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The Development *of* Modern English

The Development *of* Modern English

BY

STUART ROBERTSON

Formerly of Temple University

Third Printing, with Additions and Revisions

NEW YORK

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Preface

THIS book attempts to present the historical background necessary for an understanding of the English language as it is spoken and written today. The author has endeavored to introduce the general reader and the student who is beginning the systematic study of English to a selected portion of the mass of facts and doctrine that linguistic scholarship, of the last half-century particularly, has made available. In the belief that, for the general reader and the elementary student alike, the field of contemporary language is of paramount interest and value, the emphasis of the book has throughout been placed on present-day English. It has been the author's purpose, however, to deal with the English of our own day in the light of the perspective that is afforded by a survey of the past. He can merely express the hope that his judgment as to the fitting proportion to be observed between past and present has been reasonably sound.

The question of proportion has been present too in the problem of the relative amounts of space to be devoted to the various specialized fields of linguistic study. Naturally the attempt has been to preserve a just balance among the topics that appear as chapter headings, and not to allow the greater attention that is paid to some of them today (phonetics, for example) to dictate that an undue amount of space be given to these. Among the topics, American English is not so much given a

separate treatment as made the point of emphasis in almost every discussion of contemporary English. Hand in hand with the presentation of facts has inevitably gone indulgence in speculation on their significance. The author trusts, however, that fact is presented as fact and theory as theory, so that the reader, accepting the one, will at the same time be given the basis for determining whether the accompanying interpretation or commentary is worthy of consideration. Into the attitude toward language that the book sets forth it is impossible to go here, except perhaps to suggest the writer's belief that a woeful general ignorance of the facts is chiefly responsible for the curiously wrong-headed notions about the standards and sanctions of language that accompany most discussions of that ever fascinating topic, one's native speech.

The author's indebtedness to others is indeed vast, but exceedingly difficult either to measure or to acknowledge. He has of course endeavored to give credit for all ideas that are not common property, by citations in the text or in footnotes, but he is conscious that such acknowledgment is sadly inadequate. The footnotes have been put to other uses too: to supply additional illustrations of points made in the text, to suggest supplementary or additional lines of inquiry, and occasionally to give references that might be helpful in pursuing these or other topics. References for additional reading in connection with the general topics of each chapter have also been added at the end of the chapter. These lists consist, for the most part, of books and articles of recent date and, almost entirely, of matter in English; they do not pretend to form a complete bibliography of the subject, but are designed to indicate

supplementary material of a kind that the reader will be likely to find useful.

To the works of three men, of three different nationalities, the author feels most deeply indebted: Jespersen, Bradley, and Krapp. The first named, particularly, is in large measure, though of course quite innocently, responsible for much of the speculation, as well as for many of the facts about language that the book contains. The author can only regret the impossibility of singling out and acknowledging his debt to many another writer and work. He must, however, make the usual obeisance, and in no perfunctory fashion, to that wonderful storehouse of information, *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

There are nearer and more personal obligations that should also be recorded here. To his colleagues, the author is grateful for many expressions of interest and helpfulness; to two of them, Miss Jane D. Shenton and Mr. Ellis O. Hinsey, both of whom have read and criticized the entire manuscript, he would particularly express his thanks.

S. R.

PHILADELPHIA,
November, 1934

Preface to the Third Printing

THE second printing incorporated a few changes and corrections in minor details. For the third printing, the author has made far more numerous alterations, totaling perhaps several hundred in all; these include not only further corrections of a mechanical sort but also reconsiderations of points discussed in the text, often in the light of material that was not available when the book was first published. He has also amplified and brought up to date the bibliographies at the ends of the chapters and has added, at the request of instructors who have used the book with classes, two new features: a consecutive list of the phonetic symbols used in the text, with key words—as unequivocal as may be—for each; and a glossary of linguistic terms, including not only terms used in this book but others that the student might be expected to encounter in his reading of linguistic material elsewhere.

Perhaps the author may be permitted to express here his gratitude for the reception that has been accorded the first edition of the book—including the reception by its reviewers. He has been deeply impressed also with the thoughtfulness and generosity that have prompted so many students of language, both friends and strangers, to write to him about the book. If, as he hopes, the present printing is considerably more useful and also more nearly free from error than the earlier printings have been, acknowledgment is certainly due to those who have helped to make it so. The author would especially like to thank Professor Morse Allen, of Trinity College:

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S. R.

PHILADELPHIA
March, 1938

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: The Nature and Origin of Language

THE definition of language, like most definitions, is difficult to formulate with accuracy. Perhaps the following statement will be found to cover the main notions involved: Language is the agent or medium by which men communicate their thoughts to one another. Passing over for a moment the difficulty presented by the term that is most vague here (agent or medium), let us attempt to see how far the rest of the formula is applicable. By doing this, we may succeed in getting at certain fundamental conceptions of the nature of language.

Does the word *men*, in the first place, express a necessary and correct limitation? Is language the prerogative of man, to the exclusion of the lower animals? It is probably safe to say that, although as yet comparatively little is known about the meaning of sounds and gestures made by animals, enough has been learned to make one skeptical of the idea that language should be conceived as a human institution only. At any rate, there is clearly a close parallelism between the cries of animals, obviously expressive of emotions like pain, surprise, and joy, and a good deal of the human utterance that is directly concerned with various sorts of feelings. As we shall see presently, the parallelism is so close,

indeed, that it has been held in the past, as one of the theories of the origin of language, that *all* human speech began with involuntary ejaculations much like the cries of animals. It cannot be denied that most of the higher animals possess at least these elements of language, and it is quite conceivable that some of them—the apes, particularly—have a claim to much more than this.

Other terms of our definition, "communicate their thoughts to one another," raise doubts of more than one kind. In the first place, it is quite certain that not everyone talks in order to express ideas. Professor Jespersen is surely right in feeling that Mme. de Staël expressed a universal truth about language when she praised the French language in these terms (though perhaps her statement is more true of French than of other languages): "It is not only, as it is elsewhere, a means of communicating thoughts, feelings, and doings, but an instrument that one loves to play on, and that exalts the spirits just as music does for some people and strong drink for others."[1] Children discover very early in life, and adults—in civilized as well as in primitive communities—never completely forget, that language may be indulged in for the mere pleasure that the exercise of the vocal organs affords. When a person talks at length to a cat or a dog (even a china one on a mantelpiece, as does a character in one of Barrie's plays), it is quite certain that he does not talk in order to be understood by his ostensible interlocutor, or even, necessarily, to set his own thoughts in order. Quite often he talks, as the infant does when he babbles meaningless sounds or the grown-up when he recites nonsense jingles, for

[1] Translated from the French quoted by Jespersen in *Mankind, Nation, and Individual from a Linguistic Point of View*, p. 7.

the pure enjoyment of utterance. Even if we limit ourselves to the idea of communication with another adult human being, it by no means follows that *thoughts* are being conveyed. It may be, as with the cries of animals just referred to, mere emotion that is being expressed and communicated. And, what is perhaps not so readily perceived, it may even happen that neither thought nor emotion is being conveyed, but that utterance is used (even though the hearer has no glimmering of the meaning of what is said) to gratify a desire for sociability on the speaker's part or to disarm a feeling of hostility that the other might harbor if greeted by silence. One may speak, not only to one who understands the same language, but also to a savage who does not, for no other reason than to banish the uncomfortable tension that silence creates. What is spoken, on either occasion, may have little relation indeed to the conveying of ideas. Is it not, in spite of this, properly to be designated *language?*

Let us accept, however, the premise that, with certain limitations, the formula stated at the outset (men's communication of thought to one another) does express an essential truth about language. We may then proceed to inquire into what is meant by the *agent* or *medium* used in the communication of thought. Evidently, there are three leading possibilities: ideas may be expressed by mere gesture, by the visible symbol—drawn, written, or printed—or by the uttered or spoken sound. To be sure, *language* is sometimes used metaphorically in a way that scarcely fits these categories; we hear, for example, of the "language" of flowers, or the "language" of architecture or of music. These are clearly, however, figurative extensions of an idea that

in any literal or practical application must be limited to the three varieties of media that have been mentioned.

The first, gesture, is an element that has played, and still plays, its part in language. Primitive man doubtless expressed a variety of ideas by movements of the parts of the body, particularly the head and hands. Moreover, civilized man retains such movements to supplement oral speech, to an extent that obviously varies in part with race and individual but that on the whole is more considerable than may at first appear; witness the difficulty experienced by even the less demonstrative in explaining such a term as *concertina* or *circular staircase* without the use of supplementary gesture. Within certain limits, gesture is admirably expressive: the minatory significance of the clenched fist or the forehead contracted into a frown may be as clear as any words could possibly be. It is true that the meaning of such gestures is not everywhere the same; for example, not all men read the same message in the nod of the head or the clapping of the hands. The former signifies, to most of us, "Yes," while in some parts of the East it stands for "No"; the latter means applause in the Occident, but in the Orient, a summons. Naturally, the best illustration of a language composed exclusively of gestures, and gestures that have a completely conventionalized and widely understood significance, is the system of communication employed by the deaf and dumb. A less familiar example is the intertribal sign language once widely used as a kind of diplomatic code by American Indians of tribes whose dialects were mutually unintelligible.[2] This sign lan-

[2] At the time of his death on April 30, 1934, General H. L. Scott, former Chief of Staff of the United States Army, was preparing a permanent

guage, or something like it, represents social intercourse as it might have developed had men not been endowed with physical organs that are adapted to produce and to hear sounds, or had men not learned to use them for these purposes. For it must not be supposed that what we somewhat misleadingly call the "organs of speech" are primarily intended for that use. We refer, for example, to the lungs as furnishing the breath that is the raw material of speech, or to the tongue or the teeth or the palate as modifying the quality of the sound that issues from the mouth and making one sound distinct from another. These parts of the body, nevertheless, have other and more vital functions—respiratory, gustatory, or digestive—than the linguistic one for which they are, after all, somewhat imperfectly fitted; as someone has wisely put it, the organs of speech are no more properly so called than the knees are called the organs of prayer. Before beginning, however, to examine the use of sound in expressing thought, it will be best to deal with the second agent of the three that have been mentioned, the pictorial or the written symbol.

The development of the visual symbol begins, in all probability, with picture writing, in which a series of pictures or characters represents, in a manner not totally unlike that of the contemporary comic strip—though more crudely, at least in one sense, for the pictures must often have been highly conventionalized—a connected chain of narrative. This period of the pictogram or ideogram—the eye-picture—is eventually succeeded by, or blended into, that of the phonogram, or

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record of the language. This work, referred to in the Princeton *Herald* of July 25, 1930, is said to be almost complete. See also Paget, *Human Speech*, pp. 130–131.

ear-picture, in which a symbol is used for a sound-group. Here it is that we observe the amalgamation of two of our media for the expression of thought, the symbol and the sound. The next step is the evolution of the alphabetic symbol,[3] standing (approximately) for a single vowel or consonant, from the phonogram; in the course of this process, the original picture presented by the ideogram is so thoroughly obscured in the conventionalized alphabetic symbol as to be, finally, quite lost. Thus, the *alef* and the *beth* of the Old Semitic writing, originally symbolizing the "ox-head" and the "house," respectively, are completely conventionalized in the Greek and Hebrew characters that develop from them, so that, in Greek at any rate, the resulting letters come to stand for nothing more than the initial sounds of the two words. The first use of the visual symbol, though it evidently takes place far back in the antiquity of the human race, can scarcely be supposed to be so ancient as the employment of sound for the communication of ideas. Moreover, vital though the development of the outlined, the written, and the printed symbol has been to the growth of language, it is clear that the visible symbol has always been secondary in importance to the sound.

The third agent through which thought may be expressed, the uttered or spoken sound, is to be regarded as first in significance, even though it cannot absolutely be proved to be first in point of time. "Language" means, above everything else, *speech*.[4] The etymology

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[3] For a fuller summary of the development of writing, see p. 264.

[4] To avoid a vexatious complication, no attempt is made here to differentiate *language* and *speech*, as is done by Jespersen, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–23 (following Saussure, Bally, and H. E. Palmer), or, quite differently, by

of the word itself is suggestive: our English form comes, through the French, from the Latin *lingua* (tongue). It is being more and more recognized that the fruitful approach to language is through the study of the living tongue, and that is almost equivalent to saying the spoken, as opposed to the written, form of the language. Whether we discuss contemporary linguistic habits, or speculate, as we shall now do in reviewing theories of the origin of language, upon the obscure beginnings of human speech, the spoken language is the aspect of expression or communication on which we naturally center our attention.

The first theory, now completely discredited, is that which finds the origin of language in a divine fiat. Thus, Plato, in what is perhaps the earliest extant explanation of the beginnings of speech, insists that "names belong to things by nature," and hence "the artisan of words" must be "only he who keeps in view the name which belongs by nature to each particular thing."[5] The implication is that the original perfect language, which humans must rediscover or re-create, is the work of the ruler of the universe, the great "law-giver." Imperfections in human language are thus explained as failures to discover the original "natural" or divine words. Curiously parallel to this is the view of the origin of language that was long the orthodox Hebrew (and Christian) theory, likewise maintaining that language originated in a divine act. It was supposed that God

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A. H. Gardiner in *Speech and Language* (Oxford, 1932), p. 62. Unfortunately, to distinguish between *speech* and *language* in any of these ways runs counter to the well established practice of using the words synonymously or merely limiting *speech* (as has just been done) to the more literal implication of the term; that is, to the *spoken* aspect of *language*.

[5] *Cratylus*, New York (Putnam), Loeb ed., p. 31.

gave to Adam a language fully developed—this was, of course, believed to be Hebrew—and that the confusion of tongues at the building of the Tower of Babel accounted for the variations in human speech. This explanation, it is probably unnecessary to add, has long since been given up, by theologians as by linguists. It is now believed that man was endowed by his Creator not with speech itself, but rather with the potentialities of speech. The theory that language is an evolutionary process is universally accepted, but what were its ultimate beginnings is still a matter of speculation.

Turning to the more modern theories, which agree at least that language is of human rather than divine origin, we encounter first what is best known by its nickname, the "bow-wow" theory. This asserts that primitive language was exclusively "echoic"; that is, that its words were directly imitative of the sounds of nature or of animals. All the word-stock is thought to have originated in a way parallel to the child's calling a dog "bow-wow" or a duck "quack-quack." The great objection to this theory is that it has not been demonstrated that early or primitive languages are composed exclusively or in great part of onomatopoetic words; on the contrary, it is clear that the primitive languages of savage tribes are largely made up of words that are quite as conventional as those of civilized peoples. At best, the "bow-wow" theory can explain the origin of but a part, and not the largest part, of language. Yet it seems fair to add that the theory has in the past been somewhat unjustly derided. Words that are imitative or at least partly so—for there are many gradations between the purely imitative and the purely conventional—do form an appreciable part of the vocabulary of most

languages. There are many words that we instinctively feel to be symbolic, or semi-echoic.[6] Thus, such English words as *battle*, *roar*, and *thunder* have not perhaps a completely imitative quality, certainly not as compared with *hiss*, *whistle*, *bang*, and *crash;* yet they approach echoism in a way that the conventional words[7] of language do not. If, then, the "bow-wow" theory does not solve the riddle of the origin of language, it does at least help to account for the sounds of many words.

Similarly, other discarded theories of the origin of language may, after all, contain an element of truth. The principal ones are the so-called "pooh-pooh" theory, which derives language from instinctive ejaculatory responses to such emotions as pain or joy; and the "ding-dong" theory, which holds that language began with a mystically harmonious response, on the part of man's hitherto silent vocal organs, to a natural stimulus that was fated thus to call forth its perfect expression—"everything that is struck, rings." The obvious criticism of the interjectional theory is the difficulty of bridging the gap between interjections, which, on the whole, are relatively isolated phenomena in speech, and the main body of language; it has been held, indeed, that it is precisely this chasm that separates animal speech, "exclusively exclamatory," from that of men.[8] It seems hardly probable that the theory of interjections

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[6] *Cf.* p. 362.

[7] As an indication of the utterly conventional character of many, or most, of our words, let the reader ask himself if anything would be gained or lost if the words *cat* and *dog* were interchanged; or if *blue*, provided we were equally familiar with this application, would not serve as well as *red* to designate the color of fire or of blood.

[8] *Cf.* Grandgent, C. H., "The Why and the How of Speech," *Getting a Laugh*, Cambridge, Mass. (Harvard), 1924, p. 78.

accounts for more than the interjections themselves. The other theory is reminiscent of the Greek belief that words exist by nature, rather than by convention, and that there is a necessary and inherent connection between words and the ideas for which they stand. In its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century phases, this theory (once maintained but later rejected by Max Müller) seems no more acceptable as a complete explanation of the origin of language than it does in its Platonic form.

To this account of theories that have been held in the past as to the origin of speech[9] may be added, in brief summary, the speculations of two living students of language. Sir Richard Paget, assenting to the general belief that the earliest form of human communication is gesture, presents, as the full explanation, the theory that

> . . . human speech arose out of a generalized unconscious pantomimic gesture language—made by the limbs and features as a whole (including the tongue and lips)—which became specialized in gestures of the organs of articulation, owing to the human hands (and eyes) becoming continuously occupied with the use of tools. The gestures of the organs of articulation were recognized by the hearer because the hearer uncon-

[9] It should be understood that many others have been propounded—so many, in fact, that the problem has fallen into some disrepute. Perhaps, however, two other attempts to deal with it may be cited here: Noiré's "yo-he-ho" theory, which postulates that the first words were the sounds produced by the vibration of the vocal cords when men, performing some act of strenuous communal labor, expelled their breath forcibly and repeatedly (referred to by Jespersen, *Language*, p. 415); and Professor F. N. Scott's somewhat similar hypothesis, which holds that the first vocal utterances were the modifications of ordinary breathing due to certain constrictions—these sounds served first as recognition-signs and later as true communications. Scott's theory of "The Genesis of Speech" was the presidential address at the 1907 meeting of the Modern Language Association of America, and may be found in its *Publications* and also in Scott's *Standard of American Speech*, New York (Allyn), 1926, pp. 312–345.

sciously reproduced in his mind the actual gesture which had produced the sound.[10]

According to this hypothesis of "oral gesture," the significant elements in human speech are the postures and gestures, rather than the sounds; the latter merely serve the purpose of indicating the former.

To Professor Jespersen,[11] on the other hand, the sounds are of primary importance. His hypothesis, based in part on study of the language of children and of primitive races but chiefly on the history of language, is that emotional songs were the germs of speech. In particular, he believes that the emotion of love called forth the earliest songs, that these songs—and others called forth by different emotions (a chant of victory, for example, or a lament for the dead)—were inevitably accompanied by what were at first meaningless syllables, and that the circumstance that the same sounds were used on similar occasions brought about the first association of sound and meaning.

The conclusion of the whole matter is that the origin of language is still an unsolved enigma. That no certain answer, however, emerges from all the speculations on the question seems no adequate reason for dismissing it, as is frequently done, as something merely vexatious and fruitless. For, often, such speculations are not merely interesting in themselves, but are also suggestive of significant ideas about language. Nor are the theories all mutually destructive. The "bow-wow" and "pooh-pooh" theories, for example, are admitted as partial explanations of the general problem, in recent attempts

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[10] *Human Speech*, p. 174. Reprinted by permission.
[11] *Language*, pp. 412–442.

to solve the question of the origin of speech—notably that of Jespersen. It may be added that Professors Greenough and Kittredge, in formulating the general line of a possible future theory, which they suppose will be named the "goo-goo," are able to include in it what they conceive to be the elements of truth in the two theories just mentioned and in the "ding-dong" theory as well.[12]

If the *how* of language must still be held to elude us, there can be no doubt as to the *why*. Language must have arisen through men's desire and need for communication with each other. Social necessity is evidently the prime factor. Further, the increasingly elaborate character of language goes hand in hand with an increasingly elaborate social scheme of things. Language is useful almost exactly in proportion to its ability to adapt itself to new circumstances, to new needs for expression. To the invention of the radio, for example, are said to be due literally hundreds of new words and phrases. And behind the radio is the airplane, and behind this the automobile—each with its separate progeny of words. Our own language, English, would be much less responsive to the needs of the world it serves, much less suited to the rôle of a world language, were it not able to adapt itself, quickly and effortlessly, to the changing conditions of present-day society.

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CHAPTER II

The Ancestry of English

THERE is no proof that human language springs from a single common starting point, or that it does not. It is, however, universally believed by students of language that most of the languages now spoken in Europe and North and South America and some of those spoken in Asia go back to one speech ancestor—the hypothetical Indo-European, otherwise known as Indo-Germanic and also as Aryan.[1] Foreign families of languages that have been most directly in contact with Indo-European include the following groups: Finno-Ugrian, comprising certain non-Indo-European languages spoken in Europe, such as Finnish, Lappish, and Hungarian (Magyar); Altaic, including Turkish, Mongolian, and Manchu; Hamitic, made up of certain African languages, among them Egyptian; and Semitic,[2] the best-known members of which are Hebrew and Arabic. In addition, there are, of course, many more distant families of languages, such as the Indo-Chinese, spoken in Tibet, Burma, Siam, and China. The total number of families of languages is in the hundreds, but the great majority

[1] The last term is best avoided, since it is sometimes used as a synonym for Indo-European, and again as another designation of one of the branches of Indo-European, the Indo-Iranian.

[2] The terms *Hamitic* and *Semitic* suggest the old belief that from the different languages spoken by the sons of Noah have sprung the great groups of languages later spoken in the world; in line with this theory, the Indo-European was once called the "Japhetic."

of these are primitive dialects, especially in Africa and America, that have not yet been shown to belong to any of the larger groups. The number of native American (Indian) *families* alone is thus estimated as more than one hundred and twenty. If more evidence were available as to the earlier forms of these languages, it would doubtless be possible to reduce greatly the number of families of languages; it is even conceivable that fuller knowledge of language generally would group together, as branches of a common unit, all the families of languages now recognized. In the present state of knowledge, however, this is impossible. Any consideration of the ancestry of English, therefore, must begin with the conception of an Indo-European starting point.

Before beginning with the Indo-European theory, however, it may be advisable to inquire into the factors that account for the splitting up of a language into subdivisions and new groupings. The first, evidently, is the general tendency of language to change with the lapse of time, and the fact that changes taking place in two physically separated groups of the same language do not proceed at an even pace, or in precisely the same direction. The second factor, then, has already been suggested: migration of some of the speakers of a given tongue to a new home, particularly when the migration has traversed such a barrier as a high mountain range or a broad river. A glance at the map of Europe will illustrate the fact that natural barriers—the Alps or the Pyrenees, for instance—are often also the frontiers of language. On a smaller scale, the separation of Old English into dialects—a separation, to be sure, primarily to be accounted for because three distinct tribes, the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes, are represented—is

emphasized by the fact that rivers become boundary lines: the region of the Northumbrian dialect was from the Humber to the Forth; of the Mercian, from the Thames to the Humber; and of the West Saxon, the greater part of the country south of the Thames. A third factor is conquest. An alien tongue has often been imposed upon a conquered people, and it tends, of course, to be spoken in a changed way, with some residuum of the original speech of the people. Conquest, moreover, may work in another way: the Normans afford the remarkable instance of a conquering people twice giving up their own language for that of a conquered race; for they first exchanged their Northern language for the Southern tongue of the region they called Normandy, and eventually they substituted for the French dialect that they thus acquired, the Teutonic speech of conquered Britain.

The Indo-European hypothesis, to which we may now return, holds that in the Later Stone Age there lived a people or peoples speaking a tongue that was the common ancestor of the greater number of cultivated languages now existing in the world. As has already been suggested, this does not necessarily imply either that the original Indo-Europeans were racially a unit or that their speech descendants are racially akin. It does, however, assume that the hypothetical language known as Indo-European was the speech of a people inhabiting a comparatively limited geographical area, and that from this central focal point have radiated all the subdivisions of the Indo-European family of languages. During the last half-century, there have been a number of investigations into the problems of the Indo-European home and of the classification of

language that the Indo-European theory implies. These investigations, partly anthropological and archeological, but chiefly linguistic, have altered the old belief that the home of the Indo-Europeans was in Asia, and most probably in the fabled region of the Garden of Eden, between the Tigris and the Euphrates. It is now held that the Indo-European home was in central or south-eastern Europe. Some of the methods used in attacking the problem may be of interest.

The evidence of language is fairly clear as to the climate, the animals, and the plants of the region that the original Indo-Europeans inhabited: everything points to the temperate zone, and in all probability not the southern part of that zone. This is argued largely from the presence in many Indo-European languages of the same words (not, of course, words identical in form, but words recognizable as variants of the same roots) for such ideas as snow, winter, and spring; for such animals as the dog, the horse, the cow, the sheep, the bear, but not the camel, the lion, the elephant, or the tiger; for such trees as the beech, the oak, the pine, the willow, but not the palm or the banyan.[3] It is urged, further, that the country could not have had access to the sea: there is apparently no common word for "ocean."[4] If it was on the continent of Europe, it is unlikely, for other reasons, that it was near the seacoast:

[3] It must be recognized that, singly, many of these words offer but dubious proof; the names of trees, for example, are likely to apply to entirely different species in different times and places. Note the variety of meaning that *sycamore* has even in the English-speaking world; and it is said that in Greece the word corresponding to English *beech* means "oak" and sometimes perhaps "chestnut."

