESTION BOX

Question : Which is correct—

(a) *I went there with a view to meet him ;*

OR

(b) *I went there with a view to meeting him ?*

Answer : (b) is correct.

Question : What is the real meaning of *This may be done* ?

Answer : This sentence has two possible meanings—

(a) *It is possible that this will be done ;*

(b) *Permission is given for this to be done.*

Usually when writers employ this expression, I feel that what they really wish to say is *This should (or must) be done.*

Question : I find that many modern English writers use *can* when it seems to me that *may* would be better.

In a sentence like *Can I go now?*, would **not** *may* be more correct ?

Answer : It is possible to make a distinction between *can* implying physical possibility, and *may* implying permission. But in the spoken English of to-day, the distinction is not always observed, and sentences like the example given are often heard. In teaching, it would be wiser to observe the distinction.

Question : Is there any real difference between *much interested* and *very interested* ?

Answer : No, there is no real difference. *Much* may be used instead of *very* in front of a past participle used as an adjective. In teaching, I would recommend that *very* be taught and not *much*, since if the latter is used, pupils will feel tempted to employ it in other circumstances when it would be wrong, e.g. *much busy*.

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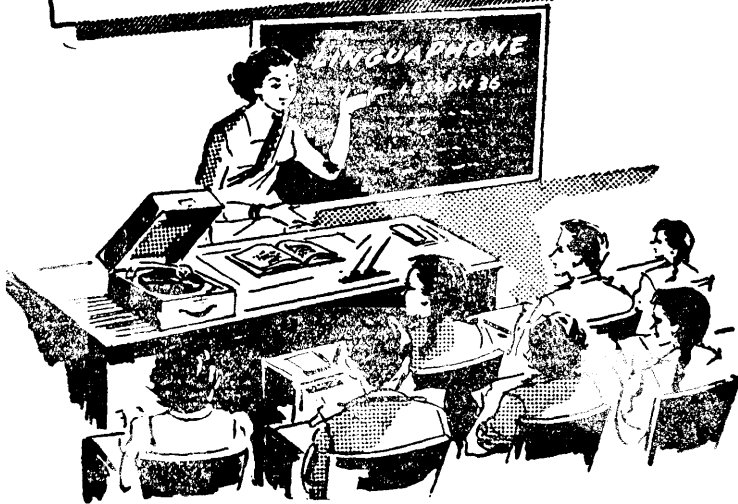
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