[4] This, however, should perhaps not be so confidently asserted as it frequently is; *cf.* Hirt, H., *Indogermanische Grammatik*, Heidelberg (Winter), 1927, Vol. I, pp. 77 and 78.

the pre-Hellenic inhabitants of Greece, for example, were not Indo-European, nor were the Etruscans in Italy, the pre-Celtic peoples who inhabited Britain, or the Basques in Spain and southern France; and over the greater part of northern (and of eastern) Europe were the Finno-Ugrians. A recent formulation of the problem and a possible solution is this:

> The areas that will satisfy the conditions require a land with a temperate climate, remote from the sea and shut off from other areas. . . . The only area which will satisfy the conditions postulated by the languages is the great area in Europe which includes practically the former empire of Austria-Hungary.[5]

In greater detail, a single argument may be added to illustrate more fully the way in which the problem of the Indo-European home has recently been attacked. Professor Bender[6] observes that almost every Indo-European language shares with its cognates a common word for honey or for an intoxicating drink made from honey. The first stem is Indo-European **melit*, the second **medhu*. The former appears, for example, in Greek μέλι (honey) and μέλισσα (bee), Latin *mel* (honey), and Old English *milisc* (honey-sweet) and *mildēaw* (mildew—literally, "honey-dew"). The latter appears, among many other places, in Sanskrit *madhu* (honey, mead), Greek μέθυ (intoxicating drink), Dutch *mede* (mead), Old English *medu* (mead), and English *mead*. The inference is that the original home of the Indo-Europeans was a land where the honey-bee abounded;

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[5] Giles, Peter, "Indo-Europeans," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14th ed., 1929, Vol. XII, pp. 262–264.

[6] *Cf.* Bender, H. H., *The Home of the Indo-Europeans*, Princeton (Princeton University Press), 1922, pp. 19–20.

and none of the Asiatic sites that have been seriously considered by linguists falls within the bee-belt. In ways like this, though with full recognition that this or that single argument may be fallacious, the weight of the evidence has been shown to favor the theory of a central or southeastern European site. Professor Bender, incidentally, favors Lithuania as the specific region, since he argues that "Lithuanian . . . has preserved into modern living speech more of the Indo-European past than any other language on earth," and that "the Lithuanian stock has dwelt in its present location for at least five thousand years, the duration of the Indo-European period, so far as it is known."

Accepting, then, the concept of an Indo-European starting point, we may proceed to examine the classification of language that follows from this theory. No single scheme of classification has met with universal assent, but the one most generally favored has divided the Indo-European system of languages into eight[7] great divisions or groups. These eight divisions are sometimes further grouped into the Asiatic and the European sections or, more frequently, according to the treatment of the initial consonant that appears in Latin *centum* and in Avestan *satem*, the word for "hundred." According to the latter grouping, the Greek, Italic, Celtic, and Teutonic languages are the *centum* branches, and the Indo-Iranian, Armenian, Balto-Slavonic, and Albanian, the *satem*. It is unknown, however, on what cause this distinction depends, and

[7] This number is increased to nine if we include Tocharian, a recently discovered language of Central Asia, and a *centum* rather than a *satem* tongue; or to ten, if we include the Indo-European section of the Hittite languages, also *centum* rather than *satem*.

it may be doubted, further, whether it really betokens important early differences between the languages, especially since the Greek, the most noteworthy of the early languages of the *centum* group, resembles most closely in its syntax the Sanskrit, the most noteworthy of the early languages of the *satem* group. To tabulate the eight groups in a single series, the order to be merely geographical, seems therefore more satisfactory. This order is as follows:

1. *Indo-Iranian.* The Indian branch includes the ancient language of the Vedas, perhaps to be dated as early as 1500 B. C.; Sanskrit, a closely related literary language; Prakrit and Pali, and numerous living languages of India; and the speech of the Gypsies (Romany). The Iranian branch comprises the ancient languages Avestan and Old Persian; the descendants of the latter are Middle Iranian and Modern Persian, together with related dialects such as Afghan and Kurdish.

2. *Armenian.* Old Armenian, which is thought to be related to the ancient Phrygian, had a Christian literature dating from about 400 A. D. Modern Armenian dialects have developed from it.

3. *Hellenic.* The Greek dialects, the most important of which are the Ionic, Attic, Doric, and Æolic, make up this branch, which has literary memorials dating from at least nine centuries before Christ. The common literary language developed from the Attic in the fifth century B. C. The dialects of modern Greece preserve some of its features.

4. *Albanian.* This is the language of ancient Illyricum, and that of modern Albania.

5. *Italic.* The two branches consist of the Latin and the non-Latin dialects; of the latter, the Oscan and the Umbrian, known only from inscriptions and place-names that antedate the Christian era, are to be distinguished. Latin, from the ancient dialect of Latium, became the literary language of Rome. Among its modern descendants are French, Provençal, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Roumanian.

6. *Celtic.* This group is usually divided into three branches: Gallic, Gaelic, and Cymric (or Brittanic). Gallic is the little-known speech of the ancient Gauls, whom Cæsar conquered. Gaelic includes the Irish, with a medieval and modern literature, interest in which has been studiously cultivated in recent years; Manx, a dialect still spoken in the Isle of Man; and Scotch-Gaelic, known from about the eleventh century and still in some use in the Highlands of Scotland. Cymric embraces Welsh, known as a literary language from the Middle Ages; Cornish, which became extinct in the nineteenth century; and Breton, or Armorican, a dialect of northwest France.

7. *Teutonic* (otherwise known as Germanic or Gothonic). The three branches[8] of this group are the East Germanic, the North Germanic, and the West Germanic. East Germanic is preserved in the fragmentary translation of the New Testament by Bishop Ulfilas, made about 350 A. D. and hence the oldest text in a Teutonic language. The East Germanic has no modern descend-

[8] Some scholars prefer a twofold division: East and North Germanic, and West Germanic. For the reasons for this, *cf.* Pedersen, *Linguistic Science in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 30 and 31.

ants. North Germanic comprises the Scandinavian languages, represented in both medieval and modern literature; an easterly division includes Danish and Swedish, and a westerly, Icelandic and Norwegian. To the West Germanic branch, from which English stems, we shall return.

8. *Balto-Slavonic.* The Baltic group consists of Old Prussian, Lettic, and Lithuanian. The Slavonic group is further broken up into two subdivisions: one includes Polish and Czech, or Bohemian; the other, Russian and Bulgarian.

What, then, are the common features of the Indo-European family of languages generally, and what are the special *differentiae* of the Teutonic group? In answer to the former question, it is to be observed, in the first place, that the Indo-European languages are all *inflectional* (though not all inflectional languages are Indo-European). That is to say, such syntactical distinctions as gender, number, case, mood, tense, and so forth, are usually indicated by varying the form of a single root. Thus, in English inflection, we most frequently use different endings—the *-s*, for example, to differentiate the plural number of nouns from the singular, and the *-ed* to differentiate the past tense of verbs from the present—though, as we shall see, initial and internal inflection are also possible. Languages outside the Indo-European system that are not inflectional are usually (1) *isolating*, like Chinese, in which only monosyllabic and invariable roots are used, and in which the relation between words must be suggested by their position or occasionally by variation in tone; or (2) *agglutinative*, like Turkish or Hungarian, in which formal affixes are

attached to independent and invariable roots in such a way that root and affix are always distinct. A fourth type of language, called *incorporating*, is sometimes differentiated. In such a language (that of Greenland is an illustration), a single word may express not only subject and verb, but also such other concepts as direct and indirect object; hence, what would be in an isolating language a sentence of five or six words may become a single word.[9]

Further criteria of the Indo-European languages are similar habits of pronunciation and the possession of a common word-stock. As to the latter, it is clear even to the novice that, for example, Greek *νυκτός*,[10] Latin *noctis*,[10] German *Nacht*, French *nuit*, and English *night* are variations of a single original root. What is implied, of course, is that their relation is that of *cognates* rather than that one language has borrowed from another. Further examples of common roots appearing in variant forms in different Indo-European languages are these:[11]

English	*Dutch*	*German*	*Gothic*	*Lithuanian*
three	drie	drei	thri	tri
seven	zeven	sieben	sibun	septyni
me	mij	mich	mik	manen
mother	moeder	mutter	——	moter
brother	broeder	bruder	brothar	brolis

Celtic	*Latin*	*Greek*	*Persian*	*Sanskrit*
tri	tres	treis	thri	tri
secht	septem	hepta	hapta	sapta
me	me	me	me	me
mathair	mater	meter	matar	matar
brathair	frater	phrater	——	bhratar

[9] *Cf.* Pedersen, *op. cit.*, pp. 99 and 100.

[10] The forms given are, of course, those of oblique cases, in order to show the root.

[11] From Whitney, W. D., *Language and the Study of Language*, New York (Scribner's), 1867, p. 196.

There are, however, special characteristics that the Teutonic languages have in common and that serve to differentiate Teutonic, as a branch, from the other divisions of Indo-European. The principal ones are usually thought of as four in number, as follows:[12]

1. A simpler conjugation of verbs, including a twofold classification.

2. A twofold declension of adjectives.

3. A fixed, stress accent.

4. A regular shifting of the explosive, or stopped, consonants.

Each of these points requires fuller explanation.

As to the first point, even a slight acquaintance with Latin and Greek makes it apparent that their conjugation of verbs is far more complex than is that of German or English. The terminology sometimes used should not be allowed to obscure this contrast. The fact that the phrase *I had loved* or *ich hatte geliebt* may be called a pluperfect tense does not mean that it really parallels, in structure, *amaveram:* the Teutonic verbal system is largely analytic, expressing the concept of pluperfect time, for example, by the use of pronoun, auxiliary, and participle; the Latin is entirely synthetic, expressing a similar concept by elaborately varying the form of the verbal root. The student of Latin who begins the study of Greek finds that the verbal system of the latter, being

[12] It should perhaps be added that the four chief changes from Indo-European to Teutonic give a very incomplete picture of the whole process; *cf.* Hirt, H., *Handbuch des Urgermanischen*, Heidelberg (Winter), 1931–

nearer the complexity of the Indo-European verb, has at least one more complication in almost every category: there are not only the two numbers of Latin, singular and plural, but there is also a third, the dual; there are not only the two voices, active and passive, but there is also a third, the middle; there are additional moods, like the optative, and additional tenses, like the aorist. In sharp contrast to this is the exceedingly simple system of Teutonic, characterized at first, for example, by only two tenses, the one to express past time, the other to express both present and future. The inflected passive voice of Teutonic, likewise, was early lost; it is represented in Old English by only a single form, *hātte* (was called),[13] the passive voice elsewhere being expressed, as in Modern English, by compound tense-forms.

The most distinctive feature of the Teutonic verb, however, is its development of a special type of preterit in many words, and the consequent classification of its verbs into two categories according as they follow, or do not follow, this pattern. The preterit is that with the dental suffix, the *-ed* of English and the *-te* of German; the resulting classification of verbs is the division into two types, called "weak" and "strong." The weak verbs, less accurately called the "regular," are those with the dental preterit, as *walk, walked;* the strong or irregular are those with internal vowel change, as *sing, sang, sung.* The latter group corresponds more nearly to the verbs of other languages, but the former is distinctively Teutonic. We have come to feel, as the designation "regular" suggests, that the conjugation of the weak verbs is not only the simpler but the normal

[13] This inflected passive survives in the poetic form *hight* (was, or is, called).

pattern; newly created or newly borrowed verbs invariably are conjugated in this way.

To sum up, then, we have in the Teutonic languages a twofold classification of verbs, and in general a verbal conjugation that is unlike that of other languages; and of these two types of verbs, the weak is more distinctively, indeed quite uniquely, Teutonic. The fact that in giving the principal parts of a weak verb in Modern English only two forms[14] need be mentioned illustrates the extreme simplicity that the Teutonic verb has attained.

The second distinguishing characteristic of the Teutonic languages is the twofold declension of the adjective. The adjective was declined according to one system when it stood alone before the noun or was used in the predicate relation, and according to another when used substantively or when it was preceded by a defining element, such as an article or a demonstrative. This is not to be illustrated in Modern English, which has lost all declension of the adjective, and thus, necessarily, the distinction between the weak and the strong forms. It was, however, preserved in Old English and is still to be found in German. Thus, in Modern English, we use the identical form *good* in the expressions *good men* and *these good men*. In Old English, however, the corresponding phrases would be *gōde menn* and *þās gōdan menn*—as in German the corresponding phrases are *gute Männer* and *diese guten Männer*. As with the verbs, it is the weak inflection rather than the strong that is distinctively

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[14] Compare, for example, the six principal parts of a typical Greek verb. But it is true, of course, that for the strong verbs in Modern English three forms must often be given (and in Old English, four).

Teutonic, the strong forms corresponding more or less to adjective declension in other languages. The loss of the distinction in Modern English need not, of course, be mourned; it is difficult to see any gain in expressiveness in this peculiar inflectional complexity. Nevertheless, its former presence in English and its retention in German are significant in marking these languages as unmistakably Teutonic.

The third characteristic of the Teutonic languages is their accent, fixed rather than free or variable, and a matter of stress rather than of pitch. To English-speaking persons it may seem, at first sight, that accent in any language must necessarily be fixed, as the Teutonic accent is. But it is clear that the original Indo-European and the primitive Teutonic accent was variable; for example, it might shift, in the inflection of a word, from the root syllable to a syllable of the inflectional ending. Greek and Latin partially preserve this, as when the Greek πούς (foot) is declined ποδός, ποδί, πόδα; the accent, that is to say, shifts in the genitive and dative from the root to the inflectional ending, and comes back, in the accusative, to the root! Latin is again a step simpler, for the cognate word is declined *pēs, pēdis, pēdī, pēdem.* However, the freer accent of Latin, as compared to the Teutonic languages, is sufficiently obvious; we may take the conjugation of the present indicative of *amō*, for example, and observe that in *ámō, ámās, ámat, amámus, amátis, ámant*, we have a similar phenomenon. Or note how in the inflection of *gubernator*, the accent is shifted from a root syllable in the nominative *gubernátor* to the syllable of the inflectional ending in the genitive *gubernatóris*. We should be doing something equivalent in English if we spoke of "the gó́vernor," and then pro-

ceeded to speak of "the govĕrnor's house." But this, of course, or anything remotely like it,[15] we never do.

The other aspect of the Teutonic accent is even more important: many other Indo-European languages retain something of the original musical, or pitch, accent; in the Teutonic languages, accent has become, to all intents, entirely a matter of stress. The implications of this distinction are considerable. The accentuation of English and German is utterly unlike that of French, which in words of two syllables has more nearly a hovering or distributed accent than a firm stress on one syllable. Such pronunciations as *weékĕnd, bóokcăse,* and *saúcepăn* are the exception in English; in most cases, we have come to overemphasize, as compared even with German, the accented syllable and to underemphasize the unaccented.[16] Perhaps this is the chief reason why French as pronounced by an English-speaking person, who can scarcely help carrying over his usual habits of accentuation, usually sounds so curiously unreal. The versification of Teutonic languages likewise depends on this distinction between the stressed and the unstressed syllable, and its effect is utterly different from that achieved by the quantitative system of the classical languages and its partial retention in the Romance

[15] It may be objected that we have shifting accent, in Modern English, in pairs of words like *pérfume* (n.), *perfúme* (v.), or in classical derivatives like *phótograph* and *photógrapher*. But these are evidently far removed from an accent which shifts in the inflection of a single part of speech.

[16] (For the interpretation of phonetic symbols see pp. 172, 188, and 539.) For this reason, it is frequently said that in the pronunciation of Modern English only those vowels that are protected by the accent have their peculiar quality, all others approximating either [ə] or [ɪ]. The dictionaries do not always indicate this, but observation makes it evident that the unaccented vowel in *subject* (noun) is [ɪ] rather than [ɛ], and in *actor* [ə] rather than [ɔ]. Again, observe the difference in the second syllables of *weekend* and *weakened;* the former is the exception, the latter the rule.

languages. Finally, perhaps the most important effect, for the development of English, of the heavy Teutonic stress accent has been that of slurring and frequently altogether dropping unstressed vowels; because the accent usually falls on the first syllable of the word and because our inflection is chiefly in the final syllables, it has been easy to lose inflectional endings and consequently to simplify the whole system of inflection. Here is the chief reason, too, for the largely monosyllabic quality of the native English word-stock.

The fourth distinctive mark of the Teutonic languages is their almost regular shifting of certain Indo-European consonants. The regularity of these changes was perhaps first stated by the Danish linguist, Rasmus Rask, but their later formulation by Jacob Grimm has given the principle the designation "Grimm's Law." A full statement of the law and its subsequent modifications would be out of place here. The formula in general, however, is as follows:

bh	dh	gh
b	d	g
p	t	k
f	th	h

The three vertical columns are, approximately, the labials, the dentals, and the palatal-velars. The first horizontal row consists of the voiced aspirate stops; the second, of the voiced stops; the third, of the voiceless stops; and the fourth, of the voiceless continuants. The formula is to be read in a downward direction: each consonant (except those in the last row) changes to the one directly beneath it. Stated briefly, then, the principle is this:

1. Indo-European voiced aspirate stops lose their aspirate quality and appear in Teutonic as voiced stops.

2. Indo-European voiced stops lose their voiced quality and appear in Teutonic as voiceless stops.

3. Indo-European voiceless stops lose their momentary quality and appear in Teutonic as continuants.

To proceed, then, to illustrations of the working out of the principle. There is the initial difficulty that, whereas Latin or Greek is commonly taken to represent the unshifted or Indo-European consonants, and English to represent the shifted or Teutonic consonants, the former languages do not always give the Indo-European consonants in their original state. Not one of the consonants in the first row—*bh*, *dh*, and *gh*—appears in Latin or Greek.[17] Our illustrations, then, if we are to confine them to Latin and English words, must begin with the second row. Even here, since initial *b* was exceedingly rare in Indo-European, clear-cut examples are wanting for the first pair, *b-p*. The other five changes may, however, be represented by many examples. In the following pairs, the Latin word[18] gives us the Indo-European consonant; the English word, the Teutonic equivalent. In most cases, not only the initial but the medial or final consonants illustrate the shift.

p-f	*d-t*	*t-th*
pedem (foot)	duo (two)	tu (thou)
piscem (fish)	edere (eat)	tonare (thun(d)[19]er)
patrem (father)	dentem (tooth)	tres (three)

[17] *Bh*, for example, has already been shifted in Greek to *φ*, in Latin (initially) to *f*; Greek *φράτηρ* and Latin *frater* are cognates of English *brother*, and Greek *φέρω* and Latin *ferō* of English *bear*.

[18] Nouns are given in the accusative case, since such forms as *pēs* do not disclose the root.

[19] *Excrescent* consonants are thus indicated.

g-k	*k-h*
genu (knee)[20]	cordem (heart)
[co]gno[vit] (know)[20]	canem (houn(d))
agrum (acre)	cornu (horn)

Later philologists than Grimm found it necessary to qualify and modify his statement of the consonant-shift. The second, or High German, shift—important as explaining certain regular differences between the consonants of English and German in cognate words—originally formed part of "Grimm's Law," but it has been shown[21] that Grimm was mistaken in stating the whole formula as one process. This second shift will therefore be mentioned later, in speaking of the relation of English and German. The principal qualification in the law explaining the first consonant-shift must, however, be referred to here. Another Danish linguist, Karl Verner, discovered that many apparent exceptions to Grimm's Law were dependent on a principle of accent. His postulate was that when the consonant-shift took place, it found the early Teutonic stress on the same syllables as in Indo-European and that it was this stress on many medial or final syllables that accounted for the presence of voiced instead of voiceless consonants. Thus, if the preceding vowel in the Indo-European and early Teutonic word did not bear the accent, Indo-European *p*, *t*, and *k* became *b*, *d*, and *g* in Teutonic rather than *f*, *th*, and *h*. To summarize, the primitive Indo-European voiceless stops first became pre-Teutonic voiceless continuants and then, if they followed an unaccented vowel, they became voiced stops. On the other hand, initial consonants and consonants preceded

[20] The initial *k* in these words was formerly sounded.
[21] *Cf.* Jespersen, *Language*, p. 44.

by an accented vowel underwent only the shifting explained by Grimm. The voicing just referred to took place, of course, before the accent in Teutonic was universally thrown on the first syllable. A complete formulation of Verner's Law is impossible here, but a few illustrations of its application may be given. Teutonic sometimes has *d* when, according to Grimm's Law, *th* should be expected, as the shift from Indo-European *t*; thus, English *old* (Old English *eald*) is cognate with Latin *altus*,[22] English *yard* (Old English *geard*) with Latin *hortus*, English *sad*[23] with Latin *satis*. Likewise, Indo-European *p* and *k*, instead of appearing as *f* and *h*, sometimes become *b* and *g*.

Of the four distinguishing Teutonic characteristics that have been reviewed, it is probably accurate to suggest that the accent contributed most to make Teutonic words distinctive and to give the modern Teutonic languages a unique place among European languages. The stress-shift that took place, as Verner's Law implies, later than the consonant-shift explained by Grimm's Law, was even more important than the other process in changing the character of Teutonic words.[24] The result of the stress-shift was that, in general, the Teutonic accent was fixed on the root syllable of the word, except that in nouns and adjectives, and in verbs derived from these, it rested on the first syllable, whether prefix or root. As a result of both consonant-shift and stress-shift, the Teutonic branch

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[22] Representing an Indo-European **alt-ós*.

[23] Originally meaning "sated"; *cf.* German *satt*.

[24] For a discussion of the relative significance of these two processes, see Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (4th ed.), pp. 22–28.

emerged as a highly individualized and easily identifiable member of the Indo-European family of languages.

The common Teutonic characteristics having thus been pointed out, it is necessary, in order to place the English language more specifically among its relatives, to return to the divisions within the Teutonic branch. To the eastern group belongs Gothic; to the northern belong Old Norse and the modern Scandinavian languages; to the western belong German, Dutch, Low German, Frisian, and English. West Germanic,[25] therefore, is to be further investigated. Its chief divisions are obvious: the part of it affected by the second consonant-shift is the High German; West Germanic languages unaffected by the shift form the Low German group. The modern representative of High German is the literary language of modern Germany, called simply German; all the other West Germanic dialects and languages that have been mentioned belong to the Low German division. The second consonant-shift began in southern or upper Germany (whence the name High German) and worked its way gradually northward, stopping short, however, of the low regions bordering the North Sea and the Baltic. Unlike the first or great consonant-shift, the history of this process is quite clear, its period covering the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries. Many German words are identical, or nearly identical, with parallel English words. This is so, in the very great majority of cases, not because English has borrowed[26] from German, or German from English,

[25] The name, of course, like *Indo-European* and like *Teutonic*, signifies a hypothetical language only—one assumed to have existed because of the similarities among derivative languages in which literature is found, not one of which there is any written record.

[26] For examples of the relatively small group of borrowings, see p. 332.

but because the two vocabularies have a common ancestry in West Germanic, Teutonic, and Indo-European; their relation is therefore that of cognates. Thus, English *house*, German *Haus*, English *man*, German *Mann*, English *finger*, German *Finger*, and English *sing*, German *singen*, are evidently pairs of words that are almost identical. In many cases, however, the relationship is less apparent. The first reason for this state of affairs[27] is the High German consonant-shift that German underwent and English, as one of the Low German languages, did not. Since the shift began in the south and went northward with diminishing force, and since, in Germany as in England, it was the language of the midland that was the ancestor of the modern literary language, it follows that not all the consonants that might have been shifted were actually shifted. Of the three series—labials, dentals, and palatal-velars—it happened that the dentals underwent the most thorough shifting. The relation, therefore, of English and German dentals is almost perfectly regular, according to this formula:

English *d* = German *t* (*deep, tief; day, Tag; dear, teuer*)
English *t* = German *z, tz, s* (*ten, zehn; cat, Katze; sit, sitzen; that, das*)
English *th* = German *d* (*this, dies; three, drei; thing, Ding*)

Among the labials, *p* was most frequently shifted, appearing in German as either *pf* or *f* (English *pepper*, German *Pfeffer* illustrates both possibilities); and

[27] It should be remembered also that the tendency of words to shift their meanings will obscure a relationship that otherwise would be obvious; thus, the fact that English *deer* and German *Tier* (animal) are cognates is obscured by the narrowing of the meaning of the former to apply to a particular species of animal rather than "animal" in general; and it is somewhat surprising to observe that English *dapper* and German *tapfer* (brave) were originally the same word.

although *f* remained unshifted, its voiced equivalent, *v*, appeared in German as *b* (note: *over, ober; shove, schieben; grave, Grabe*). The velars, for the most part, are unshifted in German, except that the explosive *k* is frequently replaced with the continuant *ch*; thus, English *wake* is cognate with German *wachen*, and *week* with *Woche*.

One other characteristic of German, which has served throughout its history to differentiate it from English and other Low German languages, should be pointed out. The fact that High German was affected by the second consonant-shift and Low German was not might seem to indicate that the former was more subject to change, less conservative, in a word, than the latter. In point of fact, however, the contrary is the case. In almost every other manifestation, German has been far more conservative than English. Only the larger aspects of this contrast can be indicated here: (1) the far greater extent of inflectional leveling in English, so that in many respects the inflection of German is more like that of Old English than that of Modern English—as in its full declension of the definite article for gender, number, and case, and its general retention of adjective inflection, even to the extent of differentiating between the weak and the strong position; (2) the thoroughly "mixed" character of the English vocabulary, on the one hand, and the relatively "pure" character of the German, on the other. In the last respect, once more, German is more like Old English than Modern English, for, like Old English, it has always preferred to translate[28] borrowed ideas into native terms,

[28] The word itself serves to illustrate the contrast: English *translate* uses the Latin roots for "over" and "carry," while German *übersetzen* uses the native ones.

while Modern English has more commonly borrowed the word with the idea, and has seldom hesitated to supersede a native word with a borrowed one.

The closest affiliations of English, therefore, are not with High German, but with the Low German languages. It is interesting to observe that the northern dialects of Modern German are frequently closer to English in their vocabulary than to the literary language of Germany. The following illustrations will serve to indicate this relationship:

High German	als	tief	Herz	dasz	ist	hatte	zwanzig
Low German	as	deep	Hart	dat	is	hadd	twentig
English	as	deep	heart	that	is	had	twenty

The explanation, of course, is that the dialect, like English, but unlike the literary language, was unaffected by the second consonant-shift.

A similar relationship exists between Dutch and English. Dutch, too, has shown a tendency to level its inflections that is more like the radical evolution of English than the conservative development of German. In vocabulary also, it is frequently closer to English than to German, as these parallels will show:

German	Wasser	zwei	Herz	zwanzig	zehn	Weib
Dutch	water	twee	hart	twintig	tien	wyf
English	water	two	heart	twenty	ten	wife

The nearest relative of English, however, is not Dutch but Frisian, a language once spoken over a great part of northwestern Germany, but now restricted to three or four hundred thousand inhabitants of Holland and of coastal islands in the North Sea. The modern dialect called Frisian is so closely akin to English that communication with the people who speak it is said to be no

more difficult for a speaker of standard English than communication with the peasantry of many parts of modern England. Old Frisian has so many characteristics in common with Old English that scholars have sometimes assumed that they were originally one speech, a separate division of Low German which they have named Anglo-Frisian.

The tendency of all this discussion of the ancestry of English is to emphasize the inevitably Teutonic character of our language. However radically its forms and its structure have changed, and however important the cross-relationships with such languages as Latin and French have been, it is evident that most important of all is the Teutonic base. It will be the endeavor of the following chapters first to set forth the more general aspects of the development of English and its present status, and then to examine successively and in greater detail such phases of the English language as inflections, sounds, spelling, vocabulary, and syntax.

References for Further Reading

The books by Pedersen, Jespersen, Sapir, Bloomfield, and Graff enumerated on pages 12 and 13, and, in addition:

Baugh, A. C., *A History of the English Language*, New York (Appleton-Century), 1935.

Emerson, O. F., *History of the English Language*, New York (Macmillan), 1894.

Jespersen, Otto, *Growth and Structure of the English Language*, Leipsig (Teubner), 8th ed., 1935.

Krapp, G. P., *Modern English, Its Growth and Present Use*, New York (Scribner's), 1909.

Lounsbury, T. R., *History of the English Language*, New York (Holt), 1894.

Meillet, A., *Introduction à l'étude comparative des langues indo-européennes*, Paris (Hachette), 7th ed., 1934.
Schmidt, P. W., *Sprachfamilien und Sprachenkreise der Erde*, Heidelberg (Winter), 1926.

For a bird's-eye view of the general distribution of linguistic groups, see the "Linguistic Map of the World," page 436 of Graff's book. An elaborate series of linguistic maps appears in Meillet, A., and Cohen, Marcel, *Les langues du monde*, Paris (Champion), 1924.

CHAPTER III

Old and Middle English

THE English language is conventionally divided into three periods: Old, Middle, and Modern English. It is probably unnecessary to suggest that the threefold division does not imply that there was a sudden substitution, at any particular time, of one form of the language for another; the English people did not, for example, stop speaking Old English on the last day of the year 1099 and begin speaking Middle English on the first day of the year 1100. The development of course has been continuous, and the transition from one period to another gradual, in spite of the fact that at certain times in the history of the language changes have taken place more rapidly than at other times. The Old English period, as the term is usually understood, is from the beginning of the invasions of Britain by the Germanic tribes, in 449,[1] to 1100; the Middle English period is from 1100 to 1500; and the Modern English period begins with 1500. Some confusion has been caused by the use of "Anglo-Saxon" rather than "Old English" as the designation for the earliest of the three phases of English. It should be understood that the two terms are synonymous, and that it is nothing more important than fashion that dictates that in one generation those who write on the English language shall term the oldest

[1] This is the date given by Bede; but it is quite likely that the first invasions were really earlier.

period "Old English" and that in another writers shall designate it "Anglo-Saxon."[2] To the present writer, the former term seems preferable, particularly because of its suggestion of a continuous development; but both labels should mean precisely the same thing—the language in its almost purely Teutonic aspect, up to or until just after the Norman Conquest.

The history of the English language proper, then, begins with the incursions of the Jutes, Saxons, and Angles[3] about the middle of the fifth century. These invaders came from neighboring regions in Schleswig-Holstein; they spoke, not one language, but related Low German dialects. The Jutes came first and occupied the smallest territory, principally Kent and the Isle of Wight. The Saxons occupied practically all of England south of the Thames, with the exception of these Jutish territories and with the further exception of Cornwall, which remained in the possession of the Celts; in addition, they occupied the regions north of the Thames later called Essex and Middlesex. The Angles took for themselves what was left: the greatest part of what is now England, and Lowland Scotland as far as the Firth of Forth, with the exception of the west coast.

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[2] At the present, fashion is divided. The titles of Krapp and Kennedy's *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, New York (Holt), 1929, and Flom's *Introductory Old English Grammar and Reader* (1930) illustrate this diversity. It is curious to note that the designation of one of the older texts in the field, originally *An Old English Grammar*, has been changed, in recent printings, to *An Anglo-Saxon Grammar*, though the content of the book is the same and though it continues to include, on the very first page, an argument for the superiority of "Old English" over "Anglo-Saxon."

[3] In addition to these three, a fourth tribe, the Frisians, should perhaps be added. They inhabited in Britain much the same regions as the Jutes, though to some extent they settled in Anglian territory also.

Here, then, is the explanation of the division of Old English into dialects that have left their trace in the provincial speech of England until this day. The dialectal groupings have been somewhat shifted, but a threefold division is long preserved. The speech of the Jutes became the Kentish dialect of Old English; the principal dialect of the Saxons was known as the West Saxon; and the Anglian tongue split into two dialects, the Mercian dialect of the Midland and the Northumbrian dialect of the north. The later history of the dialects may be briefly suggested: the Kentish and the West Saxon dialects fell together as the southern dialect of Middle English; the Mercian became the Midland, its principal subdivision—the East Midland—being the ancestor of literary Modern English; the Northumbrian dialect became the Northern, the popular tongue on both sides of the Scottish border. Literary supremacy has swung from the south to the north and eventually come to the Midland. In Old English times, the first centers of learning and culture were in Northumbria; the first important literature in English, dating from the late seventh and early eighth centuries, was therefore in the Northumbrian dialect. By the end of the ninth century, another center was established, in the south, in Alfred's kingdom of Wessex; the body of later Old English literature is in this West Saxon dialect. In Middle English times, no one dialect could claim to be supreme until the East Midland finally asserted itself, by the end of the fourteenth century, as the most favored among the claimants. Standard Modern English represents, for the most part, the further development of this dialect, which has not been, however, without important rivalry from the Northern, partic-

ularly in the late Middle and early Modern periods of the language.

To outline the general development of the language in its Old and Middle periods requires us to return to pre-Saxon Britain, and to retell a familiar story. When the Germanic invaders came, Britain was inhabited by the Celts, who had dwelt there for centuries, though it is supposed that another race or races had preceded them.[4] Celtic Britain had been invaded by the Romans in 55 and 54 B. C., as we are told in the *Commentaries* of Julius Cæsar, but any attempt to conquer the island was postponed for almost a century. By the end of the first century of the Christian era, however, the conquest was complete, and a Roman colony which embraced the territory as far north as what is now Lowland Scotland was established. This military occupation of Britain lasted until the early fifth century, when the far-flung Roman legions began to be withdrawn from the provinces in order to defend the capital; Britain, the most distant western outpost of the empire, was the first to be abandoned. The Celtic inhabitants, left defenseless against the attacks of the Picts and Scots on the north and the west, after appealing in vain to Rome for help, finally called in the aid of the Germanic sea-rovers who had in the past harried their shores. The call was answered; but the upshot was disastrous to the Celts, for the Germanic tribes who came to help against the Picts and Scots eventually coveted the island for themselves, turned against their Celtic allies, and succeeded in dispossessing them of the greater part of their lands. The Celts were driven to the corners of

[4] *Cf.* Chapter II.

the island; some fled across the Irish Sea and others across the English Channel to what is now Brittany. By the middle of the sixth century, the Teutonic settlement of Britain was complete.

What were the influences, then, of the earlier languages of the island—Celtic and Latin—upon the language of the invaders, the speech that became the English language? As to the former, the general conclusion must be that the Celtic deposit in Old English is curiously and almost inexplicably small. The words (apart from place-names) known, with any degree of certainty, to have been borrowed from the Celts in the Old English period[5]—such as *bannock*, *brock* (badger), *crag*, and *tor*—do not amount to more than a dozen; and the tendency of recent scholarship is rather to decrease than to add to this small group. Place-names stand on a different footing: hundreds of towns and cities, like *Aberdeen*, *Carlisle*, and *Dundee*, retain their old Celtic names. This situation, incidentally, exactly parallels the treatment of the languages of the American Indians in the United States; for American English, and the English language in general, has borrowed exceedingly few common words[6] from the Indians, but many places are still known by their picturesque Indian designation or some corruption of this, the impulse to substitute a commonplace European name having, fortunately, often been thwarted. Since the hypothesis of a wholesale extermination of aboriginal inhabitants is untenable in the one case and exceedingly unlikely in the other, the only plausible way of explaining the small number of

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[5] This qualification is important. See page 330.

[6] See page 337.

words borrowed from their languages is that the relative absence of social relationships made it unnatural for the conquerors to use the words of the conquered. It must be supposed that, where there was contact at all, the relation of Anglo-Saxon and Celt was that of master and slave—on the whole, a different relationship from that which obtained after the Norman Conquest between Norman and Saxon. Only in this way does it seem possible to account for the very different developments in language after the Teutonic settlement and after the Norman Conquest.

The Latin element in Old English, though considerably greater than the Celtic, is likewise relatively small; but the reasons for this are more evident. There is no real mixture of races in question here; and it is further quite clear that the policy of liberal word-borrowing, later firmly established in English, did not exist in Old English times. The attitude of Old English is much more conservative, more like that of German, as has been suggested, than like that of Modern English. When ideas and institutions were borrowed from the Romans by the Anglo-Saxons, the tendency was, wherever possible, to use translated terms for them. The whole number of Latin borrowings in Old English has, it is true, been estimated as totaling about four hundred; but many of these occur but once and evidently did not take root, so that a much smaller figure would more accurately represent the extent of the Latin element in really active use.[7] Many of these borrowings were due to the Christianization of the English following the missionary journey of Augustine in 597. Earlier contacts with

[7] *Cf.* Bradley, p. 82, and Krapp, *Modern English*, p. 216.

Latin had resulted in the incorporation of a few words into the vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxons. While still in their Continental homes, the Germanic tribes had had dealings with Roman merchants and had borrowed some of their words, which therefore appear in other Teutonic languages besides English. Then, there is the possibility of words left by the Romans among the Celts and later taken over by the Anglo-Saxons, though the meager Celtic influence on Old English in general makes this, in all likelihood, a very small group. Here again, however, it may be said that place-names are the exception; note the numerous progeny of the Latin *castra* (camp), adopted by the Celts and inherited by the Anglo-Saxons.[8] But it seems more plausible, on the whole, to explain the greater number of Latin borrowings in pre-Christian times as due to direct contact between Anglo-Saxon and Roman rather than to the medium of Celtic. It should be emphasized, at any rate, that at least a few very common words—*mile*, *wall*, *street*, *wine*, *kitchen*, and *cook*, for example—antedate the influence of the ecclesiastical vocabulary of Rome.

Before turning to the general characteristics of Old English, one other foreign contact must be mentioned. The word "foreign" seems less appropriate in this connection, and the effect in general was to strengthen rather than weaken the Teutonic character of the language; for the contact was that with a race closely allied to the Anglo-Saxons, the Danes. The inroads of the Danes

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[8] The word itself gives *Chester*, and, with similarly palatalized *ch*, other southern names like *Rochester* and *Winchester;* the northern names keep the hard *c*, as in *Doncaster*, *Lancaster*, and *Todcaster*. To the same general source belong also place-names like *Gloucester*, *Leicester*, *Worcester*, and *Exeter*.

began in the late eighth century, and by the time of Alfred the Great these people had extended their territory southward from their original foothold in Northumbria until they commanded all the territory north of the Thames. Their amalgamation with the Anglo-Saxons was finally complete, and their influence upon the language of the latter was certainly very great, though its extent is obscured by the intimate relationship between the two word-stocks. In many cases, indeed, it is impossible to be sure whether the form of a given word is Scandinavian or Northern English. Undoubtedly, many very familiar words have reached us in a Scandinavian rather than a genuinely English dress: *sister*, for example, is from the Old Norse *syster* rather than the Old English *sweoster;* and we should be saying *yive* and *yift*, as Chaucer did (rather than *give* and *gift*), had it not been for the influence of Old Norse *gifa*.[9] In regard to *gift*, it is interesting to note, too, that we owe not only the modern form but the modern meaning to the Scandinavian rather than the Old English variant; for the more specialized meaning of the latter was, in the singular, "the price paid by a suitor in consideration of receiving a woman to wife," and, in the plural, "wedding."[10] As Jespersen well says, in connection with the last instance, "No subtler linguistic influence can be imagined than this"—nor, one may add, one more difficult to estimate in its entirety.

Consideration of these three loan-elements in Old English—Celtic, Latin, and Danish—has emphasized

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[9] Since in Old English *g* was palatalized before *e* and *i*; so that *giefan* (to give) was pronounced with initial *y*.

[10] Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language*, p. 69.

what may well be regarded as its first distinctive quality, the thoroughly Teutonic character of its word-stock. Whereas the Modern English vocabulary possesses native and borrowed constituents that are of approximately equal value and importance, the Old English vocabulary was, with on the whole decidedly minor exceptions, exclusively Anglo-Saxon, or at any rate Teutonic. Had the Norman Conquest not taken place, and had the English language persisted in its ultraconservative attitude toward word-borrowing, our modern speech would resemble German much more than is actually the case.

The resemblance between Old English and German suggests perhaps the readiest way to outline the general characteristics of the former. Not only, as has been indicated, in its vocabulary, but quite as strikingly in its accidence or inflection does Old English present familiar conceptions to one who has studied German. Modern English has discarded grammatical gender in favor of what we are prone to call logical or natural gender; but Old English, to give a single illustration, could use a neuter noun, *wīf*, for "woman," just as German does in the cognate form *Weib*. The noun, further, had an elaborate system of case endings, which German approximates much more nearly than Modern English. In other parts of speech, such as the verb, particularly in its treatment of the subjunctive, and the adjective, in its distinctions between the weak and strong positions as well as its inflection for number, gender, and case, the resemblance to German is noteworthy. Most striking of all, perhaps, is the fact that while the Modern English definite article has a single invariable form, the Old English article exhibits an elaborate set of distinctions

for gender, number, and case that exactly parallel, point for point, the German forms.

In addition to vocabulary and to inflection, a page of Old English seems foreign to the reader of Modern English in its arrangement of the words in the sentence. There appears to be an awkwardness, a cumbersome quality, about not only the more complicated forms of individual words but also their very order. The familiar pattern of Modern English—subject, predicate, object—is frequently departed from. Exactly the same variations as German exhibits—the inverted order with the verb preceding the subject, and the transposed order with the verb following the object—are to be observed. Such varied word-order, as we shall see, is compatible with a higher state of inflection; a stereotyped word-order, like that of Modern English, is a necessary consequence of inflectional leveling. We are concerned at present, however, with the impression that the former makes upon the modern reader. It is not surprising that to a reader of our greatly simplified Modern English, German, with all of its tantalizing resemblances to English, should still appear not merely foreign but also highly involved and almost ludicrously distorted in the forms of its words and their order in the sentence. And perhaps this is not an unduly exaggerated description of the impression produced by Old English also.

The readiest way to summarize these first impressions of Old English is to analyze a typical passage of its prose. Here is a selection from the most characteristic aspect of Old English prose—Early West Saxon, as it was written by Alfred the Great in the late ninth century. The selection forms part of Alfred's preface to his translation of the *Cura Pastoralis* of Pope Gregory. The king

expresses his perplexity that so little of the learning that, before the ravages of the Danes, had flourished in the land has been handed down in the form of English translations of worthy books; he concludes that the refusal of the older generation of scholars to do this work of translation was deliberate and dictated by their feeling that learning would increase with the study of languages.

When I then this all remembered, then wondered I exceedingly
Đā ic þā ðis eall gemunde, ðā wundrade ic swīðe swīðe

of the good wise men who formerly were throughout England, and
þāra gōdena wiotona þe gīu wǣron giond Angelcynn, ond

the books all completely learned had, that they of them then
þā bēc ealla be fullan geliornod hæfdon, þæt hīe hiora þā

no part did not wish into their own language [to] turn.
nǣnne dǽl noldon on hiora āgen geðīode wendan.

But I then soon again myself answered and said: "They not
Ac ic þā sona eft mē selfum andwyrde ond cwæð: "Hīe ne

thought that ever men should so reckless become, and
wēndon þætte ǣfre menn sceolden swā rēccelēase weorðan, ond

the learning so fall away; for the desire (i.e., intentionally)
sīo lār swā oðfeallan; for þǣre wilnunga

they it neglected, and wished that here the more wisdom in the
hīe hit forlēton, ond woldon ðæt hēr þȳ māra wīsdom on

land should be the we more languages knew."
londe wǣre þȳ wē mā geðīoda cūðon."

A few remarks, then, on this passage, in the light of what has been said of the general characteristics of Old English. Study of its vocabulary will reveal that much more of it is familiar to us, as part of our Teutonic inheritance, than appears at first glance. Indeed, perhaps only a single noun, *geðīode* (language), and a very few adverbs and conjunctions, such as *swīðe* (much),

gīu (formerly), *þā* (then, when), and *ac* (but), are wholly strange. Several others, of course, are preserved in Modern English only as archaisms—*eft*, *cwæð* (quoth), and *wēndon* (weened)—or as roots the meaning of which has somewhat changed—*giond* (*cf.* yon), *cūðon* (*cf.* un-*couth*, formerly meaning un*known*), and *weorðan* (*be*, *become*, as in "Woe worth the day," i.e., "Woe be to the day"). Notice, too, that in a number of cases, the form seems nearer to German than to Modern English: *woldon* (*cf. wollten*), *weorðan* (*cf. werden*), *wāron* (*cf. waren*), *geliornod* (*cf. gelernt*), *wendan* (*cf. wenden*).

Our second point, the far greater complexity of inflection, also finds abundant illustration here. In this short passage, the definite article, which in Modern English appears invariably as *the*, has five variants: *sīo* (nom. fem. sing.), *þǣre* (gen. fem. sing.), *þȳ* (instrumental neut. sing.),[11] *þā* (nom. plur.), and *þāra* (gen. plur.). Adjective declension, utterly lost in Modern English, appears in such forms as *rēccelēase* (plur.) and *gōdena* (gen. plur. and a weak form). Several lost inflectional endings of the noun may be noticed; for example, *londe* (dat. neut. sing.), *wiotona* (masc. gen. plur.), and *wilnunga* (dat. fem. sing.). Other types of plural formation than the regular *-s* ending of Modern English are to be seen: *bēc*, an umlaut plural[12] later regularized into *books*, and *geðīoda* (languages). In the verb, too, a far higher state of inflection—as in the infinitive endings of *wendan* and *weorðan* and the plural endings of *forlēton* and *cūðon*—is evident.

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[11] Such a phrase as "*the* more *the* merrier" preserves this adverbial use of the old instrumental case; it parallels the Latin ablative of degree of difference.

[12] *Cf.* page 115.

Finally, our selection gives a vivid picture of the more varied word-order that accompanies the greater degree of inflection in Old English. German might parallel this order: "When I this all remembered, then wondered I much at the good wise men who formerly were throughout England and the books all completely learned had"—but Modern English, never! Note, throughout the passage, how infinitives and participles are detached from their auxiliaries, how a predicate is detached from its subject, and how a pronominal object may precede rather than follow its predicate. Most striking of all, probably, is the transposed order that is the usual rule in subordinate clauses. The use of transposition[13] is perhaps the most powerful single element in making the passage appear, to the modern reader, thoroughly un-English.

With this glimpse of the language in its Old English stage, we may pass on to the developments in the Middle English period. As has been indicated, the transition from the one to the other is to be thought of as gradual rather than as sudden; further, it is clear that it did not proceed at a uniform rate in all the dialects. In the north, changes were earlier and more rapid than in the south, so that in the year 1100, which we have taken as the dividing line, the northern speech had already distinctly assumed its Middle English aspect, while the southern tongue remained for at least half a century longer essentially what we know as Old English.

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[13] Though it is to be observed that the substantival *þæt* clauses are not *completely* transposed. It seems to be here that the transposed order gave ground most readily to the normal and opened the way for the final establishment of the normal order in most types of dependent clauses—doubtless aided later by the influence of French.

The great factor in accelerating and making more thorough changes already at work in the language was of course the Norman Conquest. The danger, however, is much more likely to be that the influence of this Conquest be overestimated than that it be minimized. To account for *all* this difference between Old English and Middle English as due to the Conquest is a gross exaggeration. For example, the transposed word-order and the grammatical gender that have been mentioned as characteristic of earlier Old English had certainly begun to be replaced by normal order and logical gender[14] before the Norman Conquest. In observing the traits of Middle English, therefore, it is well to guard against the easy but erroneous assumption that everything not found in Old English admits of but one explanation.

If, however, we approach the general characteristics of Middle English through the obvious method of comparison with Old English, it is undeniable that in the very first point, and the most conspicuous change of all, a transformed and augmented vocabulary, we encounter overwhelming French influence. As we have seen, the Old English word-stock is virtually unilingual; the Middle English is clearly bilingual. The French influence began before the Norman Conquest:[15] King Æthelred

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[14] For word-order, see the preceding footnote. For the other point, the replacing of grammatical by logical gender, see Bradley, pp. 47–50; Classen, *Outlines of the History of the English Language*, pp. 38–39; and especially, an article by Samuel Moore, "Grammatical and Natural Gender in Middle English," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1 (March, 1921), pp. 79–103. Whatever the exact steps of the process, it is clear that it was under way long before the end of the Old English period.

[15] *Castle, mantle, purse,* and *trail* are French borrowings in Old English writing (Kluge, F., *Englische Studien*, Vol. XXI, pp. 334 and 335).

married in 1002 the daughter of the Duke of Normandy, and their son, later known as Edward the Confessor, found many influential posts in the English church and state for French clergymen and French nobles. It is to be noted, too, that French influence continued, though in a new form, after the loss of Normandy in 1204. As early as the twelfth century, the French of Paris, as learned by English students and priests, had begun to supplement the earlier influence of the Norman dialect, and eventually it became a more important force. Thus, the influx of French words that had begun before 1066 was gradually increased throughout most of the Middle English period, and particularly accelerated, as Professor Baugh has recently shown,[16] between 1250 and 1400.

What kinds of words were they? Before answering this question, it will be necessary to outline the extent to which French supplanted English and the extent to which the two languages existed side by side. The policy of William the Conqueror is believed by recent historians to have been far more liberal in its attitude toward the English language than was long supposed. Apparently, the king made no attempt at all to force his new subjects, in their relations with one another, to speak French. But it was inevitable that French should become at once the language of law, of the church, of civil government, and of military organization. It was almost as inevitable, particularly since the Normans represented a higher social and literary culture, that their advan-

[16] *History of the English Language*, p. 219. His inference is that the gentry, as they ceased to *speak* French, naturally employed more French borrowings in their English. Doubtless, however, if we could add words used in conversation to those recorded in writing, the numbers for the earlier periods would be considerably increased.

tageous position as conquerors should mean the importation of a French vocabulary for the conventions and usages of polite society, for the things of the church, for education, and for literature. The English language was reduced from the status of a literary language to that of a mere spoken dialect; here is a most important reason for the rapidity and thoroughness of the changes that take place, in other aspects of language as well as in vocabulary, in the early Middle English period.

Illustrations of some of the groups of words that have been suggested as representing the fields of French influence may now be given. Most of our legal terminology is to be traced directly to this source: familiar words like *suit, plead, plaintiff, judge, jury,* and *jail*[17]; and more technical ones like *larceny, assize, demesne, court* of *oyer* and *terminer.* Here belong also ecclesiastical terms like *cloister, homily, clergy,* and *service;* terms of national government like *parliament,*[18] *crown, realm,* and *sovereign;* and military words like *fortress, siege, armor, battle,* and *war* itself. We may mention also the terms of feudalism, such as *liege, vassal,* and the very word *feudal;* and the terms designating the various grades of the French aristocracy, such as *prince, duke, marquis, viscount,* and *baron,*[19] as well as those standing for the

[17] This "American" (and more phonetic) spelling comes from the form of the word in the dialect of central France; the British *gaol,* though pronounced identically, perpetuates the Norman variant.

[18] The Middle English spelling, *parlement,* is better both etymologically and phonetically.

[19] It might be added that the highest ranks of all, *king* and *queen,* retained their Anglo-Saxon titles; the general terms *lord* and *lady* likewise survived. *Earl, knight,* and *alderman* (alas, how fallen!) also go back to an earlier dispensation. It is curious, however, that the wife of an *earl* is called by the French title of *countess,* the lack of a feminine equivalent for *earl* suggesting a different attitude towards the position of a noble lady in pre-Conquest days.

virtues supposed to be cultivated at *court*—including *honor*, *courtesy*, and *refinement*. Illustrations of French borrowings like these may possibly suggest this question: In what classes of objects or ideas has the French influence *not* been felt? What groups of words remain purely Anglo-Saxon? According to Bradley,[20] there is just one class of objects for which the native names have remained (so far as colloquial use is concerned) without any French mixture—that consisting of the external parts of the body. Even here there is one exception: the French word *face* found its way into English conversation comparatively early, evidently because there was no equally simple Anglo-Saxon noun to contend with it. Otherwise, this group of words—*eye*, *ear*, *tongue* (French only in spelling), *nose*, *arm*, *hand*, and so forth—is purely native. The very fact, however, that a homogeneous group of words like this is so highly exceptional is most striking evidence of the omnipresence of French influence on our vocabulary.

Enough has perhaps been said to suggest the transformation that the vocabulary underwent in Middle English times. But it should be remembered that the addition of a French word does not necessarily mean the loss of an English one. Frequently, the two remain as synonyms, though more likely than not the earlier, English term takes on a humbler significance; thus, we have *table* as well as *board*,[21] *labor* as well as *work*, and *chair* as well as *stool* (formerly as general a term as its German cognate *Stuhl*). A striking illustration of this aspect of the bilingual vocabulary is the often-quoted

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[20] *The Making of English*, p. 91.

[21] Retained, in a similar sense, in *bed and board*, *boarding house*.

observation of Wamba, the jester in *Ivanhoe*, to the effect that while the Saxon serf calls the animals he tends by one set of words (*ox*, *cow*, *calf*, *sheep*, *swine*, and *deer*), the Norman master knows them, when their flesh appears as food, by another (*beef*, *veal*, *mutton*, *pork*, *bacon*, and *venison*).

One more general comment on the Middle English vocabulary. It may appear to have been assumed, since only the influence of French has been commented on, that this was the sole source of borrowing. Of the three foreign influences that were mentioned in connection with the Old English vocabulary—Celtic, Danish, and Latin—it is true that the first two are of little importance so far as Middle English is concerned. The third, however, has been a potential source of borrowing in all periods of the English language; and the fourteenth century may be mentioned, along with the sixteenth and the nineteenth, as one of the times in which Latin words were introduced in greatest numbers. And it is by no means the least important aspect of the custom of importing French words that this precedent opened the way for a similar treatment of Latin. This is undoubtedly the reason why English contains so much larger a Romanic element than any other Teutonic language. It is not at all true that classical scholarship has been more active in England than in Germany or Holland; but in the history of neither German nor Dutch had the Renaissance impulse, which began to be felt, even in England, as early as the fourteenth century, been preceded by an earlier wholesale borrowing of French words. The earlier importations from Latin as a consequence of the humanistic movement—many of which, to be sure, are difficult or impossible to separate from Latin words borrowed

through the medium of French—are thus to be reckoned as an additional, and a very significant, aspect of the enlarging and developing vocabulary of Middle English.

The more complex vocabulary is accompanied by an increasingly simpler inflectional system. This will form part of the subject of a later chapter and needs only to be summarized here. Two changes are perhaps most conspicuous, in the general process of leveling to which the various inflectional endings were subjected: the far-reaching vowel weakening, by which almost every vowel other than *e*, occurring in an inflectional ending, was changed to *e*; and the loss of final *-n* in the inflectional forms of several parts of speech, especially in the weak declension of nouns and adjectives and in the infinitives and certain plural indicatives of verbs. These two developments alone—the former, at any rate, quite certainly completed in early Middle English times—are enough to account for a great part of the simplification of Old English inflectional forms. A further step in doing away with the variety of forms exhibited in the earliest period of the language, and incidentally in shortening a very great number of words,[22] was the general loss of final *-e*. These levelings eventually did away with any possibility of inflection in the adjective and the article, and greatly simplified what inflection remained in the noun and the verb. Only the personal pronoun has retained, throughout the Middle

[22] A final *-e* retained in the modern spelling, as in numerous monosyllables like *love*, *name*, *tale*, is of course lost in the living, or spoken, form of the word. But the final *-e* of certain Modern English words is not a weakened inflectional ending, since to Old English monosyllables like *wīf* (wife) and *hām* (home) an uninflectional *-e* was often added later. In feminines like *lār* (lore) the process was somewhat different: here the *-e* of the oblique cases began to be extended to the nominative as early as the tenth century.

English period and in Modern English, anything like the full inflection of Old English.

Greater simplicity was achieved also in the structure of the Middle English sentence. Here, too, the inherent tendency of the language to simplify—as in the replacing of the transposed and the inverted orders with the normal order—was aided by the influence of French. At the same time, and through the same causes, English expression became not only simpler but more varied and more flexible. Just as the influence of the French vocabulary made the word-stock richer and fuller, so also in the structure of the sentence the French example caused the language to become a more supple and more efficient instrument. A single illustration perhaps will serve to indicate the greater variety of expression that was developed in Middle English. In Modern English, as in Middle English, we can still use the Old English, or Teutonic, method of expressing possession; we can say, "the king's palace." But we can also use a prepositional phrase, on the French model, for the same purpose: "the palace of the king." More than that, we can combine the two types of expression, and phrase a similar idea in a third way: "that palace of the king's."

It remains for us to sketch in brief outline the gradual victory of English over French in the Middle English period, and the rehabilitation of English as a literary language after its temporary and partial eclipse. Its eclipse, of course, was never total: even in the early Middle English period, the language did not cease to be spoken, and, though to a much smaller extent, written. As early as the twelfth century, there are references which indicate that some, at least, of the Norman nobles and Norman churchmen both spoke and

understood English.[23] The lower orders, naturally, had never left off speaking English among themselves. For formal and written purposes, French lasted perhaps longer than we should have expected; but this is evidently due to the fact that the educational and cultural supremacy of France throughout the later Middle English period made it natural that instruction in the schools, for example, should be given in French long after the direct influence of the Norman Conquest had ceased. In the law courts, too, the use of French, established after the Conquest, was continued, with typical legal conservatism, as late as the middle fourteenth century; so far as that goes, a good deal of French terminology lingers in Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence to this day. As the language of written documents, and of royal proclamations, English reasserted itself by the middle thirteenth century, even though, in the former category especially, it was here in rivalry with Latin as well as with French. It should be added, however, that this particular victory was not complete; for the prestige of French culture in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was great enough to cause the general use of French, where Latin was not employed, in public documents until almost the end of the Middle English period.

A most significant aspect of a written language is its use for purely literary purposes, and here the eventual triumph of English over French was heralded as early as 1200. This is the approximate date of both the *Ormulum* and Layamon's *Brut*. It should be remem-

[23] See Emerson, *History of the English Language*, pp. 59–60. This book and Professor Baugh's (*op. cit*) quote many of the documents illustrating the replacing of French, for various purposes, by English.

bered, too, that in some sense our literary tradition has really been continuous, works like the *Ancren Riwle* in particular, serving to represent the transition from Old to Middle English literature, and the earliest aspect of the latter as well. Yet, after the Normans came, the literary use of the native language was all but discontinued. Norman French took its place as the language of pure literature, while Latin continued to be, as it had been before the Conquest, the language of monkish chroniclers and scholars. From about the middle of the twelfth century, however, the Anglo-Norman literature is paralleled by writings in English, until the great revival of poetry in the fourteenth century saw the lasting triumph of English as a literary language. This poetical renaissance, to be sure, was not an unqualified victory for the Anglo-Saxon tradition; for, while the old, alliterative measure was used in *Piers Plowman*, in the *Pearl*, and in *Gawain and the Green Knight*, rhymed and metrical verse, on the French model, was used by the court poets, Chaucer and Gower. It need not be regretted that the practice of the last-named poets[24] proved to be the more influential, since one may well be dubious about the poetic possibilities of the four-stress alliterative measure.[25] Not only in metrical

[24] There are probably, however, more echoes of the old Teutonic metre in Chaucer's verse than has generally been supposed. See my note, "Old English Verse in Chaucer," *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. XLIII, No. 4 (April, 1928), pp. 234–236.

[25] *Cf.* the opinion of Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch. After quoting a fifteenth-century survival of the old form, he remarks, "Clearly a language to attain poetry must cure itself of this fashion . . . . Historically it may be valued as a stage in the Teutonic endeavor towards being lively: as a form of poetry and in comparison with civilized verse it is silly. For real literature it simply will not do." *The Age of Chaucer*, London (Dent), 1926, p. 48.

form, but in the general conventions of literary technique, was Chaucer greatly in debt to his French predecessors and contemporaries. Unlike Gower, however, he chose to commit his whole literary fortunes solely to the English language; and ever since he wrote, it has been unmistakable that the literary language of England is English.

The fourteenth century not only saw English firmly and finally established as a literary language, but it saw the elevation of one dialect into a commanding position as a literary speech. Hitherto, there had been rival claimants among the three groups of dialects: Northern, Midland, and Southern. Beginning with the fourteenth century, however, a single subdivision of one of these, the East Midland dialect of the capital, the court, and the universities, assumes a peculiarly favored position among its rivals; its position as the literary standard is never seriously threatened throughout the rest of the Middle English and the whole of the Modern English period.[26] The causes of this elevation of East Midland are not far to seek. All things worked together to bring it about; if England was to be a really united realm, the speech of London could scarcely fail to be, in time, the standard for the whole country. But the chief reason why London English became the standard dialect just when it did is quite certainly the influence of Chaucer. Not, by any means, that this was the sole cause. The happy chance, however, that

[26] The nearest approach to a rival literary language and a second literary center is, of course, to be found in the literary use of Lowland Scots, and in Edinburgh as a rival of London—particularly in the work of the Scotch Chaucerians of the fifteenth century, and again in the early nineteenth century, in the circle of Sir Walter Scott and the contributors to the *Edinburgh Review* and to *Blackwood's*.

Chaucer was a Londoner born and bred and wrote for a court that, so far as it was English-speaking at all, spoke the local dialect, helped immeasurably to give the East Midland dialect[27] a place apart from the others. It is easy to exaggerate here; and, in the past, phrases like "the father of the English language," "the first finder of our fair language," and "the well of English undefiled" have tended unduly to magnify the contribution of Chaucer to the English language. On the other hand, it is evident that a great part of English poetry, throughout the fifteenth century, is in direct imitation of Chaucer, and hence that its language is overwhelmingly influenced by his. The point perhaps needs no laboring, for the mighty genius of Chaucer—if that is not too pretentious a description of so thoroughly human and companionable a writer—has never been so clearly perceived as in the twentieth century. His twin masterpieces, the "tragedie" of *Troilus and Criseyde* and the human comedy of the *Canterbury Tales* are now quite generally admitted to be not only unsurpassed but quite unrivalled in their kind. And this was not altogether unperceived in Chaucer's own day and in the century immediately following. No wonder, then, if his work is to be reckoned the most important cause both of the victory of English as a literary language and of the beginning of its standardization.

The fifteenth century saw the standardization of the literary language carried further, though there are still

[27] To be quite accurate, it should be pointed out that the London and the East Midland dialects are not quite synonymous. Chaucer, and London English generally, used occasional Southern forms that are later displaced in the standard speech by East Midland ones.

occasional references to the fact that dialectal differences are a stumblingblock. Thus, Caxton, who, as Professor Emerson suggests,[28] was probably made more conscious of such difference through his long residence abroad, complains that "it is hard to please every man because of diversity and change of language,"[29] at the very time that the products of his printing press were helping to remove this cause of complaint. One of the earliest and one of the most famous of these books, Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* (1485), by common consent the first great prose classic of our literature, is thoroughly representative of the standardization as well as of the simplicity and flexibility that the language had attained in late Middle English times. Considerably less than a century separates Chaucer and Malory; but while readers of Chaucer are impressed by a modern spirit couched in medieval language, exactly the opposite is likely to be the impression created by Malory. However dreamlike and unreal the Arthurian world of Malory may appear, the language is, nevertheless, exceedingly simple, and so nearly akin to Modern English that it presents no important difficulties at all to the present-day reader. As in the relatively barren period just preceding the Norman Conquest, so in this other period of stagnation when English literature awaits a new foreign impulse—in this instance, that of the Italian Renaissance—the language has been simplified with unusual rapidity. Before the end of the fifteenth century, it has become essentially what we know as Modern English.

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[28] *Op. cit.*, p. 81.

[29] Prologue to his version of the *Æneid*, quoted by Emerson, pp. 81–82.

References for Further Reading

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CHAPTER IV

Modern English: British and American

WE have seen something of the process by which the English language, as we know it, was born; how, after the Germanic dialects had achieved some literary distinction in the eighth and ninth centuries, the literary progress of the language was interrupted for several centuries and an alien tongue introduced in its stead; and finally, how, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a literary language was again evolved from popular dialects that had meantime undergone rapid changes, and a final and standard stamp set upon it by such men as Chaucer and Wyclif, Caxton and Malory. After this time, there are no violent or revolutionary changes in the language to be recorded. One obvious reason is that never again was England exposed to foreign conquest. Nevertheless, in one sense something like this did happen: in the sixteenth century, the republic of letters was conquered by the humanistic movement, the revival of learning that put the study of Latin on a new basis and introduced the study of Greek. The general effect of the revival of learning in the progress of the English language was twofold: a temporary neglect of the vernacular by those whose classical studies made them almost contemptuous of modern tongues, but a later recognition of the possibility of giving to modern languages something of the grace and something of the sonorous quality that scholars found in the classics. In addition, the

developing of nationalistic feeling under the later Tudors gave a new incentive to the literary use of the vernacular. The great tradition of Biblical translation, from Wyclif and Purvey in the fourteenth century, through Tindale and Coverdale in the sixteenth, to the King James version of 1611, is likewise to be mentioned as one of the channels through which literary Modern English took form and exerted a powerful and widespread influence.

What is perhaps most striking in the attitude of scholars and writers toward the English language in the early Modern English period is a tendency to divide into two opposing camps: those who held that English should be "improved" by free importations from without, particularly by borrowings from Latin; and those who believed that the language should rather develop its own resources, and that an admixture of other languages meant not improvement but corruption. These points of view are, of course, signs of the opposite beliefs about vocabulary that have always existed and, to some extent, will always exist; but conservative and radical tendencies in this field have seldom been so consciously and definitely opposed as they were in the late sixteenth century. We shall have occasion later to see just how these two influences affected the development of the vocabulary; but it may be suggested here that the eventual victory was with the radical camp, and that in the Renaissance there was established, once and for all—though there are, to be sure, later qualifications—the principle of liberal word-borrowing as a permanent policy of the language. Not every aspect of this victory, however, is to be regarded as admirable. Free borrowing from Latin was accompanied by an aping of Latin rhetoric, and more than that, a deliberate striving to give English prose certain orna-

ments and decorations that would lend it dignity and an aloofness from ordinary speech comparable to that of verse. The Euphuism of John Lyly and the Arcadianism of Sir Philip Sidney are merely two particularly conspicuous examples of the general tendency to cultivate a highly self-conscious and thoroughly artificial language. The promise of Malory's beautifully simple manner was set aside; despite noteworthy exceptions (the outstanding one being the Anglo-Saxon diction of the King James Bible), the all but universal trend of literary prose is toward the rhetorical and the ornate until the Restoration and the early eighteenth century see the establishment of quite opposite ideals.

Abraham Cowley's *Several Discourses, by Way of Essays, in Prose and Verse* and John Dryden's *Of Dramatic Poesy* both were published in 1668. These two works are sometimes thought of as marking the first appearance of a truly modern prose in English literature —a language that is to all intents identical, in syntax and in structure as well as in vocabulary, with the English of our own day. The long separation between an elevated and ornamental diction for literary purposes and a plain, terse vocabulary for conversation begins to draw to a close. Throughout the eighteenth century, beginning with the work of men like Swift, Steele, and Addison, the striving is for simplicity and directness. The vocabulary is no longer looked upon as susceptible of change and addition. The Elizabethan exuberance, the joy in language as in a new toy, is gone. Gone too are the long, rolling periods, the Latinized diction of Milton, Sir Thomas Browne, and Jeremy Taylor. What takes their place is conciseness and simplicity—a desire for clarity and accuracy. The tendency is toward "purifica-

tion" and refinement; to make the best use of the language we have but to suffer no innovations. Swift protests against the borrowing of foreign words, and, later in the century, Samuel Johnson believes that his dictionary will forever "fix the English language."[1] On the whole, this more conservative attitude toward language is to be regarded as a salutary reaction from earlier radicalism; in language too, it is "our indispensable eighteenth century."

With the dawn of Romanticism, a freer and a more liberal atmosphere becomes evident, in language as in other matters. Sir Walter Scott, for example, takes delight in reviving obsolete words and in introducing dialect terms, particularly from the balladry of the Scottish border but also directly from the living language of the peasantry. It is, however, not merely the language of literature that is renovated in the nineteenth century. The colonial expansion of England and the great advances in scientific thought are both accompanied by a changing and freely developing vocabulary. As in the spacious days of Elizabeth, though to be sure with somewhat more restraint, original writers like Carlyle strike out words and phrases for their individual purposes, colonizers and travelers borrow exotic words from the languages of foreign peoples, and men of science coin the terms to describe the new ideas and new discoveries that they have contributed to the world's knowledge.

Just as much, then, in the history of the language as in literary history is the eighteenth century, with its precursor, the age of the Restoration, to be regarded as a

[1] The phrase is from the *Plan* of the Dictionary addressed to Lord Chesterfield. Johnson, however, experienced a change of heart as to this purpose, as the *Preface* to the Dictionary indicates.

conservative interlude set between two epochs of far greater liberalism. It is to be added, however, that in certain respects the conservative spirit then triumphant established conventions and ideals that have not been overthrown in later periods. Particularly is this true of the standardization of language, in spelling and pronunciation more than in vocabulary, that was largely brought about by the dictionaries, the grammars, and the printing houses of the eighteenth century. The notion, for example, that there is any virtue in uniform spelling is distinctly of recent origin; the earlier attitude, of course, was that spelling offered an opportunity for individual choice. Hence the spelling of a particular word was often due to the caprice of the moment; the variations in the spelling of Shakespeare's signature are a striking Elizabethan illustration. But when dictionaries, which became an important factor in language in the eighteenth century, began to indicate a single spelling as the only correct and permissible form of each word, the older attitude was necessarily altered. Hand in hand with this influence, and making itself felt in a significant way at about the same time, went that of the modern printing house, with its insistence on uniformity and regularity. As with spelling, so with pronunciation. Occasional literary use of dialectal differences in forms and sounds is to be found in medieval and Renaissance writing; the Yorkshire dialect of the Cambridge students in Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale* is perhaps the earliest instance. But not until the dictionaries of the eighteenth century began to record first the accent of words and then their vowel sounds was there any formal move toward a standardization of English pronunciation. Dictionaries have had so powerful an influence upon Modern English that a

sketch of its development is incomplete without some account of the part that they have played in it.

The approach to the modern English dictionaries was by way of Latin-English glossaries, of which many appeared in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Just which of their successors deserves the title of first English dictionary is a point on which opinion is divided. John Bullokar's *English Expositour* (1616) is the earliest claimant;[2] but it is soon followed by Minsheu's *Ductor in Linguas, or Guide into the Tongues* (1617), the first of etymological dictionaries; and by Henry Cockeram's *English Dictionarie*[3] (1623), the first in which the word *dictionary* is used in the sense in which we now understand it. The full titles of Bullokar's and Cockeram's compilations suggest the early conception of a dictionary as limited to *difficult* words only: the one reads *An English Expositour: Teaching the Interpretation of the hardest Words used in our Language, with sundry Explications, Descriptions and Discourses* (incidentally implying also the early affiliation between dictionary and encyclopedia); the other, *The English Dictionarie: or, An Interpreter of hard English Words.*

Later dictionaries, with greater pretensions to completeness, are that of Milton's nephew, Edward Phillips—*New World of Words, or a General English Dictionary* (1658)—and that of Nathaniel Bailey, the direct predecessor of Johnson—*Universal Etymological English*

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[2] *A Table Alphabeticall*, published in 1604 by Robert Cawdrey, perhaps should be mentioned; though, according to its full title, it is intended to be limited to *borrowed* words, and to importations from Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and French exclusively, it does in fact include archaic native words.

[3] A recent reprint of this work is available (Huntington Press, New York, 1930).

Dictionary (1721). Professor Weekley[4] points out that it is only just before Bailey's work is published—in the seventh edition (1720) of Phillips's dictionary, to be explicit—that the familiar word *dog* makes its appearance. Bailey's volume seems, on the whole, to be the best candidate for the position of first complete dictionary. It was Bailey, too, who began the practice of marking the accent of words, in which he was followed by Samuel Johnson in his epoch-making dictionary of 1755. Johnson, however, did not give the full pronunciation, because, as he observed to Boswell, it was impossible to model this "after the example of the best company because they differ so much among themselves." He had come to believe, in other words, that he could "fix" the spelling and signification of words but not their pronunciation.[5] Not until after Johnson, therefore, was the final step taken in indicating the pronunciation of words: the vowel sounds were indicated, for the first time in a general dictionary, by William Kenrich in the *New Dictionary* which he published in 1773.[6] This precedent was immediately followed by other British lexicographers of the late eighteenth century, and by the Americans, Webster and Worcester, in the early nineteenth.

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[4] "On Dictionaries," *Atlantic Monthly*, June, 1924 (Vol. 133, No. 6), p. 786.

[5] For a fuller statement, see the chapter "Johnson's Dictionary" in McKnight, G. H., *Modern English in the Making*, pp. 351–376.

[6] Two Scotchmen had in the meantime published pronouncing dictionaries. These were James Buchanan and William Johnston, whose works appeared respectively in 1757 and 1764. For a recent treatment of Buchanan's work, see Burt Emsley, "James Buchanan and the Eighteenth-Century Regulation of English Usage," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 4 (December, 1933), pp. 1154–1166.

It has been more than once remarked[7] that there is a certain poetic justice in the history of dictionary-making since Johnson, in that the two races he particularly abhorred, the Scots and the Americans, have taken the lead in the production of English dictionaries. Noah Webster's *Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* (1806), in its various revisions,[8] was the leading authority during the greater part of the nineteenth century, and its chief rivals at the close of the century were two other American works, the *Century* and the *Standard*. The greatest of all dictionaries, the *New English* or *Oxford*, the first volumes of which were published in 1884 and the last in 1928, was begun under the editorial supervision of one Scotsman, Sir James Murray, and finished under that of another, Sir William Craigie.

And what of the authority of the dictionaries, their influence upon the speakers and writers of the language in the three centuries that have elapsed since Bullokar and Cockeram? It is probably correct to say that it is not until the eighteenth century, with the rise of the middle class to social prominence and the development of middle-class anxiety about "correctness" in speech,[9] that dictionaries and grammars (which increase in numbers and prestige at about the same time and in a parallel way) take on anything like the character that to many

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[7] *Cf.* again Weekley's article, and McKnight, pp. 365 and 366.

[8] The elaborate two-volume revision published in 1828 was suggestively called *An American Dictionary of the English Language*. This work is termed by Professor Krapp "the most significant contribution to English lexicography between Dr. Johnson and the appearance of the first volume of the *New English Dictionary*," *English Language in America*, Vol. I, p. 362. Its later forms, particularly the first edition to be designated *Unabridged* (1864), were successive improvements over the earlier.

[9] *Cf.* Wyld, H. C., *A History of Modern Colloquial English*, New York (Dutton), 3rd ed., 1937, pp. 18–20.

minds they now possess: the final arbiters of speech. The general veneration of "rules" in the early and middle eighteenth century—implicit, to take a single example, in the doctrine of Pope's *Essay on Criticism* that literature is to be both produced and judged according to a formula—naturally lends its weight to the treatment of language as something that must be adjudged, once and for all, as either correct or incorrect.[10] Doctor Johnson's dictionary purported to give the correct meaning, spelling, and accent of all words then existing in accepted usage, and these words Johnson conceived to be all that would ever be necessary. This eighteenth-century attitude toward language and toward the dictionary as the final authority on language has been inherited in more recent times by both the users and the makers of dictionaries (despite the latters' frequent protestations to the contrary) to what is really an astonishing degree.

Recent dictionaries, it is true, maintain that they do not profess, like Doctor Johnson's, to tell what the standard of language should be; they merely record, in tangible form, the standard already set by usage. In theory, their attitude is much less dogmatic and conservative than the eighteenth-century one; in practice, it is not so very far removed from it.[11] New spellings are recorded with great reluctance, new words sometimes

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[10] C. C. Fries has an excellent chapter (pp. 1–31), "The Rules as Measures," in his *Teaching of the English Language*, on the part that grammars have played. *Cf.* also McKnight's *Modern English in the Making*.

[11] There is even a nearer affinity in temperament between Doctor Johnson and certain modern lexicographers than is perhaps generally realized. Note, for example, the magisterial tone of such utterances as those of Dr. F. H. Vizetelly, editor-in-chief of the *Standard:* "Keeping Step with Speech" and "A Matter of Pronunciation," *Atlantic Monthly* (August, 1930, and February, 1931, respectively).

knock long at the gates for admittance, and the indication of a change in pronunciation lags far behind the actual usage of good speakers.

The attitude of even well-educated persons toward the dictionaries is often curiously naïve. "What does the dictionary say?" is the usual question when any problem regarding the sound or form or meaning of words arises. The implication, of course, is that there is only one verdict to be found in any dictionary, and that dictionaries, of any kind and any date, are all equally valuable. No thought is given to the possibility of consulting the wrong dictionary,[12] or to the discrepancy between dictionaries, or to that between dictionaries and good usage. No, "the dictionary," however that authority is conceived, is all-sufficient; to question its omniscience is heresy. In the extremely conservative attitude of the dictionaries and in the docile acceptance of their authority by the great majority of their users we have a most important influence upon the development of the modern language. It is clear that when dictionaries, grammars, and handbooks of usage are widely circulated and uncritically accepted as the final word, the formerly free development of the speech is constantly kept in check.

Americans seem to inherit the eighteenth-century attitude, or the middle-class veneration of authority, to a greater extent than Englishmen of equal education and culture. The educated Englishman is more prone to consider that his own observation of what constitutes good practice in speech takes precedence over any

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[12] Wrong, for example, because of insufficient authority, because of date, or because of national or sectional bias.

written guide. Much more than the educated American, he is likely to think of dictionaries and grammars as being primarily for those whose background and upbringing have not brought them in contact with the best tendencies in English. For himself, he quite frequently scorns their use very much as he would scorn to follow, in other aspects of social intercourse, the dictates of a book of etiquette. The following observation of a traveled and cultured Englishman illustrates this point of view: "When I came to America nothing struck me more forcibly than the respect paid to the dictionary, and the disposition to fly hotfoot to it when any question arose."[13] If we have rejected the eighteenth-century dogma that dictionaries make usage, we still seem reluctant to accept, in all its implications, the converse of the proposition.

In discussing Modern English, it has already proved impossible to treat it entirely as a unit. Reference has just been made to contrasting attitudes, on parallel social levels, in England and in the United States. It is of course evident that, from the seventeenth century on, the English-speaking world expands with a rapidity and on a scale paralleled in the history of no other language. From the point of view of an American, it is quite essential to treat the evolution of the modern speech, at least in part, from the angle of American English.

Is that, in the first place, the proper designation? Is it "American English," or should we rather discuss, as some would have it, "the American language"? It is curious that two of the leading books that have been

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[13] Letter to "Contributors' Column" of *Atlantic Monthly*, January, 1931, p. 30.

produced by the recent attention to American speech indicate in their very titles these opposing points of views: Gilbert M. Tucker's *American English* and H. L. Mencken's *The American Language*.[14] The divergence of opinion of course is absolute: American speech is either conceived of as a special section of a larger whole or it is thought to have departed so widely from its seventeenth-century point of contact with the English of England as to deserve to be considered an entirely separate entity. Before attempting to argue for either position, it may be useful to summarize the history of the debate. What has been the consensus of American opinion, in the Colonial period and in the successive eras of our national life, on the relation of American speech to the English language?

The usual Colonial attitude was quite naturally one that accepted without cavil the idea that the standard for the English-speaking world was to be found in southern England, and deprecated any such departures from this as doubtless did actually occur in the spoken or written practice of the Colonists. Parenthetically, it may be observed that this provincial and apologetic attitude has not yet been entirely lost. Richard Grant White, *arbiter elegantiarum* in the middle nineteenth century, is still convinced that American English can be good only in so far as it is identical with British English.[15] Even in the twentieth century, particularly in New

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[14] I find that Sir William A. Craigie has already made this observation ("An American Language," *Saturday Review of Literature*, Vol. VII, No. 31, Feb. 21, 1931, p. 614); and, very fittingly, he further points out that Professor Krapp avoids definite issue by using as the title of his most elaborate survey of the field, *The English Language in America*.

[15] "In language, everything distinctly American is bad" (*Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. XLI, p. 495), quoted in Emerson, p. 106.

England, this feeling occasionally persists, in scarcely diluted form. "It is a safe rule to require every perceptible departure from English usage to justify itself"—so runs the general advice given in a rhetoric published in 1917 and widely used in American colleges.[16] This attitude, of course, scarcely enters into the dispute between American English and the American language, for it amounts almost to a denial that either has a right to exist.

After the Revolution, there was a sharp reaction from the general unquestioning acceptance of British authority, in language as in other matters; indeed, a demand for a "genuine American language" is to be heard. This seems even to have gone to the grotesque length of demanding that an entirely different language—Greek or Hebrew, for choice—be substituted for English.[17] Among the more realistically minded, however, such schemes had no place; nevertheless, the conception that the English language as spoken in America would in time be widely different from the English language as spoken in England and might eventually become a separate dialect was not uncommon. Whether such a development should be helped or hindered was, of course, the bone of contention. Several leading men of the new republic—most notably, Thomas Jefferson[18]—felt that it should be helped.

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[16] Greenough, C. N., and Hersey, F. W. C., *English Composition*, New York (Macmillan), 1917, p. 353.

[17] Just how serious such suggestions were is a little dubious; *cf.* Mencken, *American Language*, 4th ed., p. 79, and *Cambridge History of American Literature*, Vol. I, p. vi.

[18] *Cf.* Mencken, p. 11, and Krapp, *English Language in America*, Vol. I, p. 9.

The leanings of Noah Webster were undoubtedly, and more particularly in his earlier work, toward an American language. He conceived that the American language of the future would be "as different from the future language of England, as the modern Dutch, Danish, and Swedish are from the German, or from one another."[19] "Let us," he said, "seize the present moment and establish a national language as well as a national government."[20] But Webster was forced to recede from this extreme position, as the title of his chief work, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), significantly indicates. The more conservative and more British character of the work of his great rival, J. E. Worcester, the first form of whose dictionary was published in 1830, is obviously one reason for the moderating of Webster's patriotic ardor. Worcester, indeed, was long preferred by the Tories in language.[21]

Through the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century, the debate between conservative and radical, on this question as on other linguistic matters, has continued. Men of letters and professed students of language have, for the most part, been more inclined to the conservative tradition; they have felt that it was of more importance to emphasize the likeness of our speech to that of England than its differences. Until quite recently, only works deliberately couched in dialectal speech—Lowell's *Biglow Papers*, Holmes's *Autocrat*, Harris's "Uncle Remus" stories, and so on—have ordinarily striven for a distinctly American idiom.

[19] *Dissertations* (1789), p. 22 (quoted by Krapp, p. 9).

[20] Quoted by Mencken, 3rd ed., p. 45.

[21] "As late as the last decade of the nineteenth century Harvard University, in its English entrance requirements, specified Worcester's dictionary as the authority in spelling," McKnight, *op. cit.*, p. 490.

Occasionally, however, it is to be noted that an American writer has protested against the blind following of British tradition; the most famous protest is perhaps that of Lowell in his preface to the second series of *Biglow Papers*. William Dean Howells[22] and Mark Twain[23] have also joined their voices to Lowell's. Walt Whitman, too, who has been called by Louis Untermeyer "the father of the American language,"[24] is to be remembered for his conviction that America both needed and would have a distinctive speech, and for his experimentation to that end: "The new world, the new times, the new peoples, the new vistas, need a tongue according—yes, what is more will have such a tongue—will not be satisfied until it is evolved."[25] Recently, Mr. Vachel Lindsay has gone on record with the conviction that we need not one but two dialects or planes of utterance for American purposes:

> What do shopgirls mean when they say "Talk United States"? We, the citizens of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, to provide for the common defense and promote the general welfare, have ordained and established two languages, the United States Language and the American Language, for ourselves and our posterity; the one for informal, the other for formal occasions, one inherited from the Mermaid Tavern, the other from the Globe Theatre, and both of them changed, yet hereditary in style. No shopgirl ever yelled at a floorwalker, "Talk American." [26]

[22] *Cf.* "The Editor's Study," *Harper's Magazine*, January, 1886.

[23] As in "Concerning the American Language," in the volume *Tom Sawyer Abroad, etc.*

[24] As quoted by Mencken, 3rd. ed., p. 90.

[25] As quoted by Horace Traubel in the preface to *An American Primer*. For an account of this, see Leon Howard, "Walt Whitman and the American Language," *American Speech*, Vol. V, No. 6 (August, 1930), pp. 441–451.

[26] Review of Charles Cestre, "An Introduction to E. A. Robinson," *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. XLVI, No. 5 (May, 1931), p. 323.

Self-consciousness about our speech seems in the air today, and, as we have seen, it does not necessarily take the form of apologizing for departures from the British standard. The question inevitably arises: Are the differences great, and are they important? Further, of what do the chief differences consist? These questions will be glanced at more fully in later chapters, when such aspects of language as spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax are under discussion. Here, only certain observations about the general contrasts between American and British English will be attempted. Incidentally, the warning may be voiced that accounts of American English tend usually to exaggerate the differences and minimize the resemblances. One who investigates the subject is prone to play up the striking but often superficial contrasts in detail, and neglect, as too familiar and too obvious, the identity in more weighty but often less conspicuous matters. Nevertheless, one finds certain contrasting tendencies in speech, when one compares American with British practice, that seem to admit of fairly safe generalization.

It will be quite commonly agreed, in the first place, that American speech is far more uniform than British. We have no dialects, in the sense in which they exist in England; the local speech of any part of America, with all but the rarest exceptions or (according to the point of view) with none at all, is immediately intelligible to a visitor from any other part. Further, we have no geographical standard that stamps a special value upon the speech of a particular city or state. Our ideal is unquestionably national, rather than local or sectional, usage. A third aspect of our linguistic solidarity is this: the gulf that separates the speech of the most highly educated

from that of the average citizen is considerably less than the corresponding one in England.

If these generalizations seem, like some of Noah Webster's utterances, put forward with patriotic bias, that objection will scarcely be urged against what seems to the writer a necessary corollary. In the words of Professor Shorey, it is this: " . . . it is probably true that the educated Englishman expresses himself in sounder idiom and more discriminating choice of words than the American of the same class."[27] If, in other words, the average of American speech is above the average of British speech, it is still conceivable that the best American speech falls below the best British speech. This dictum, it may be argued, will hold for both the spoken and the written tongue.

A familiar misconception of the relation between American speech and English is that which describes our language as relatively nearer the English of Shakespeare's day. A distinguished writer on language[28] has expressed this fallacy thus: "Owing also to the curious fact that the colony usually tends to preserve the language of the time of separation, we retain some older words and some meanings of words not now found in England." That one may find a number of illustrations of archaic words and archaic meanings (by the present British standard) preserved in living use in America does not really establish this "curious fact," which has been given a surprisingly wide credence. Professor Krapp[29] aptly

[27] Paul Shorey, "The American Language," *Academy Papers*, pp. 156 and 157.

[28] Emerson, O. F., *History of English Language*, New York (Macmillan), 1894, pp. 105 and 106.

[29] See *English Language in America*, Vol. I, pp. 49–51, for an extended discussion of the point.

points out that the usual illustration of this supposed law, the speech of the mountaineers of Kentucky and Tennessee, is erroneous in that "the speech of these communities is archaic . . . not because it is transplanted speech but because the communities in their general social life have had few social contacts. Thus the speech of Iceland is archaic as compared with that of Norway." The "arrest of development," in other words, is due not to the fact that the language was transplanted, but rather to the fact that the regions to which it was transplanted have been curiously inaccessible to outside influence. It is folly to suppose that such a condition applies in most of America, or that American English has not altered as thoroughly as British English from their seventeenth-century meeting place.

To deal briefly, then, with the general aspects of the contrasts between American and British English today. As to vocabulary, it is fair to say that popular belief grotesquely exaggerates the number of words that are peculiar to American English or have a different meaning here. A partial explanation, perhaps, is that in a group of words with which the American visitor to England must come in contact—the vocabulary of travel—the differences are unusually great; it has been suggested that this is so because railroad travel developed after the separation, and the source for railroad terms in America was the vocabulary of the steamboat, while in England it was that of the stagecoach. At any rate, the differences here[30] are far from being typical. The proof of the essential identity of the two vocabularies is

[30] Some of them, for example, are listed by Mencken, 4th ed., pp. 238–239, and by Greenough and Kittredge, *Words and Their Ways in English Speech*, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

simply the fact that no American has the slightest difficulty in reading a book by an Englishman and printed in England, or an Englishman with a book by an American and printed in America—unless, perchance, the book is unusually full of either British or American slang. (An English edition of O. Henry is furnished with a glossary.) Nor is the fact that an occasional word is spelled differently in the two countries enough of an obstacle to be worthy of the name. American practice has been a trifle more hospitable to spelling reform than British, but the divergence, on the whole, is small and unimportant.

It is not to be denied, on the other hand, that an American does sometimes experience difficulty in listening to an English lecturer, and an Englishman in understanding an American speaker. One is tempted to say that the American's difficulty is the result of ignorance and the Englishman's the result of affectation; in both cases, more careful and more patient attention would probably reduce any lack of understanding to the vanishing point. What difficulty there is, it should be noticed, comes from somewhat different habits of pronunciation—not, to any significant extent, from different vocabularies.

And what are these different habits of pronunciation? As satisfactory a generalization as any, so far as the less admirable but unfortunately more conspicuous aspects of pronunciation are concerned, is Mr. George Arliss's recent dictum:[31] "The chief fault in speech in America is sloppiness and the outstanding defect in England is snippiness." It may also very possibly be true, as Americans are often told by Englishmen, that our speech

[31] "Mr. Arliss Makes a Speech," *Atlantic Monthly*, February, 1931.

is harsher and more nasal than theirs; but, at least, it has, in the opinion of many disinterested European observers, the merit of superior intelligibility. That which is sloppy may be less distinguished but at the same time more understandable than that which is snippy.

If American speech, particularly the spoken rather than the written variety, is correctly to be designated as "sloppy" or "slovenly," the explanation may lie, where Mr. Arliss finds it, in the educated American's fear of appearing superior—a sensation much less dreaded by Englishmen of a corresponding social level. Mr. James Truslow Adams not long ago christened this "the mucker pose": the affectation, on the part of men of education and culture, of the language of "uneducated half-wits." [32] One can scarcely deny that there is some truth in this; that one of the less fortunate results of the democratic dogma of general equality is that men speak more nearly after the same pattern than in an aristocratic society, and that bad speech, like bad money, tends to drive out the good.

But this, as has been suggested, is much more true of the spoken than of the written language. Strangely enough, the very American who speaks, as Mr. Adams has put it, in an idiom reminiscent of the longshoreman's, is meticulously correct, to the point of being pedantic, when he puts his thoughts on paper. With all the license that he permits himself for the informal purposes of spoken discourse, he still feels an extreme sense of restraint, an abiding respect for authority and tradition, when he addresses himself to formal writing. Here it is

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[32] "The Mucker Pose," *Our Business Civilization*, New York (Boni), 1929.

that the eighteenth-century feeling for "correctness," together with that curious veneration for such guides as dictionaries and handbooks of speech that we have already noted, plays its part. The result is likely to be a diction that is approved by the best authorities, and a style that is utterly derivative and lifeless. This is American English in its provincial or parochial aspect.

It will doubtless occur to the reader, however, that this is not all of the truth. The written language in America is surely not always to be condemned as colorless and dull. Side by side with the following of tradition, and in absolute opposition to it, there is an unmistakable striving for warmth, for novelty, and for vividness. It was this purpose, in part, that animated Walt Whitman. It is the same purpose, though not always with happy results, that today animates many of our journalists, our advertisers, and our purveyors of slang and local color. This phase of American speech it is that has tempted commentators to apply the term "Elizabethan" —not with reference to seventeenth-century survivals in America, but with reference rather to a new delight in language, an exuberance in playing with words, that is at least remotely akin to the old. It is usually indulged in —and here its presence is to be reconciled with the existence of the conservative feeling for authority and tradition—with a sense of its appropriateness for less formal purposes only. The future, it is to be hoped, will see the coalescence of these two opposite tendencies; one may, at any rate, look forward to a time when they will not go their separate ways—when, rather, traditional correctness will be enlivened by colloquial freedom and inventiveness, and at the same time unbridled license will be kept in check by a salutary respect for authority.

To return to the question of "American English" as opposed to "the American language." The latter phrase, as has doubtless been apparent, seems to the writer an exaggeration of the real status of our speech. The differences that have been pointed out between American and British English seem, in the end, far too superficial and trivial to allow one to think of the two brands of English in any other way than as parts of a larger whole. Moreover, the divergence that does exist seems to be growing less rather than greater. There is every reason why this should be so. Communication between England and America becomes every year not only quicker but, some would add, more intimate. We have listened, on the radio, to a British Premier both at home and in America; and it is significant that a frequent comment on Mr. MacDonald's American broadcasts was that his speech was so nearly like an American's that the infrequent departures from American English seemed almost an affectation. The radio is not alone as an instrument of international standardization of English. There are the "talkies," and the increasingly international character of literature in English. Not that complete standardization is likely ever to be attained. Indeed, one may express the pious hope that this will never happen, for, as has been well remarked, it is the byways rather than the highways of speech that are piquant and interesting; it would be deplorable indeed if there were no national or local deviations from the international standard.

Our question has been succinctly answered by an eminent British lexicographer, who is now engaged on an American dictionary:[33]

[33] Sir William A. Craigie, *op. cit.*, p. 615.

A distinct American language, clearly marked off from other forms of English, in the same way as one Germanic or Romanic language is from another, is less likely to arise than seemed possible a century ago . . . The new American Language . . . is . . . impossible, for the reason that it can no longer develop by itself, but must keep in touch with that wider English which concerns the world at large.

Truly of more moment than the relation of American to British English is the subject the last words suggest. Our survey of Modern English may appropriately conclude with a consideration of the topic of "World English."

One of the most interesting and important aspects of Modern English is its constantly increasing use as an international language. That such a general medium of expression is a real desideratum we have the experience of history to testify. In the Middle Ages, Latin occupied this position, and in modern times French has approximated it, especially as the language of international diplomatic relations. Before examining the present claims of English as a world speech, however, it may be well to glance at what many consider a possible alternative: the use, not of any of the existing vernaculars of the world, but rather of an artificially created universal language, such as Esperanto.

The ideal of an artificial speech, scientifically constructed so as to combine the merits of some of the leading naturally developed languages and at the same time embody none of their defects, is by no means a new thing. Some of the projected artificial languages do not, it is true, fulfil the former of these conditions; that is, they are based not on one or more existing languages, but are purely *a priori* schemes. None of these,

however, is seriously advocated at present;[34] it is quite generally recognized that a universal language must be founded on one or more of the vernaculars of the world. To go into the many variations of the project[35]—such as Volapük, Ido, "Latino sine flexione," Novial—would take us too far afield. A few words must nevertheless be said about Esperanto, the claimant favored by the majority of the advocates of a universal language.

Esperanto has Latin, as the most nearly international and neutral of elements, as the chief basis of its vocabulary; its grammar is exceedingly simple and its spelling is phonetic. That it has won a real, though necessarily limited, measure of successful adoption, is indicated by the support given it by the League of Nations, the International Telegraphic Union (1925), and the Union Internationale de Radiophonie (1927).[36] On the other hand, it must be said that the arguments that have been urged against it in the past[37] are still largely valid: at most, it now occupies a position analogous to that of a cable code, without any important use in scientific, literary, or social communication; and one advantage that has been urged in its behalf, its strict uniformity all over the world, is partly vitiated by its different pronunciation in various countries. Further, its pretensions as *the* universal language are obviously damaged by the

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[34] With the possible exception of Ro. See "Universal Language," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (14th ed.), Vol. 22, p. 861.

[35] *Cf.* particularly L. Couturat and L. Leau, *Histoire de la langue universelle* (Paris, 1903), and Otto Jespersen, *An International Language.*

[36] *Encyclopedia Britannica*, article *op. cit.*

[37] Those, for example, of Professor Krapp, *Modern English* (1909), pp. 40–43.

refusal of partisans of the ideal of a universal language[38] to give it unanimous support.

If, then, the project of an artificially constructed universal language has so far met with failure or only a very limited measure of success, what claims may be advanced for English as an international language? It seems more and more certain that if any living speech attains this position, it will be English.[39] In our own day, English has come to rival French in the field of diplomacy, and it is apparently destined to replace French as the "second" language—the language most useful for the traveler—all over Europe.[40] In other parts of the world, its prestige is still more commanding. Beach-la-Mar or Sandalwood-English, spoken and understood all over the Western Pacific, and Pidgin-English, known in China and to some extent in Japan and in California, are the most conspicuous examples of corrupt forms of

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[38] Among them, perhaps the most eminent of living linguists, Professor Jespersen. It should be added, however, that Jespersen now feels that there are enough points of similarity among the leading projects looking toward an international language—including Esperanto, Ido, Nov-Esperanto, Latin without Flexion, Occidental, and his own creation, Novial—to justify the hope that a single adequate International Auxiliary Language will some day emerge. See "Interlinguistics," his contribution to the symposium *International Communication.*

[39] A middle position between those who support the claims of an artificial language like Esperanto and those who support the claims of English is taken by those who advocate an artificially simplified form of English. This speech is known as "Basic English"; see Ogden, C. K., *Basic English*, London (Kegan Paul), 1930, and *The System of Basic English*, New York (Harcourt, Brace), 1934.

[40] It may be noted that in recent times French scholars, realizing the advance of English, have sometimes advocated an Anglo-French condominium: *cf.* Bréal, M. J. A., "Le choix d'une langue internationale," *Revue de Paris*, year 8, v. 40, pp. 229–246 (July 15, 1901); and Chappellier, Paul, *Une nouvelle solution de la question de la langue universelle*, Paris, 1901.

English that have been evolved from the contact with exotic tongues[41] and spread over large areas. It is said, incidentally, that the American share in these trade languages is becoming larger than the British.[42] But it is not, of course, merely in such corrupt jargons that Modern English has gained a world-wide ascendancy; in its more standard British and American forms, it is, especially since the World War, more and more dominating the civilized, and a large part of the uncivilized, world.

This leadership among the languages of the world has been achieved well within the Modern English period. In the Renaissance, and probably as late as the period of the Restoration, the speakers of English were fewer than the speakers of at least four other European languages—German, French, Spanish, and Italian. Even in the eighteenth century, English was still, for a time, outdistanced in numbers of speakers by four other European languages, since, if Italian had been left behind, a new rival, Russian, had asserted itself. In the nineteenth century, however, English came rapidly to the front, largely as a result of the swift increase in the population of the United States and of the British colonies. Probably by the middle of the century it had outdistanced its competitors. Estimates, in millions

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[41] For a description of these and similar jargons, see the section "Pidgin and Congeners" in Jespersen's *Language* (pp. 216–236). *Pidgin*, as Jespersen explains, is derived from the Chinese distortion of *business*.

[42] *Cf.* Mencken, p. 597. Mencken also quotes (p. 598) a striking testimony to the use of English as a world language in the account of an English traveler who observed Chinese mandarins speaking English not only in conversation with German ship's officers and Japanese travelers but even with one another. Since they came from various provinces of China, they found English a more convenient medium than their less standardized native tongues.

of speakers, made at several times since then, are as follows:[43]

	English	*German*	*Russian*	*French*	*Spanish*
1868.....	60	52	45	45	40
1890.....	111	75+	75	51+	42+
1900.....	116(123)	75(80)	70(85)	45(52)	44(58)
1912.....	150	90	106	47	52
1921.....	170	87½	120½	45	65

The figures, necessarily only approximations, have at least the merit of coming from a number of different sources and representing various points of view. Their testimony to the recent and rapid increase in the number of those speaking English is perhaps for this very reason the more impressive. It is evident, of course, that they do not tell the whole story as to the languages of the world; but China's 400 millions speak dialects that are mutually unintelligible[44] and that, besides, scarcely spread beyond her borders; and a similar observation may be made of those who speak cognate varieties of Indic—the Indo-European languages of India—perhaps 230 millions in numbers. Clearly, any rivalry for the position of a world language must come from the tongues of Europe; and the figures that have been quoted are a striking evidence of the way in which English has

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[43] The following sources have been used: for 1868 and 1900, the figures quoted by Mencken, 3rd ed., pp. 383–384; for 1900 (minimum and maximum) and 1912, those quoted by Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language*, p. 252; for 1921, the estimate of L. Tesnier in Meillet, *Langues*, as quoted by Bloomfield, *Language*, p. 44. Mr. Mencken, who has tried to reconcile the somewhat conflicting estimates of various writers, believes that in 1936 Spanish was second to English and that Russian and German were almost tied for third place (4th ed., pp. 592–593).

[44] Though one of them, North Chinese, in all probability has more native speakers than even English, and another, Cantonese, is not very far behind.

outdistanced its European competitors. In numbers of native speakers, English is rivalled only by North Chinese; in numbers of native *and foreign* speakers, it is quite unrivalled by any language in the world. The fact that English has gained the ascendancy is not to be disputed. There may be difference of opinion, however, as to *why* it has done so.

English may conceivably enjoy its present favored position for either of two reasons: its spread may be accounted for by external circumstances, or it may have come about because English is the language best fitted to be the international tongue. Probably it is nearer the truth to say that external and internal causes have worked hand in hand: that English has been so marvelously favored by political, economic, and social forces that it would have a world-wide vogue even were it ill-fitted to be an international language; but also that there is something inherent in the language itself that has made it particularly useful in such a capacity.

The former point surely needs no special demonstration. England's rise as a world power, beginning in the days of Elizabeth, is accompanied, step by step, by the ascendancy of English as a world language. The political union of England and Scotland under James I in 1603, followed by the formation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, helped to make it certain that English would be used, and in a form substantially the same, throughout the islands and in the newly-founded Colonies. In the New World, the fall of New Amsterdam in 1664 and that of Quebec in 1759 assured the triumph of English over two important rivals, Dutch and French; and the expansion of the United States brought it about that Spanish, the only

remaining competitor of English on the North American continent, was reduced to a position of relative insignificance. In the latter half of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, the English language was established in every corner of the earth through conquest, colonization, and the commercial ascendancy of the English-speaking peoples. It may even be conjectured, as Professor Krapp suggests,[45] that the tenacity with which the British and the Americans hold to their own language and their own ways has been a real factor in spreading the English language; for if the English-speaking people will not learn a foreign language, it is evident that foreigners, to trade with them, must learn English. The contrast has been observed, for example, in the far greater readiness of the Germans, as compared both with the English and with the Americans, to learn the Spanish language and adapt themselves to Latin ways, when engaged in commerce with South America. Doubtless, the more complacent Anglo-Saxon attitude is bad for trade, when better linguists, like the Germans, are competitors; but, just as evidently, it has proved in the past to be an appreciable factor in the world-wide use of English.

Having, by the middle-nineteenth century, won first place among the languages of the world, English has been favored by more recent developments so that its primacy is less and less questioned. Inventions that make communication between nations easier have inevitably lent themselves to the spread of English. So we may regard the telephone, the telegraph, the radio, the movies, and the "talkies." Here too, it may be said, it is often

[45] *Modern English*, p. 39.

the American brand of English that is spread abroad, frequently to the chagrin of the British. A Danish visitor to America is thus quoted in the *New York Times*:[46] "An amazing interest in American talkies is evident in all of Scandinavia. English is taught in the schools . . . and now that American talkies are available in so many Danish towns, the whole populace is interested in 'brushing up' on English pronunciation." This observer predicts that American "talkies" will soon make English the universal language of the Continent. Time may prove the prophecy oversanguine, but there can be little doubt that the increasing prestige of English finds fresh illustration here.

So far, we have dealt with external factors in the world-wide use of English. Can as much be said for the intrinsic qualities of the language? Is English, on the whole, well- or ill-fitted for its rôle of world-speech? It is undoubtedly difficult for one whose native tongue is English to see the problem with proper objectivity. More valuable testimony, quite certainly, is that of a foreign observer who has studied English, and other languages, intensively, and who can more dispassionately assess its merits and shortcomings. Professor Jespersen, certainly as competent a foreign observer as could possibly be found, summarizes his impressions thus: "The English language is a methodical, energetic, businesslike, and sober language";[47] and again (with particular reference to its increasing use as a world language),[48] "It must be a source of gratification to mankind that the tongue spoken by two of the greatest powers of the world

[46] October 15, 1929.
[47] *Growth and Structure of the English Language*, p. 17.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 252.

is so noble, so rich, so pliant, so expressive and so interesting. . . ." In still another place,[49] he states his view of English as compared with other languages in these terms: " . . . it seems to me positively and expressly *masculine*, it is the language of a grown-up man and has very little childish or feminine about it."

The foregoing terms represent, with entire adequacy, the usual favorable view of Modern English. It is most frequently praised for its businesslike simplicity—in sound-system, in grammar, and in at least the native and more frequently used section of its vocabulary. This simplicity is commonly thought of as that which makes it easy for a foreigner to learn it, and hence, that which particularly adapts it to use as a world tongue. To modify this judgment, however, we have such an admission as the following, from the pen of an enthusiastic defender of this very quality of simplicity:[50] "The foreigner essaying it, indeed, finds his chief difficulty, not in mastering its forms, but in grasping its lack of forms." More subtly, and from a different angle, the apparent simplicity of English has recently been declared to be a delusion and a snare:

> The fact that a beginner in English has not many paradigms to learn gives him a feeling of absence of difficulty, but he soon learns to his cost that this is only a feeling. . . . The simplicity of English in its formal aspect is . . . really a pseudo-simplicity or a masked complexity . . . He [the foreigner] may well feel that the apparent simplicity of English is purchased at the price of a bewildering obscurity.[51]

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[49] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[50] Mencken, 3rd ed., p. 387.

[51] Sapir, Edward, "Wanted: A World Language," *American Mercury*, Vol. XXII, No. 86 (February, 1931), pp. 202–209. (Reprinted by permission of author and publisher.) These excerpts cannot do justice

Granting that there is some truth in these strictures and that the superficial impression of simplicity that English gives is somewhat ambiguous, one may still feel that its forms, its words, and its sounds compare favorably, in the ease with which at least approximate mastery of them can be attained, with those of other languages. Its vocabulary has the enormous advantage of being compounded almost equally of Teutonic and Romanic elements, so that a good part of it is already familiar to the speakers of many other European languages. Its grammar is so inconsiderable that the language has been called (of course, inaccurately) "the grammarless tongue." In inflections and word-order, as we have seen, the modern speech has greatly simplified and regularized the practices of Old English.

The one great stumblingblock in the way of the foreigner who would acquire English is, as will be granted on all sides, the spelling—"that pseudo-historical and anti-educational abomination."[52] While it is frequently pointed out that the grotesquely illogical spelling of Modern English forms a most difficult barrier to its use as a world language,[53] it may, nevertheless, be contended that this one great and obvious disadvantage does

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to the keenness of the writer's analysis of the deficiencies of English as an international language. Professor Sapir presents this point of view also in his contribution to *International Communication*, a symposium by Herbert N. Shenton, Sapir, and Jespersen.

[52] Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language*, p. 250.

[53] This, for example, was the general tenor of the speeches made at the English Language Congress held in connection with the Sesquicentennial Exposition in Philadelphia, November 26 and 27, 1926. The principal topic of the congress was "English as the International Secondary Language." A Swedish project to spread the use of English by improving its spelling advocates the system known as "Anglic." See Zachrisson, R. E., *Anglic*, New York (Stechert), 1930.

not overbalance the several important advantages that have been enumerated. When every just deduction has been made, it is reasonable to regard the language as on the whole well fitted by its own positive merits for that larger usefulness which outward circumstances have more and more conspired to give it.

References for Further Reading

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CHAPTER V

English Inflections

INFLECTION, broadly speaking, is the process of varying the form of the word to differentiate related meanings or uses. As the term is commonly applied, it refers most frequently to such syntactical distinctions as those of gender, number, case, mood, tense, voice, and so forth. In any strict use, inflection should mean *variation* rather than *composition;* that is, it should imply that there is a certain stable element in the word that is its nucleus, and that this is given variety of application by internal change or by the addition of certain prefixes or suffixes. These affixes, it is assumed, exist only for the purpose that has been described; they are not separate words or even independent word-elements. In practice, however, it is difficult or perhaps impossible to mark off the limits of true inflection. A point of contention, for example, is whether the *-ly* ending of such words as *quickly* and *smoothly* is to be considered as an inflectional suffix that transforms an adjective into an adverb, and whether the process is hence to be considered as parallel to the addition of the *-s* ending that transforms most of our singular nouns into plurals. In general, it will be more satisfactory to limit our application of inflection to changes that take place *within* the part of speech. It should be added, too, that any strict conception of inflection must exclude analytical formations such as we now have in the future and the perfect tenses of the

verb. A synthetic verbal form for the future, like the Latin *habēbō* or the French *j'aurai*, is a strict example of inflection; the German *ich werde haben* or the English *I shall have*, on the other hand, is inflection only by courtesy.

Certain large questions suggest themselves when one considers the general nature of inflection. For example: If it is true that the history of English, and of many other languages, includes a gradual simplification of inflection, how are we to account for the former existence of an elaborate machinery that has had to be quite largely eliminated? Again, are we to suppose that, beyond the comparatively complicated state of Old English inflection, there is a still greater complexity to be predicated in West Germanic, in Teutonic, and in Indo-European? Is language in its infancy characterized by a high degree of inflection? Finally: What are the origins and the general course of the development of inflection in language as a whole?

The question of the prehistoric development of our speech necessarily takes us somewhat afield and into controversial ground. The orthodox theory may be stated thus, in the words of Professor Jespersen (who, however, formulates it in order to attack it):[1]

> . . . an originally isolating language, consisting of nothing but formless roots, passed through an agglutinating stage, in which formal elements had been developed, although these and the roots were mutually independent, to the third and highest stage found in flexional languages, in which formal

[1] *Language*, p. 367. (Reprinted by permission of the publisher, Henry Holt and Co.) A full discussion of the question of an earlier noninflectional stage in Indo-European will be found in Hirt, H., *Indogermanische Grammatik* (Heidelberg, 1921, 1927, 1929).

elements penetrated the roots and made inseparable unities with them.

Inflection is thus conceived as having been gradually developed, through agglutination as an intermediate step, from a primitive "root stage" of language. An isolating language like Chinese is, therefore, the type of all language in its infancy. According to the generally received hypothesis, then, the process is something like this: Some of the originally separate roots became attached to other roots and lost their independent character, becoming first agglutinative formatives, and eventually inflectional affixes. Or, to view the development from the other angle, we may state the postulate thus: All our inflectional endings were originally independent roots that have gradually coalesced with other words.

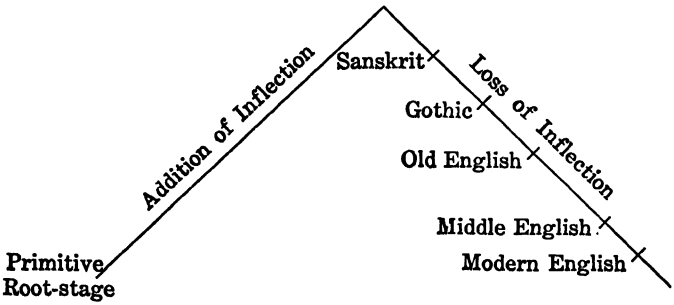
Jespersen musters serious objections to the universal application of this theory. Two may be particularly mentioned: the fact that Chinese, the stock illustration of a language in its root-stage, has recently been proved to exhibit traces of earlier inflection, and does not therefore give us the picture of the primeval structure of our own language that it has been usually supposed to give; and the impossibility of proving that *most* of our inflectional suffixes go back to independent roots. Nevertheless, even Jespersen is willing to admit that the "agglutination theory" contains a good deal of truth, and that it does actually explain the origin of much (but not all) of our inflection. For the provisos and supplements that he feels are to be added to the usual explanation, the reader must be referred to his own treatment of the problem.[2]

[2] "Origin of Grammatical Elements," *Language*, pp. 367–395.

So far as the English language is concerned, the farther back one goes from the present, the more inflection does one encounter. Back of our slightly inflected Modern English is a higher degree of inflection in Old English, and a still higher degree in the oldest Teutonic language that has been preserved, Gothic; Sanskrit, of much greater antiquity than any Teutonic language, is a still nearer approach to the original complexity of Indo-European inflection. A single illustration of comparative degrees of inflection may be useful: the case distinctions for the noun, pronoun, and adjective. Sanskrit exhibits distinctive endings for eight cases: the nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, instrumental, ablative, locative, and vocative. Gothic, like Greek, has reduced the number to five; certain cases, that is to say, have lost distinguishing endings and so appear in one form. (Latin here is more conservative, since six cases are preserved.) Old English lost the distinctive form for the vocative and so exhibits, at most, five variations; practically, since the dative and instrumental are identical in the very great majority of instances, the number is reduced to four—and often to three, through the falling together of nominative and accusative. Modern English, of course, preserves three cases only in one category—the pronoun; the noun has but two case forms, and the adjective but one.

The general picture, then, that has been suggested is of language beginning with separate and independent roots but gradually developing inflection until it is so overburdened with its variety and complexity that expression is made difficult. Then the reverse process sets in, and words are more and more stripped bare of their inflectional distinctions. Both extremes of the

development we can merely speculate about: the extent of inflection in the remote past, and the limit of its simplification in the distant future. But the general direction, so far as English is concerned, is sufficiently clear; as has frequently been observed, the structure of English has become less and less like Latin, and more and more like Chinese. In its larger aspect, and from the point of view that most interests us, the conjectural history of inflection may be represented thus:[3]



It is, of course, evident that the one side of the figure represents mere hypothesis, however plausible; the other side represents, almost entirely, a statement of facts.

Before dealing more specifically with the history of English inflections, it may be convenient to suggest the three general types of inflection that are possible. Inflection may occur in the beginning of the word, in the middle, or at the end; it is a question of prefix, medial change, or suffix. The terms usually employed to designate the three types are *initial*, *internal*, and *final* (or *end*).

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[3] This diagram should not, of course, be interpreted to mean that Gothic is derived from Sanskrit or Old English from Gothic.

The first category need not detain us, if the question concerns merely the present stage of the language. Modern English contains no example of initial inflection.[4] The nearest approach is in such words as *manservant* and *maidservant*, and *cock sparrow* and *hen sparrow*;[5] but these formations are evidently far removed from inflection in the strict meaning of the term. In Latin, a certain type of initial inflection is familiar; thus, the perfect tense *cecidī* (I have fallen) is differentiated from the present *cadō* (I fall) chiefly by the "reduplication" of the initial consonant to form an inflectional prefix. The same method is in Greek the *typical* way of forming the perfect: λύω (I loose), λέλυκα (I have loosed). Early Teutonic also utilized the method of "reduplication," to form certain preterit tenses; but the full forms of Gothic have regularly become, in Old English, "contract" forms, in which the "reduplication" prefix has merged with the radical syllable. For example, **hehald* becomes *hēold* (held). A clearer instance of initial inflection is the frequent use in Old English of the *ge* prefix with the past participle of verbs, as in German. On the whole, it is fair to say that, even in the earliest stage of English, only a trace remains of true initial inflection.

The other two types, however—internal and final inflection—are abundantly represented in all stages of the English language. We have a familiar illustration of the former in such strong verbs as *ring*, *rang*, *rung*, and in such "irregular" nouns as *goose*, *geese* and *man*, *men*. These two types of internal inflection, incidentally,

[4] Unless *to*, as the "sign of the infinitive," may be so counted. *Cf.* Aiken, *English, Present and Past*, p. 216.

[5] Krapp, *Modern English*, p. 58.

are historically quite distinct. *Ring, rang, rung* represents the process known as *gradation* or *ablaut;* that is, the variation of the vowel through a *series* of changes. *Goose, geese* and *foot, feet,* on the other hand, illustrate the process of *umlaut* or *mutation;* that is, the single change produced in a vowel by the influence, usually[6] of the *i*-vowel, of the following syllable. Thus, the presence of the *i* in the second syllable of such Teutonic forms as **gōsiz* and **fōtiz* eventually brought about the "fronting" of the vowel of the first syllable, and the loss of the vowel that caused the transformation—hence the evolution of the Old English forms *gēs* and *fēt.* The same process has operated in other pairs of related words; for example, *blood, bleed; doom, deem; proud, pride; foul, (de)file; fall, fell.*

The third type of inflection, called *final* or *end,* is too common to need particular illustration. Its most familiar illustrations undoubtedly are the *-s* ending that we have come to feel as the *regular* plural sign for nouns, and the *-ed* ending that has a similar place as the indication of the past tense and past participle of verbs. The *-s* ending has, of course, other functions than the one mentioned; it may also be the indication of the third person singular, present tense, of verbs, or (with the apostrophe) the sign of the possessive case of nouns. Other inflectional endings of Modern English are *-ing* (of the participle and the progressive forms of verbs), and the two suffixes utilized in the comparison of adjectives, *-er* and *-est.* These five endings virtually exhaust the varieties of final inflection that are now in really

[6] Always, so far as changes the effects of which are seen in Modern English are concerned.

living use—the ones that we apply, without question, to the words entering the language or to old words used with a new function or as a new part of speech. Initial or internal inflection would never be employed in either of the categories that have just been mentioned. A noun borrowed from another language, for example, must make its plural by end inflection[7]—and usually by the addition of the *-s*, whether this ending is felt by scholars to be appropriate to the noun in question or not. It is this tendency that accounts for the preference given (except in certain academic circles) to such plurals as *curriculums*, *criterions*, *stadiums*, *gladioluses*, and *campuses* over the forms in *-a* or *-i*. Even a well established mutation plural can scarcely be carried over when the noun is used in a new compound—hence the difficulty with the plural of *tailor's-goose* or *mongoose*. How strong is the preference for the usual types of end inflection is neatly illustrated in the recent history of *broadcast*. When this word began to be used as a verb, in connection with radio, the popular form of the past tense was *broadcasted*,[8] in spite of the precedent of the simple (and invariable) verb *cast;* an elaborate educational campaign —over the radio itself—has scarcely yet driven it out altogether.

The fact that only five endings can be enumerated as the varieties of inflection that are in vital, active use in Modern English is a striking testimony to the simplification that the inflectional system of the language has undergone. Is the English language, however, unique

[7] Unless the foreign plural is also borrowed.

[8] A parallel form, employed by certain sports writers, is the past tense *uppercutted*. I have also seen the form *forecasted:* "Forecasted trouble . . . was lightly brushed aside." (Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, December 9, 1931.)

in this respect? The answer must be qualified. It is evident, as we have already seen, that inflectional simplification is characteristic of all Indo-European languages since the establishment of the original elaborate and intricate system of inflection. The Teutonic group has been especially subject to simplification; even members of it that have been considerably less exposed to foreign influence, like Swedish and Dutch, have experienced thorough inflectional leveling. Likewise, certain languages outside the Teutonic system—French, for example—exhibit parallel changes in their inflectional character. The present spelling of French often exhibits the greater variety of form that once existed but has now been lost in the living or spoken language. Note, for example, the appearance of *aime, aimes, aime, aimons, aimez, aiment.* The Latin prototypes, of course, are *amō, amās, amat, amāmus, amātis, amant.* Five variations for the present indicative, that is to say, are preserved in the French spelling—not a great simplification of the six forms of Latin. The pronunciation, however, presents but three, since *aime, aimes,* and *aiment* are sounded alike. Thus, the three variations of form in modern French really represent almost as much simplification as the two forms of the present indicative in English.

On the other hand, if it is clear that inflectional leveling is not peculiar to English nor to Teutonic, it is likewise evident that the history of English inflection is striking for both the rapidity and the thoroughness with which leveling has been carried out. The primary reason, though it is possible to exaggerate and easy to misstate this, is the fact that different tongues or different dialects have been in rivalry, in the relatively restricted

territory of perhaps half the island of Britain, in several distinct times and ways. The original invaders of Britain—the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians—spoke somewhat different dialects. The Scandinavian raiders who conquered and settled in a large part of England at a later date spoke a language differing from that of the Anglo-Saxons as a group. The Normans, still later, established in England a language still further removed from the Anglo-Saxon tongue, which was nevertheless, in some degree, finally incorporated within it. The effect of this diversity of tongues on the history of English inflections was inevitably to make their variety smaller.[9] When men of different tongues attempt conversation, it is natural for each speaker to employ both his own and the other's language in as simple a form as possible—his own, for his hearer's readier understanding, and the other's, through his imperfect acquaintance with it. Inflection is, on the whole, much less important for conveying one's approximate meaning than vocabulary. Some degree of meaning can be conveyed by only the roots of words. As Bradley remarks,[10] "Many Englishmen of the uneducated class have lived for years in Germany, and managed to make themselves fairly well understood, without ever troubling themselves with the terminations of adjectives or articles, or the different ways of forming the plurals in nouns." Just so, we may imagine, were the elaborate inflections of Old English simplified for the mutual understanding of the original invaders themselves, and later in communication with the Danes and with the Normans. If a simplified form

[9] See Bradley's treatment of "Simplification of Accidence," in *Making of English*, pp. 17–53, for a fuller exposition of this point.

[10] *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

of the language was used to make it intelligible to others, it was natural, in the end, to use the same simplifications for all purposes. Only the most vital of the inflectional distinctions eventually were preserved. Not in every respect, perhaps, but in quite large measure, was it a case of the survival of the fittest, or at any rate the most essential.

Inflectional leveling once having begun on a considerable scale, it was undoubtedly accelerated and made more far-reaching by the operation of the great principle of analogy. This is the extremely important drift in language through which the exception tends to conform to the rule. When once a particular declension or conjugation is established as the normal or typical one, the rival types of inflection often yield to its influence; they cease to be distinctive and become more and more "regular." The most conspicuous illustrations in English are the *-s* plural ending for nouns and the *-ed* preterit suffix for verbs; it is significant that the modern tendency, however misleading the term may be historically, is to call these the "regular" types of plural formation and verbal conjugation. The pull of analogy is, of course, resisted to some degree and at some points; otherwise, we should have complete uniformity and only a single type of inflection in each part of speech. In reviewing the inflectional history of the various parts of speech, we shall observe certain counteracting influences that have served to prevent absolute standardization.

Before turning to the separate parts of speech, however, the question of the relative rapidity and scope of inflectional leveling in the various stages of the language should be considered. A familiar misconception, as has been indicated, is to attribute the whole process to

the influence of the Norman Conquest, and hence to limit the operation of simplification to the early Middle English period. This misunderstanding has doubtless been fostered by the habit of giving to the three periods of English—Old, Middle, and Modern—the additional labels of "period of full inflections," "period of leveled inflections," "period of lost inflections."[11] Convenient and useful as the terms are, it may be pointed out that each one is in some measure inaccurate—that Middle English might better be called the period of "leveling" rather than "leveled" inflections, and further that it has no monopoly on even this term; that Old English is not in every respect the period of "full" inflections, certainly not as compared with its Teutonic and Indo-European antecedents; and that Modern English is far from being, in any absolute sense, the period of "lost" inflections.

Inflectional leveling began, of course, before the English language came into being. Its progress in the first stages of English of which a written record is preserved is well marked. Phonetic changes, on the whole with the tendency to obliterate the more elaborate inflectional distinctions of West Germanic, and the diversity of inflectional endings among the Old English dialects themselves—these were the great factors in bringing about a large measure of simplification in grammatical structure, even before what may be called "foreign" influence began to operate. Just what was the effect of contact with other languages may also be misconceived. As Emerson puts it,[12]

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[11] These terms were first applied by Sweet and have been commonly used by later historians of the language.

[12] *History of the English Language*, p. 284. (Reprinted by permission of the Macmillan Co.)

The effect of foreign tongues, especially of French, was in preventing the establishment of a standard speech, rather than in directly breaking down the inflectional system of the native tongue. For it was only necessary to remove the check of standard usage to bring about all, or most, of the changes taking place in the Middle English period.

We are not to suppose, then, that there was any conscious substitution of the French inflections for English ones or even that (to any great degree) the precedent of the simpler inflections of French was the cause of the simplification of English forms. It is rather that, when the temporary eclipse of English by French took place, and English was thereby reduced in importance and dignity so that it became for a time rather a popular dialect than a literary language, it necessarily changed with greater rapidity and thoroughness than formerly, simply because the conservative checks that usually operate to throttle popular tendencies in language were temporarily in abeyance. The dropping of inflectional distinctions, noticeable from the first in the Old English dialects and becoming more rapid in late Old English, was still more greatly accelerated in Middle English for the reason that has just been mentioned. In Modern English there is much less of it, partly, to be sure, because there is less opportunity for it, but also because of the far greater degree of standardization in the language as a whole. In the later aspects of Modern English, particularly since eighteenth-century ideas of "correctness" have had their weight, the simplification of inflection has been reduced almost to the vanishing point.

The parts of speech in which inflection occurs are now to be treated in order. The noun, with which we may begin, affords a particularly striking illustration of

progressive simplification. Just how many declensions ought to be indicated for the Old English noun is to some extent a matter of opinion, since there is no unanimity among scholars as to the amount of variation necessary to constitute a separate category. Usually, however, four vocalic and at least four consonantal declensions are listed (the distinction between the two groups depending on whether the original stem ended in a vowel or a consonant). Nevertheless, a classification like this tends to exaggerate the variety of declension in Old English, since one of the vocalic declensions included most of the masculine and neuter nouns, and another most of the feminine, and since the great majority of the nouns of the consonantal declensions were of a single type, the *n*-stem. Practically, then, we may say that in the best-known form of Old English, Early West Saxon, there are only three *normal* declensions to be distinguished—two varieties of the vocalic declension, the one for masculine and neuter nouns, and the other for feminine; and one variety, the *n*-stems, of the consonantal declension.

For the first group, masculine and neuter nouns with vocalic stems, these paradigms are typical (the second and third columns illustrating the difference between neuter monosyllables with long and short stems):

	Masculine	Neuter	
		Singular	
Nom., Acc.	stān, *stone*	word, *word*	hof, *dwelling*
Gen.	stānes	wordes	hofes
Dat.	stāne	worde	hofe
		Plural	
Nom., Acc.	stānas	word	hofu
Gen.	stāna	worda	hofa
Dat.	stānum	wordum	hofum

The other two groups—feminine nouns with vocalic stems, and nouns of the consonantal declension—may be represented thus:

	Singular	
Nom.	lār, *learning* (*fem.*)	guma, *man* (*masc.*)
Gen.	lāre	guman
Dat.	lāre	guman
Acc.	lāre	guman
	Plural	
Nom., Acc.	lāra	guman
Gen.	lāra (-ena)	gumena
Dat.	lārum	gumum

One minor group must be added, particularly because of its survival in Modern English—the monosyllabic consonantal stems in which inflection may be represented by mutation of the root-vowel only. Such a noun is *fōt* (foot) (*masc.*):

	Singular	*Plural*
Nom., Acc.	fōt	fēt
Gen.	fōtes	fōta
Dat.	fēt	fōtum

In spite of the variety of inflection that has been indicated, it is evident that even in the early Old English noun, there is a fair degree of uniformity and simplicity. A few general principles may be useful: *-um* is the invariable ending of the dative plural, and, for the great majority of nouns, *-a* is the ending of the genitive plural; *-es* is the sign of the genitive singular in the very great majority of masculine and neuter nouns, as *-e* is of the dative singular in almost all nouns, including feminines. In general, the endings that are established as normal and typical at a very early stage are these:

	Singular	*Plural*
Nom., Acc.	—	—as
Gen.	—es	—a
Dat.	—e	—um

It will have been observed that gender in the Old English noun differs from that in Modern English in being grammatical rather than natural or logical: thus, the words for *stone* and *foot* were masculine, while that for *learning* was feminine. Part of the explanation of the substitution of the new system for the old lies, of course, in the dropping or leveling of inflectional endings; the change of the genitive of *lār*, for example, from *lāre* or *lore* to *lores*, meant the loss of a form that could be recognized as distinctly feminine. The replacing of grammatical by logical gender first began long before the end of the Old English period,[13] and by the time that the simplification of noun declension that we think of as typical of Middle English had been accomplished, it was already a completed process.

The typical Middle English declension for the noun may be summarized thus:

	Singular	*Plural*
Nom., Acc.	—	—es
Gen.	—es	—es
Dat.	—(e)	—es

Of the six distinctive forms for the typical Old English noun, that is to say, two—the genitive and dative plural —had been lost altogether, and a third—the dative singular—was going. The last mentioned case ending, the *-e* of the dative singular, is preserved occasionally in Chaucer, after it has presumably been more nearly lost in spoken English, for several reasons: the language of poetry is usually more conservative and hence more archaic; the vowel is useful for its sound value and for rhyme or metre (as in *to the rote*, rhyming with *shoures*

[13] *Cf.* p. 52.

sote[14]); also, it tends to survive, as a "petrified" form, in certain familiar formulas, like *to bedde, in londe, on fyre.* The corresponding ending, it is interesting to observe, is likewise in a disappearing state in the German of our own day. It might be added that the originally distinctive ending of the feminine genitive, i.e., *-e* instead of *-es*, also occasionally appears in Chaucer, though to be sure much less frequently; thus, the title of one of the *Canterbury Tales* is *Nonne Preestes Tale* (*Nun's Priest's Tale*) rather than *Nonnes Preestes Tale*, and we sometimes meet a phrase like *in his lady*[15] *grace* (in the favor of his lady), in which the feminine genitive is partly preserved, though the vowel has actually been dropped.

There is only a short step from the typical declension of the Middle English to that of the Modern English noun. The latter, of course, is as follows:

	Singular	*Plural*
NOM., ACC., DAT.	—	—s
GEN.	—'s	—s'

The apostrophe in the genitive singular represents the elision of the vowel, which had actually taken place in pronunciation much earlier. But it was still possible in early Modern English for poetical language to use the vowel; thus, Shakespeare's *moonës sphere*[16] is the same kind of genitive that we find almost regularly in Chaucer

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[14] *Prolog to the Canterbury Tales*, ll. 1–2.

[15] This particular feminine genitive is preserved even in Modern English in the name of one of the days on the calendar of the English Church: *Lady Day* (i.e., "Day of Our Lady").

[16] *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act II, scene 1, l. 7.

and occasionally in the popular ballads.[17] Likewise, the plural *-s* is a syncopation of the Middle English *-es*, which in turn represents the "weakening" of the Old English *-as*. Modern English has improved on Middle English by differentiating (through the *-s*, *-'s*, and *-s'*) forms which had been distinct in Old English, but which phonetic changes had made indistinguishable in Middle English. The disadvantage, of course, is that the modern printer's device of the apostrophe is useful chiefly on the printed page; in the spoken language, the leveling of case endings has been attended by possible ambiguity, in Modern English as in Middle English.

So far we have been concerned with the normal or typical declension of the noun. It is of course evident that not all Middle and Modern English nouns are declined on this model. The exceptions are usually to be explained either as survivals of some other Old English declension than that of the masculine and neuter *a*-stems, which tended to absorb the other types, or, less frequently, as analogical formations. It will be simplest to approach this question from the angle of Modern English.

One noteworthy group of survivors of another Old English declension comprises the mutation or umlaut plurals. The Modern English plurals that represent this declension, uncomplicated by any other type of plural formation, are these: *feet*, *teeth*, *men*, *women*, *geese*, *mice*, and *lice*. In Old English, of course, the group was considerably larger; it included, for example, such words as *bōc* (book), *āc* (oak), and *gāt* (goat), the plurals of which have later been regularized, so that

[17] *Cf.*: "the *warldis* room," *Edward*, l. 45.

we now speak of several *books*, *oaks*, or *goats*, rather than of several *beek*, *eak*, or *geat* (forms that might well have developed). But how does it happen that the seven plurals mentioned above have resisted the pull of analogy and remained in Modern English as a small but useful body of recalcitrants? There are two partial explanations. In the first place, it is evident that the more familiar the form, the less likely it is to change; it is much easier to imagine the irregular plural of a rarely used word conforming by analogy to the usual pattern than it is to imagine *men* being supplanted by *mans* or *feet* by *foots*. Then, again, euphony has doubtless had some influence: *gooses*, *mouses*, *louses*, and *tooths* would be both longer and uglier than *geese*, *mice*, *lice*, and *teeth*.

A second group of irregular plurals in Modern English is made up of the nouns that have the same form in the plural as in the singular. These unchanged plurals are either the direct descendants of the Old English neuter monosyllables with long stems, or analogical forms that follow the model. Of the first type are *swine*, *sheep*, *deer*, *folk;* in these, the vowel of the Old English form was long, or, if short, was followed by two consonants, making the stem long, so that a *-u* was not added to form the plural. *Hors* survived in Middle English as an unchanged plural, as we see in Chaucer's line:

> His *hors weren* gode, but he nas nat gay
> (*Prolog to Canterbury Tales*, l. 74.)

but it has since conformed, by analogy, to the regular type of plural. On the other hand, Old English *fisc* was a masculine *a*-stem with plural *fiscas*, which would regularly give *fishes* as the Modern English form:

but it has another and commoner plural form, *fish*,[18] in Modern English, apparently because of the analogy of such other names of animals as those just mentioned. The unchanged form *fish* having thus been established as the usual plural in Modern English, names of various species of fish—*salmon, trout, bass*, and so on—make their plurals accordingly.

A few other unchanged plurals in Modern English may be mentioned, though they are of different origins. *Pound* comes from an Old English long-stemmed monosyllable, *pund*, and the original unchanged plural survives in such phrases as *a five-pound note* and *The Twelve-Pound Look*. *Night* does not belong to this declension historically, being an umlaut plural, nor does *month;* but both occasionally use the same form for plural as for singular—as in *fortnight* (for *fourteen nights*) and *twelvemonth*—in addition to their ordinary employment of the *-s* plural. In vulgar speech, this category of unchanged plurals for nouns of enumeration or measurement is more widely extended: "twenty *foot* high" and "seven *year*[19] old" are expressions widely current.

The *n*-stems, or weak declension, furnish a third group of exceptional plurals in Modern English. Only a single word, however—*oxen*, from Old English *oxan*—now

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[18] Sometimes present-day (especially British) usage employs two plural forms for other names of animals. The distinction is thus explained by Miss Rose Macaulay: "Animals seen as sport become to the mind meat, and cease to be reasonable creatures, so that you may feed fishes, but catch fish, ride elephants but hunt elephant, . . . throw bread to ducks, but shoot duck, admire moths, but seek to exterminate moth. . . . " *Staying with Relations*, New York (Liveright), 1930.

[19] This is the historically correct form, since Old English *gēar* was a long-stemmed neuter monosyllable.

represents this declension in its purity. Even words in everyday use—those, for example, for *sun, moon, eye,* and *ear*—have had their plurals regularized by analogy.[20] Here, incidentally, is one of the best evidences of the strength of analogy, that, of the many numerous and important weak nouns in Old English, one alone should survive into Modern English. In Middle English there were considerably more survivors: *toon* (toes) (<O. E. *tān, tāan*), *been* (bees) (<O. E. *bēon*), and *treen* (trees) (<O. E. *trēo, trēowu,* later made a weak plural by analogy) are Chaucerian forms. Milton's *shoon,* in

> The swain
> Treads on it daily with his clouted shoon (*Comus,* l. 635.)

is, of course, a belated occurrence of a weak plural, possible only in the more archaic language of poetry.

Other exceptional plurals in Modern English are explained as combinations of two different types of Old English plural formations. Here, for example, belong *brethren,* which joins a weak ending with an umlaut form, the Old English *brēðer;* and also *children,* in which the *-r* ending (*cf.* Ger. *Kinder*) was the older sign of the plural, the *-en* having been added after the other had lost its plural significance. Another interesting double plural is the poetic form *kine.* Here the development that might have been expected is singular *cow* (<O. E.

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[20] It is significant of the more conservative development of German that, in a number of instances, the Old English and the Modern German cognates are both of the weak declension, while the Modern English forms have gone over to the typical declension. Note O. E. *ēagan,* Ger. *Augen,* Mn. E. *eyes;* O. E. *cnapan,* Ger. *Knaben,* Mn. E. *knaves;* O. E. *tungan,* Ger. *Zungen,* Mn. E. *tongues;* O. E. *flēogan,* Ger. *Fliegen,* Mn. E. *flies;* and O. E. *naman,* Ger. *Namen,* Mn. E. *names.*

cū), plural *kye* (<O. E. *cȳ*, an umlaut form). In ordinary use, the plural, of course, is the regularized form *cows;* but *kye* is preserved in the Scots dialect, and *kine*, in which a weak ending has been attached to the mutated plural, is a familiar archaic form.

Apart from all the groups of plurals that have so far been mentioned stand the foreign plurals that are occasionally met with in Modern English. With scarcely any exceptions, nouns entering the language before the Modern English period have conformed to the inflection of native words. In Modern English, however, there are many instances of borrowed words retaining their foreign plurals. The present tendency, which the writer believes should be encouraged, is to regularize a number of these forms. Where there is a choice, that is to say, between the native plural ending in *-s* and a foreign plural, the better principle is to use the former. It must be admitted that the choice does not always exist; thus, *axes*, *bases*, *crises*, and *theses* (with the second vowel pronounced distinctly as [i:]) are certainly to be preferred to the awkward succession of sibilants that would be present in their regularized forms. The pronunciation indicated is of course particularly necessary for the first two forms in order to make a distinction between the plural of *basis* and that of *base*, and between the plural of *axis* and that of *ax*. But surely, when two plurals, one native and one foreign, are competing in actual use, it is desirable to use the native. Plurals like *banditti*, *monsignori*, *prime donne*, *stadia*, *gymnasia*, and even *campi* have a certain (usually academic) vogue, but they have also an unpleasant air of something akin to pedantry or affectation. The story is told of a certain celebrated English lady airily remarking, "I don't understand how anyone

can ride in those odious *omnibi*[21]"—to be met by the retort, "Ah, there you propound one of the most difficult of all *conundra!*"

Sometimes the problem of rival plural forms is resolved by retaining both, but for somewhat different uses: the native for general and the foreign for specialized, frequently scientific, purposes. Thus the mathematician or the chemist may prefer *formulæ*, but the man in the street is justified in using *formulas;* and so it is with *foci* and *focuses*, *gladioli* and *gladioluses*. The last instance is further complicated by varying accentuation; it seems natural to put the stress, in the foreign plural, on the second syllable, and in the native plural on the third. However, the pronunciation last mentioned is often used with uneasy misgivings as to its correctness; hence some who have occasion to use the word dodge the issue altogether and say *glads*—just as others avoid the difficulties involved in the plural forms of *hippopotamus* and *rhinoceros* by using the shortenings *hippos* and *rhinos*.

One argument for preferring the native plural where there is any sanction for it in reputable use is that, after all, only a small proportion of the English-speaking world is sufficiently acquainted with Latin, Greek, or Italian inflection to employ the foreign forms correctly. Observe, for example, the confusion between *alumni* and *alumnæ*, a confusion which is intensified by the fact that the preferred English pronunciation of these

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[21] What makes *omnibi* particularly grotesque is of course the fact that the *-us* with which the singular of the English word ends is not, in the Latin word from which it is taken, a singular ending at all; the *-i* plural is as thoroughly false as it is in *ignorami*, which the writer has actually seen in journalistic use.

words exactly reverses the sound of the Latin endings. More commonly, however, the difficulty is as to number rather than gender. Thus, it is easily forgotten that *phenomena* is a plural; it tends then to be used as a singular, and a new English plural, *phenomenas*, is evolved. And so it is with *insignia*, *data*, and perhaps *memoranda*. It is to be remembered too that even with our native words it is possible for a form etymologically a plural to become a singular in use; *wages* was once so treated,[22] and *news* is so treated now (present usage exactly reversing that common in Elizabethan English). Foreign plurals have sometimes gone the same way, the meaning of the word changing in the process; thus *opera* and *stamina* are both, etymologically, Latin plurals. A recent Latin borrowing, *agenda*, is on the way to complete Anglicization in an interesting fashion: first the pronunciation with the "hard" *g* yielded to that with the "soft," and now the tendency seems to be to treat the word as a singular rather than a plural.[23]

Such a discussion as the foregoing tends, perhaps, to suggest that the inflection of the noun in Modern English is more complicated than is actually the case. In spite of the attention that has been given to departures, in both native and borrowed words, from the simple pattern of the typical inflection, it remains true that the Modern English noun is inflected slightly and, on the

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[22] As in "The wages of sin *is* death."

[23] "Agenda Is Determined on Calendar Reform" (headline in *New York Times*, June 17, 1931). As for *phenomena*, the sentence: ". . . Goethe had taken an intelligent interest in all this phenomena of history" appeared in the *Times* "Book Review" for February 14, 1932; and: "Russia seems to be getting along very well without this phenomena we have been taught we could not do without," in the *Times* for November 27, 1933.

whole, regularly. This is the case both comparatively (with other languages and with earlier stages of English) and absolutely. A similar observation could not be made about the pronoun. The pronoun, on the contrary, is the one part of speech that retains in Modern English a degree of inflection comparable to that which it had in Old English. The personal pronoun is inflected, in Modern English as in Old English, for three cases, three persons, and (for the third person singular) three genders; in addition, two numbers are distinguished in the Modern English forms, and (for the first and second persons) three in the Old English. The evolution of the first, second, and third personal pronouns will now be given in some detail.

FIRST PERSON

	Singular	*Dual*	*Plural*
NOM.	ic	wit	wē
GEN.	mīn	uncer	ūre
DAT., ACC.	mē	unc	ūs

These are the forms commonly used in late Old English and in early Middle English. In early Old English separate accusative forms were employed (*mec* for the singular, *uncit* for the dual, and *ūsic* for the plural), but eventually—and well before the end of the Old English period—these forms had been completely superseded by the datives, which thus did double service.[24] Our modern forms (except of course those for the dual, all trace of which is lost after the thirteenth century) have developed, with the regular sound changes, directly from the ones just listed, except that the consonant in *ic*

[24] In the dual, however, the two forms *unc* and *uncit* (the latter a form of more recent origin) were often used side by side, for both dative and accusative.

has been lost and the vowel lengthened, and that the vowel in *ūs* has been shortened.

	Second Person		
	Singular	*Dual*	*Plural*
Nom.	ðū	git	gē
Gen.	ðīn	incer	ēower
Dat., Acc.	ðē	inc	ēow

These, again, are the typical Old and early Middle English forms, the distinctive accusative forms—*ðec, incit,* and *ūsic*—having been absorbed by the datives.[25] Once more the modern forms—*thou, thine, thee, ye, your,* and *you*—have developed regularly from their Old English prototypes (though we might have expected *your* and *you* to be pronounced with the diphthong of *our*). It is evident, however, that modern usage has treated the second personal pronouns differently from those of the first person. A single form, *you,* does service, for the most part, in Modern English for both nominative and accusative, in both singular and plural numbers. This requires further explanation.

The custom of addressing kings and other great personages by the plural rather than the singular second personal pronoun began in the Latin of the Empire and was spread, through a similar usage in French, throughout Europe; it exactly corresponds, of course, to the present royal, and editorial, use of the plural of the first personal pronoun. In English, the polite use of *ye* and *you* for the singular became common by the end of the fourteenth century; at the same time *thou* and *thee* began to be relegated to familiar or affectionate use. The proverb that familiarity breeds contempt is illustrated in

[25] Except that *incit* and *inc* were frequently used indiscriminately for both cases, as noted above for *uncit* and *unc.*

their later history; for a misplaced *thou*—one used where the occasion demanded the formal *ye*—could only be interpreted as patronizing or derogatory. Thus in early Modern English *thou* has much the force of the German *du:* it may signify affection, intimacy, or scorn. However, the more conservative language of poetry and religion preserved the older *thou* in certain special categories. It still persists in the language of prayer and it is kept likewise in the speech of the Quakers. The latter use, however, is somewhat different: the form in vogue among the Quakers is not *thou* but *thee,* just as the standard speech has substituted the formerly accusative *you* for the nominative *ye;* it is joined, moreover, with the verb not of the second person but of the third (*thee goes,* for example, rather than *thou goest*), perhaps through the influence of the similar sound of *he* or *she goes.*[26]

The other point in the simplification of the modern second personal pronoun is that the former distinction for case, as between nominative and accusative, has also been lost. In the early seventeenth century, the older use of *ye* for nominative and *you* for accusative is being replaced by the indiscriminate use of the single form *you.* The King James Bible of 1611 preserves the distinction (as in "Ye in me, and I in you"); but Shakespeare, less bound by tradition, not only frequently uses *you* for nominative but also occasionally uses *ye* for accusative. Milton, too, frequently uses the two forms regardless of their historical distinction: " . . . *you* must then first become that which *ye* cannot be . . . And who shall then stick closest to *ye* . . . ?" (*Areopagitica*). Modern poetry sometimes retains the *ye,*

[26] Emerson, *History of English Language,* p. 323.

just as it does the *thou* and *thee* ("And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills," Wordsworth: *Immortality Ode*); but save for such poetical, and occasionally also dialectal, survivals, the invariable form for the second personal pronoun is *you*.

Such simplification has not been unattended by ambiguity. Obviously useful distinctions are made possible by preserving four forms in the first personal pronoun—*I, me, we, us;* and it is clear that the one form that has to do service for all four categories in the parallel uses of the second personal pronoun is somewhat overworked. The lack of a distinction for case seems less vital than the lack of distinction for number. Hence it is that a number of creations—the Southern *you all,*[27] the dialectal *you-uns,* and the vulgar *youse*—have been evolved to make good the deficiency.

The third personal pronoun differs from the other two in being declined for gender (in the singular), and in preserving, throughout the Old English period, separate forms for the dative and accusative singular of all three genders.

THIRD PERSON

SINGULAR

	Masculine	*Feminine*	*Neuter*
NOM.	hē	hēo	hit
GEN.	his	hiere	his
DAT.	him	hiere	him
ACC.	hine	hīe	hit

[27] Though the point is disputed, the best opinion seems to be that Southern usage confines *you all* to the plural, or, more accurately, that even if it is addressed to one person it still has a plural implication; that is, that it stands for "you and your family," "you and your friends," and so forth, as fits the circumstances.

	PLURAL
NOM., ACC.	hīe, hī
GEN.	hiera
DAT.	him

These were the forms most frequently used in Old English. The Modern English equivalents are so different that some details about their evolution are necessary.

The third person singular masculine develops regularly into the Modern English paradigm, except that, as with the first and second personal pronouns, the distinctive accusative form is lost and *him* does service as both dative and accusative. In the feminine, however, a new form developed for the nominative,[28] since, if *hēo* had remained, its later form and sound would have been identical with those of the masculine *hē;* here too, the original dative form, *hiere,* became also accusative in use, even though it was identical with the genitive, as modern *her* still is. In the neuter, the form *hit* was nominative as well as accusative, and this may account for its survival (with loss of initial *h*) in Modern English as the accusative, especially since *him* had become the masculine accusative as well as the dative, and the use of *hit* as dative-accusative for the neuter thus brought about a useful differentiation. Nevertheless, what one finds to be most striking, in comparing the modern forms with the old ones, is that in a single instance, the possessive of the neuter, an additional and a totally new form has been evolved—an outstanding exception in the general trend of inflectional leveling. This is *its,* formed by adding the usual genitive ending to the nominative *hit* or *it;* it supersedes the *his* that once did service as the neuter

[28] Perhaps influenced by *sēo,* but it is also argued that *she* could have developed phonetically from *hēo*; see M. B. Rudd, *M.L.N.*, XXXV, p. 222.

as well as the masculine genitive. The substitution of *its* for the neuter *his* comes about in the early seventeenth century. The English of the King James Bible, again, is more conservative than the general practice of its day, for *its* is never admitted. The old form *his* is often employed ("If the salt hath lost his savor"), but that it is also felt to be awkward is shown by the frequent use of paraphrases such as "of it" or "thereof" ("The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof") where, to us, *its* would be the natural word.

In the plural, the forms of Old English have been considerably altered. The general reason for this is evident: if *hīe* or *hī* had been allowed to remain, it would have been too nearly like *hē* and *hēo*, while *hiera* would have become identical with *hiere*,[29] of the feminine singular. What has happened, then, is that the Scandinavian forms *they*, *their*, and *them*, entering first in the Northern dialect of Middle English, eventually took the place of the original *hīe*, *hiera*, *him*. The nominative *they* was employed earliest, this being the regular form in Chaucer, alongside *hem* as dative and accusative and such forms as *hire* and *hiere* as genitive. In late Middle English and early Modern English, however, *their* and *them* established themselves firmly.

In listing the personal pronouns, the origin of the possessive pronouns has also been indicated. Save for *its*, the Modern English possessive pronouns developed from and were once identical with the genitive cases of the Old English personal pronouns. These forms early

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[29] That is, both forms would have become *hire*, *here*, or *hir*. This confusion does, in fact, exist in Chaucer. Compare the similarly ambiguous *ihr* of Modern German.

in their evolution lost almost entirely their genitival function, and came to be inflected and used like adjectives. The genitives of the first and second personal pronouns were declined as strong adjectives in Old English, while the forms *his* and *hiere*, indeclinable in Old English, came to be inflected like adjectives in Middle English. In Middle English times, too, are to be observed the beginnings of the modern differentiation between the modifying and the absolute forms of these pronouns. The final consonant of *mīn* and *thīn* was dropped before a word beginning with a consonant, and the forms *my* and *thy* thus created; eventually *my* and *thy* were used even before a word beginning with a vowel, but in the absolute position the old forms *mine* and *thine* are still retained. In the more conservative language of poetry, however, the older forms are permissible in Modern English even in the modifying position, when used before vowels ("Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord"). In addition to the pairs *my*, *mine* and *thy*, *thine*, the differentiation for these two uses was accomplished in Middle English for all the other pronouns except *his*, which has but one form in both the modifying and the absolute positions (though the vulgarism *hisn* is an understandable analogical formation, which had indeed a certain literary use in Middle English, as had also *hern*, *theirn*, and *yourn*). The final *s* of *his* was apparently the pattern for the Middle English forms in *-s* for absolute use, which have become standard: *ours*, *yours*, *hers*, and *theirs*.

Aside from the personal pronouns, it is the interrogatives that have preserved more of the original inflection than any other group of pronouns. The Old English forms were these (alike for both numbers):

	Masc. and Fem.		*Neuter*
Nom.	hwā		hwæt
Gen.		hwæs	
Dat.		hwām	
Acc.	hwone		hwæt
Inst.	—		hwȳ

Except for the *hwone*, all of these forms are represented in Modern English, in the following equivalents: *who*, *what*, *whose*, *whom*, and *why*. The last named is the sole remnant of the instrumental case in Modern English, save only for the instrumental *the* (indistinguishable, however, in form from other cases of the now indeclinable *the*) in *nevertheless* and in such phrases as *the sooner*, *the better*. But it is evident that usage in present-day English treats these forms somewhat differently from what the paradigm might seem to imply: *whose* is now but sparingly applied to things, almost always to persons; and *whom* in popular usage tends to give way to *who*.[30]

Other pronoun groups that were fully inflected in Old English have for the most part lost this inflection in Modern English. Such are the simple demonstrative *sē*, *sēo*, *þæt*, which served also as the definite article, and the compound demonstrative *þēs*, *þēos*, *þis*, formed by adding *sē* to the simple demonstrative to make the expression more emphatic, just as vulgar speech now creates such combinations as *that there* or *this here now*. Both demonstratives were fully inflected in Old English, for three genders and five cases in the singular, and for

[30] Especially when the form which is theoretically objective precedes the verb. Expressions like "Who did you see?" and "Who did you call on?" are widely current and have won a certain partial sanction. *Cf.* Sapir's opinion of the general "drift" of the language in this respect (*Language*, pp. 166–174); his conclusion about *whom* is this: "It is safe to prophesy that within a couple of hundred years from today, not even the most learned jurist will be saying 'Whom did you see?'" See also p. 500.

one gender and three cases in the plural. Modern English has greatly simplified these forms. The distinction between *sē* and *sēo* was lost in Middle English, the forms of the article becoming *thē* and *thēo*, and the latter eventually being lost as grammatical gender fell into disuse. The originally neuter *þæt* (that) was retained only as a demonstrative, without distinction for gender. All forms for the definite article were leveled to *the*. The old plural form *þā* (M. E. *thō*) was given an analogical *-s* ending in its demonstrative use. This took place, apparently, after that ending had established itself as the normal plural termination of nouns; perhaps the plural form of the compound demonstrative (O. E. *þās*) was an additional influence. The plural for *that* thus came to be *those*, so that a new plural for *this* (which, like *that*, was at first neuter only) had to be evolved; this form was Middle English *thēs*, Modern English *these*. Modern English thus retains of these elaborate inflections only the following five forms: *the*, now the indeclinable definite article; *that* and *this*, formerly the neuters of the simple and the compound demonstratives, respectively, but now otherwise differentiated; and the corresponding plurals, *those* and *these*, the origin of which has just been indicated. No variation of form is now possible for the article, while the demonstratives, having lost inflection for case and gender, retain it for number only.

The remaining groups of pronouns show almost no inflectional variation beyond what has already been mentioned. The reflexives, for example, have no separate forms, as they have in more highly inflected languages, but are made simply by attaching *-self* or *-selves* to the corresponding personal pronouns. In Old English the

personal pronouns served, without change, as reflexives also, and this custom persisted until early Modern English times; the phrase "Now I lay *me* down to sleep" illustrates this use. But Old English also sometimes employed the double forms, with *-self* added, for greater emphasis; and these are the regular reflexive pronouns of Modern English. The indefinite pronouns, being derived from and inflected like other pronouns or adjectives or nouns, likewise possess no separate inflectional forms. One group of indefinites was, in Old English, identical in form with the interrogatives,[31] and these are of additional interest as the source of the modern relative pronouns.

Old English possessed no distinctive relative pronoun. The relative function was variously performed (1) by the demonstrative *sē, sēo, þæt,* (2) by the indeclinable relative particle *þe,* (3) by *þe* joined with the demonstrative, or (4) by *þe* joined with the personal pronoun. The sole remnant of all these forms is *that,* originally the neuter of the demonstrative, but widely used as the relative pronoun for all genders in Middle English, and the only relative in colloquial use today. The other relatives of Modern English—*who* and *which*—developed their relative use much later, though both are from Old English forms, the interrogative-indefinites *hwā* and *hwilc,* respectively. *Which* was the earlier to develop a relative function; it became, in early Middle English use, a general and indeclinable relative form, like *that.* A familiar instance of its earlier application to persons is the opening phrase of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father,

[31] The Modern English indefinite use of *who* and *what* is illustrated in Shakespeare's "*Who* steals my purse steals trash," and such familiar phrases as "*What* you say is true" (Emerson, p. 340).

which art in Heaven." The present use of *who* as a relative and the distinction between *who* for persons and *which* for animals and for things were not fully worked out until the eighteenth century.[32] Even yet, as has been suggested, *who* and *which* are used as relatives less freely than as interrogatives; the man in the street unconsciously prefers *that* to *who*, quite conceivably because the problem of case distinctions does not arise in connection with the former.

Much less space need be devoted to the adjective than to the pronoun, for adjectives in Modern English have completely lost inflection (unless we consider comparison as a type of inflection). The Old English adjective, however, was declined for number, gender, and case, and in addition, as we have seen, it had two sets of inflectional endings—one set for when it was used in the strong position, and another for the weak position. These forms, ten in number,[33] were already leveled in early Middle English to just two—a form without ending. and one with final *-e*. In Chaucer, the only remnant of the elaborate distinctions of Old English is that a form without ending is usually found in the singular of the strong declension; in all other positions, the adjective ends in *-e*. With the general loss of final *-e* in late Middle English, the last vestige of adjective declension was eliminated. The only exception in Modern English is

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[32] The classical illustration is "The Humble Petition of *Who* and *Which*," in the *Spectator* for May 30, 1711. As Jespersen points out (*Essentials of English Grammar*, p. 359), Addison turns historical truth topsy-turvy by describing the relative *that* as an upstart that has recently done injury to *who* and *which*.

[33] There were of course many duplications, so that the number of inflectional distinctions is far greater than this.

the occasional use of a borrowed inflection, as in the phrase *Knights Templars* (from the French).

Closely allied to true inflection, however, is the process of comparison. Modern English utilizes two methods of comparison: the addition of the suffixes *-er* and *-est* to form the comparative and superlative degrees, respectively; and the use of the auxiliary adverbs *more* and *most*. The latter method of comparison is comparatively modern, becoming common only in late Middle English. The use of the suffixes, however, goes back to primitive Teutonic. In Old English, most adjectives made their comparatives in *-ra* and their superlatives in *-ost;* from these endings come the Modern English suffixes *-er* and *-est*. There were, in addition, a smaller number of adjectives with mutated comparative and superlative forms (the latter usually ending in *-est*), and a few adjectives in which mutated comparatives and superlatives are of a different root from the positive form of parallel meaning, the original root having been displaced. Of the former type are such forms as *strengra* and *strengest* as comparative and superlative of *strang* (strong), *lengra* and *lengest* of *lang* (long), and *ieldra* and *ieldest* of *eald* (old). The only survivals in Modern English are *elder* and *eldest*, and even these have been superseded, for most purposes, by the regularized forms *older* and *oldest*. There are, however, several survivals of the other type (that which utilizes two separate roots in the process of comparison); *good, better, best* and *little, less, least* are the clearest illustrations.

Certain Modern English adjectives show in their comparative and superlative forms a "pyramiding"[34]

[34] The term is Mrs. Aiken's. *Cf. English, Present and Past*, p. 226.

of inflections. There are, for one thing, double forms like *inmost, outmost, foremost,* and *hindmost,* in which an original superlative in *-m*[35] has been reinforced by a second superlative suffix *-est.* In these words the double ending *-mest* has been altered through association with the auxiliary adverb *most,* since this word was used in the analytical superlative forms. Parallel to these are double comparatives like *nearer, lesser,* and *worser.* The Old English comparison for the first word was *neah, nearra, niehst*[36]—in the modern equivalents, *nigh, near, next. Near* (or *ner* or *nere*) remained as the comparative in Middle English,[37] but was eventually used, perhaps under the influence of an adverbial *near,* as the positive. A new comparative, *nearer,* and a new superlative, *nearest,* were then built up on the assumption of a positive *near.* The most extreme example, probably, of the accumulation of comparative and superlative endings in a single word is *nethermost.* Though the point is disputed, the word may possibly be analyzed as follows: *ne* "down" + *-th* (comp.) + *-er* (comp.) + *-m* (sup.) + *-ost* (originally, sup. *-est*). Only one degree removed from this quadruply inflected word are such triple forms as *innermost, uppermost, furthermost,* and *outermost.*

As we have seen, inflection is possible in the Modern English adjective only in the limited sense of comparison. Save for this sense, the adverb is uninflected in

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[35] *Cf.* Latin *optimus* and *primus,* the latter cognate with Old English *forma* (first).

[36] *Cf.* German *nah, näher, nächst.*

[37] This is regularly so in Chaucer. Note: "And as he dorste, he drough him ner and ner" ("Prioress' Tale," l. 1710), which Wordsworth absurdly translates into the meaningless "And as he durst he drew him near and near."

both Modern English and Old English. Nevertheless, inflection was used in the *formation* of the Old English adverb. The regular method was to add the instrumental ending *-e* of the adjective to form the corresponding adverb; for example, *georn* (eager), *georne* (eagerly); *wīd* (wide), *wīde* (widely). Adjectives already ending in *-e* became adverbs without change of form; thus *blīðe* meant either "joyful" or "joyfully," and *clǣne*, either "clean" or "cleanly." In addition, a second adverbial termination, *-līce*, was evolved through the circumstance that when certain adjectives ending in *-līc* were made into adverbs [*earmlīce* from *earmlīc* (wretched) and *frēondlīce* from *frēondlīc* (friendly)], the ending *-līce*, rather than *-e*, came eventually to be felt as the adverbial suffix. It was then added, instead of *-e*, to form other adverbs; thus, we have *eornost* (earnest) and *eornostlīce* (earnestly) (rather than *eornoste*). The *-līce* termination, and its modern descendant *-ly*, gradually became established as the normal or typical adverbial ending. This suffix has been added by analogy to many words, native as well as foreign, to which it did not originally belong. There is a special reason for this in the phonetic change that the old adverbs in *-e* have regularly undergone.

In the Middle English period, inflectional final *-e* was regularly dropped. This meant, of course, that adverbial forms which employed this suffix could no longer be differentiated from the corresponding adjectives: Old English *heard* and *hearde* became alike *hard; fæst* and *fæste* became alike *fast*. The modern adverbs *hard* and *fast* are therefore not properly to be described as adjectives used adverbially; they are true adverbs, though identical in form with adjectives. Only a few of them,

such as *hard, fast, first,* and *wide,* remain in both common and "correct" use. The great majority of the adverbs which once possessed the *-e* suffix and later lost it have conformed by analogy to the *-ly* pattern. Even in the cases mentioned, *hardly,* as well as *hard,* and *widely,* as well as *wide,* are possible as adverbs (though with a differentiation in meaning); and *firstly,* by analogy with the other ordinals *secondly, thirdly,* and so forth, is knocking lustily on the doors for admission.

It is true that, in popular, and sometimes in archaic, literary use, other adverbs without ending (representing a lost *-e* suffix) are to be found. But most of these are definitely incorrect according to standard usage. Thus, it does not seem accurate to put *slow* and *fast,* as adverbs, on the same basis.[38] *Fast* is the only possible adverbial form for present use, but *slowly* has, in precise use, long since superseded the adverbial *slow;* this has happened in spite of the fact that *slow* was once correct, as in Milton's line

Swinging slow with solemn roar,

and that there is considerable use today of the same form, perhaps because "Go slow" is easily made parallel in form to the phrase of opposite meaning, "Go fast." It might be added, too, that frequently a stereotyped formula will preserve the older form of the adverb for that particular collocation; thus, "to laugh *loudly*" is correct, but also "to laugh *loud* and long."

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[38] As, for example, Professor Krapp apparently does when he remarks, "This type of adverb formation persists in Modern English in adverbs without ending, as in the constructions 'Go *slow*'; 'He fought *hard.*'" (*Modern English,* p. 72.) For further discussion of *slow* and *slowly,* see p. 523.

Further, it is to be pointed out that the difficult task of discriminating between adjectives and adverbs[39] is made harder not only by certain ambiguous forms—for example, *well* and *ill*—but by the occasional occurrence of the adjective in what is usually the adverbial position, just after the predicate or just after the object. Thus, to use the adjective of resultant state is the more accurate in the phrase "to roll the cigaret tight"; and the same reasoning makes "the sun shines bright" at least as logical as "the sun shines brightly." To many, it is difficult to see that the verbs of sensation have a copulative force exactly parallel to that of *be*, *seem*, and *appear*, which require a predicative adjective rather than an adverbial modifier. This, of course, is the explanation of "the rose smells sweet," "the milk tastes sour," "the ground feels rough," and the like. Even here, however, there is sometimes another possibility:[40] one can justify both "it smells bad" (i.e., "appears, when smelled, to be bad") and "it smells badly" (i.e., "abominably," "atrociously"). In a similar way, with a slight difference in emphasis, both "he stands conspicuous" and "he stands conspicuously" are possible.

To return to the use of inflection in the original formation of adverbs. After the instrumental *-e*, the most common inflectional ending used adverbially in Old English was the usual genitive ending of nouns and adjec-

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[39] This has been proposed as the supreme test of the educated person: "He may be a Ph. D. from any place you like; but if he confuses adverbs and adjectives, he is not an educated man." (Katharine F. Gerould, "What Constitutes an Educated Person Today," *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 127, p. 745.) Truly a hard saying, if strictly interpreted.

[40] For further discussion, see p. 522.

tives, *-es*. Some of these formations that have survived in Modern English are *nēades* (needs) (as in "He needs must go"; i.e., "He must *of necessity* go"); *nihtes* (nights)[41]; *ānes* (once) (where changes in spelling and pronunciation have obscured the origin, as also in *twice* and *thrice*); *sūðeweardes* (southwards); and *hāmweardes* (homewards). The adverbial genitive *his weges* (on his way) is preserved in the Shakespearean "Go your ways" and in the present-day colloquialism "He went a long ways." Modern English, in fact, makes frequent use both of the genitive ending used adverbially—for example, *sideways*, *backwards*, *always*, *sometimes*—and of the corresponding prepositional phrase—as in *of course*, *of old*, *of late*, *of a truth*, and so forth.

One other case ending used adverbially may be mentioned, although there are very few survivals of it in Modern English. This is the dative-instrumental *-um*, as in Old English *miclum* (greatly), *wundrum* (wonderfully), *stundum* (from time to time), and so on. The form *whilom*, now archaic, comes from *hwīlum*, originally meaning "sometimes," "at times," but later "in former times." *Seldom* (O. E. *seldum*) is an analogical creation in which an earlier form *seldan* (cognate with German *selten*) has been altered to *seldum* through the influence of other adverbs with this ending. The fuller suffix *-mǣlum* [< *mǣl* (time), (measure)] was used in a number of adverbial forms; for example, *styccemǣlum* (here and there), and *dropmǣlum* (drop by drop). This is preserved in Chaucer's *flokmele* (in a flock) and *stoundemele*

[41] In "He goes out nights," the final *-s* is not plural but genitive singular in adverbial use; the expression is thus exactly equivalent to the old-fashioned "of an evening," in which the prepositional phrase replaces the genitive ending.

(hour by hour), and in a single Modern English example, *piecemeal.*

Distinguishing features of the inflection of the English verb have already been mentioned, in the discussion of the Teutonic verbal system. These may be briefly recapitulated on the basis of the Old English forms: two completely conjugated tenses, present and preterit; two moods, indicative and subjunctive, for these two tenses, and an imperative for the present only; one voice, the active; three persons; and two numbers. In addition, there are the verbals: the infinitive and the gerund, the latter historically the dative case of the infinitive, used as a neuter noun, after *to;*[42] and the two participles, present and past. The general trend of the development of the verb in English has been toward simplicity and regularity. It must be noted, however, that while inflectional endings have been more and more leveled, new analytical formations have constantly been replacing the lost synthetic forms. The two most striking illustrations of this drift, perhaps, are the histories of the future tense and the subjunctive mood. Early Old English had no future tense; the original synthetic future of Teutonic had been lost, and the analytical future of Modern English was only beginning to be built up, by the use of the auxiliaries *willan* (wish, will) and, occasionally, *sculan* ("must," later "shall"). Meantime, the present did service for the future also, as it still does in Modern English in such a phrase as "I leave tomor-

[42] The inflected form very early began to drive out the simple or uninflected form of the infinitive. This accounts for the preservation of the *to* as the "sign of the infinitive," after the distinction in form between infinitive and gerund had been lost in Middle English. The modern gerund is of course an entirely different thing; it is identical in form with the present participle but different in use.

row" or "The boat sails at midnight." The present elaborate distinctions between "shall" and "will" (whether we regard them with admiration or with dismay) must surely be considered to illustrate simplicity replaced by complexity. It is perhaps not generally recognized that the subjunctive mood reveals a somewhat similar story, though with the difference that the earlier synthetic method was not entirely lost before it began to be replaced by the analytical. In Modern English, it is of course obvious that little use is made of the once prevalent inflected subjunctive. That is not, however, equivalent to saying that the subjunctive has but little place in Modern English; on the contrary, the subjunctive formed by the auxiliaries *may, might, should, would, could, ought,* and so forth (a method exactly parallel to that used in the compound tenses of the indicative) has been constantly given a wider and more subtly differentiated use.[43] There is danger, then, of assuming overhastily that the undeniable loss of inflectional endings necessarily means greater simplicity in the Modern English verb. The two illustrations just cited indicate that greater complexity, though of a different kind, may be the eventual result of the simplification of verbal endings.

The usual classification of the Modern English verb follows, almost exactly, the distinctive twofold division of the verb in the Teutonic languages generally; that is, its separation into two chief groups, strong and weak. For the most part, the weak verbs of Old English have become the so-called "regular" verbs of Modern English, and the strong verbs the "irregular." As has been said,

[43] See Curme, *Syntax*, pp. 390–430.

the basis of the distinction is the use of the dental suffix (*-ed, -d,* or *-t*) in the one case and of an internal vowel change (ablaut series) in the other. The former group, the weak verbs, has been the larger in all periods of English, and it grows steadily even now, both because newly created or newly borrowed words are invariably conjugated in this way and because verbs that were once strong not infrequently become weak; thus, *swelled* has replaced *swoll,* and *climbed* has replaced *clomb* or *clumb.* There are a few exceptions to the latter type of change, however: in certain instances a shorter form, made by the analogy of some existing strong verb, has replaced a longer weak past tense; thus *strove, stuck,* and *dug* have displaced *strived, sticked,* and *digged.* But on the whole the simplifying and regularizing tendency is very manifest; the strong verbs have tended both to conform to the simpler pattern of the weak, and to level the variations of the ablaut series within their own conjugation. Both tendencies have, of course, freer play in the language of the uneducated and of children than in the speech of those who are more restrained by conventional "rules." Thus, the man in the street is likely to substitute *drink, drank, drank* for *drink, drank, drunk,* and *swim, swam, swam* for *swim, swam, swum;* similarly, young children instinctively prefer *runned* to *ran* and *comed* to *came.*

The strong verbs in Old English fall into six classes, according to their ablaut series; in addition, there is a seventh group made up of reduplicating verbs, which may or may not have gradation. All of these are represented in Modern English. Principal parts of a representative example of each of the six ablaut series, in Old and Modern English, follow. It will be noted

that the four principal parts of Old English have been reduced to three in Modern English, since the distinction between the second and third forms (the preterits, singular and plural) has long since been lost; further, as we have seen, the three variants often tend in Modern English to be simplified to two, and the principal parts therefore, to be no more complicated than those of weak verbs.

Old English	*Modern English*
1. drīfan, drāf, drifon, drifen	drive, drove, driven
2. cēosan, cēas, curon,[44] coren[44]	choose, chose, chosen
3. singan, sang, sungon, sungen	sing, sang, sung
4. beran, bær, bǣron, boren	bear, bore, borne[45]
5. etan, ǣt, ǣton, eten	eat, ate, eaten
6. scacan, scōc, scōcon, scacen	shake, shook, shaken

Reduplication of the initial consonant to form preterit tenses occurred in many Teutonic verbs, but the only trace of this in Old English is the resulting contraction of certain verbal forms. The vowel sequence of a fair number of Old and Modern English verbs is nevertheless the result of their former initial inflection.

Typical representatives of the reduplicating (or seventh) group are the following:

Old English	*Modern English*
bēatan, bēot, bēoton, bēaten	beat, beat, beaten
blōwan, blēow, blēowon, blōwen	blow, blew, blown

[44] In these two forms, *r* has taken the place of *s* by a substitution called *rhotacism*. To state the matter more fully, the Indo-European *s* became voiced [z] in these forms because the preceding vowel was not accented (Verner's Law): later, as in Old English, this voiced *s* passed to *r*. The Modern English forms of course show the analogical replacement of *s*. Compare the past participles of two other verbs of this group, *lēosan* (lose) and *frēosan* (freeze): *lorn* and *frore* survive as archaic forms in Modern English, but for general use they are replaced by *lost* and *frozen*. *Was* and *were* (<O. E. *wæs* and *wǣron*) show a similar alternation, preserved to this day.

[45] Modern English *born* is a variant form, differentiated in meaning.

Old English	*Modern English*
feallan, fēoll, fēollon, feallen	fall, fell, fallen
grōwan, grēow, grēowon, grōwen	grow, grew, grown

Weak verbs in Old English have the preterit in *-de* or *-te*, and the past participle in *-d* or *-t*; in Modern English the same verbs end, in both preterit and past participle, in *-d*, *-ed*, or *-t*. This is the surest criterion of the distinction between strong and weak. Other indications differentiating them may be confusing: internal inflection, for example, may occur in the weak verbs as well as in the strong, though in the former it is due to mutation or umlaut rather than gradation or ablaut; then, too, the formerly distinctive suffix of the strong past participle, the *-en* ending, has been lost in many verbs. Weak verbs are divided, in Old English, into three groups, of which only two are represented by many verbs, the third having been reduced to just four verbs. The following examples may be given:

	Old English	*Modern English*
Class 1.	bringan, brōhte, gebrōht	bring, brought
	hīeran, hīerde, gehīered	hear, heard
	settan, sette, gesett	set, set[46]
	tǣcan, tǣhte, getǣht	teach, taught
Class 2.	clǣnsian, clǣnsode, geclǣnsod	cleanse, cleansed
	lufian, lufode, gelufod	love, loved
	seglian, seglode, geseglod	sail, sailed
Class 3.[47]	habban, hæfde, gehæfd	have, had
	libban, lifde, gelifd	live, lived
	secgan, sæde, gesæd	say, said

[46] The so-called invariable verbs of Modern English represent the ultimate simplification of principal parts. As we have seen, four forms must be given for the Old English strong verbs and three for the weak; in Modern English, the four strong forms are reduced to three and sometimes to two, while the three weak forms are reduced to two and sometimes to one. Other invariable verbs are *burst*, *cast*, *cut*, *hit*, *hurt*, *let*, *put*, *shed*, *shut*.

[47] Only one other verb of this class survived in Old English: *hycgan* (think).

The foregoing classification does not include certain verbs which, though numerically few, are in use extremely important. Two irregular groups must therefore also be mentioned: the *mi*-verbs and the preterit-presents. The former are the sole survivors of another type of conjugation than that which gives the strong and weak verbs of Old English. Indo-European verbs used either *-ō* or *-mi* as the ending of the first person present indicative singular. Almost all English verbs are of the former type, but to the *mi*-class belong a few of our most important irregular verbs: *be, do, go,* and *will.* These are verbs that go back eventually to the classification of such Greek verbs as εἰμί, τίθημι (in Latin *sum,* only the *m* of the suffix is preserved), rather than that of λύω, φέρω. Only one form of Modern English, *am,* retains a trace of the *-mi* ending, but in Old English *dōm* (I do) is also found—in the Mercian and Northumbrian dialects. These four so-called anomalous verbs —*be, do, go,* and *will*—are for the most part irregular only in the present tense, but in *be* and *go* it should be noted that more than one root is used in the conjugation. *Is* (or *are*) and *was* are not from the same source as *be,* while *go* formerly used as its preterit a separate form, *ēode* (later *yede*), and now uses still another form, *went,* originally a preterit of *wend.*

The other group of irregular verbs comprises the preterit-presents, so called because the present tense of each of them is a former preterit that has superseded the old present and is now a present in use.[48] The old

[48] Just as Latin *novi* and Greek οἶδα have become present in meaning (=*I know*); Old English *wāt* is exactly parallel.

strong preterit has then usually been succeeded by a new, weak form. The preterit-presents that are retained in Modern English are *ought*, *can*, *dare*, *shall*, *may*, *must*. The first and last have no separate forms for the preterit; the others have *could*, *dared* (formerly *durst*, but now usually regularized), *should*, and *might*. *Ought* and *must* are peculiar in that, in their histories, preterit forms have *twice* become present in use: the original strong preterits, *āh* and *mōt*, became present in meaning and were succeeded by weak preterits, *āhte* and *mōste* (Mn. E. *ought* and *must*); these new preterits in turn became present in use as well as past—as is true also of *durst*. There is consequently ambiguity in the modern meaning of *ought*, *must*,[49] and *durst*. *Durst* for past use has been largely replaced by the new form *dared;* but such a substitution is scarcely possible for *ought*[50] or *must*, since these verbs have already exhausted the two possible types of preterit formation, the strong and the weak. All these preterit-present verbs are conjugated in the present indicative without *-s* in the third person singular; in other words, like forms of the preterit tense rather than of the present. *Dare*, however, is a partial exception, since *dares* (by analogy of regular verbs) is now more usual than *dare*.

The simplification of inflectional endings may now be summarized. The present and preterit endings of the *typical* Old English verb were as shown at top of p. 146.

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[49] "He *must* go," for example, formerly meant "He *had* to go," but now ordinarily means "He *has* to go."

[50] There is the additional reason, in this instance, that the regular verb *owe*, *owed*, *owed* comes from the same source as *ought* and has been differentiated from it in meaning.

INDICATIVE

	PRESENT		PRETERIT[51]	
	Sing.	*Plur.*	*Sing.*	*Plur.*
1.	—e	—að	—ede	—edon
2.	—est	"	—edest	"
3.	—eð	"	—ede	"

SUBJUNCTIVE

1, 2, 3.	—e	—en	—ede	—eden

In addition, there were also these forms: two imperatives, the singular without ending for strong verbs and in *-e* for weak verbs, and the plural in *-að*; the infinitive in *-an* and the gerund in *-anne;* the present participle in *-ende* and the past in *-ed* or *-od* (for strong verbs, *-en*). The past participle was prefixed by *ge-*, normally, in the weak verbs, and also often in the strong verbs.

In Middle English, these were the typical endings:

INDICATIVE

	PRESENT		PRETERIT[52]	
	Sing.	*Plur.*	*Sing.*	*Plur.*
1.	—e	—e(n)	—ede	—ede(n)
2.	—est	"	—edest	"
3.	—eth	"	—ede	"

SUBJUNCTIVE

1, 2, 3.	—e	—e(n)	—ede	—ede(n)

[51] The forms given are for the *weak* verb. The strong preterit was more complicated, since two different stems are involved: one for the first and third singular, and the other for the remaining four forms of the indicative; for example, *ic cēas, þū cure, hē cēas, wē (gē, hīe) curon.* In the subjunctive, only the second stem is present: *cure* for the singular, *curen* for the plural.

[52] Again the forms of the strong verb were somewhat different from the forms given, which are those of the weak. The preterit singulars were 1 and 3: —, 2: *—e;* the plurals, 1, 2, and 3: *—e(n).* Usually, the two preterit stems have been leveled to one—more commonly, the one originally singular. Occasionally, however, even as late as Chaucer, both are preserved, so that we have such a conjugation as this: singular, 1 and 3, *bigan,* 2, *bigonne;* plural, *bigonne(n).* In the subjunctive, as in Old English, the singular is usually (but not always) made by attaching *-e* to the preterit plural stem, and the plural by attaching *-e(n).*

The imperatives and infinitives are as in Old English, except that *a* regularly weakens to *e*; the plural imperative, accordingly, ends in *-eth*, and the infinitive in *-e(n)*. The gerund is usually the same form as the infinitive, but sometimes a distinctive form like *to seyne* or *to done* occurs in Chaucer. *-Ing(e)* replaces *-ende* as the ending of the present participle, possibly through the influence of verbal nouns in *-ing(e)* [from O. E. *-ung(e)*].[53] The usual endings of the past participle are, for weak verbs, *-(e)d* or *t*, and for strong verbs, *-en* (which is, however, sometimes syncopated to *-n* and sometimes altered to *-e*). The old prefix to the past participle, *ge-*, has been weakened to *y-*, and appears with many verbs, both strong and weak. Incidentally, the fact that *y-* in Middle English is not invariably the sign of the past participle (the O. E. infinitive forms *geþēon* (prosper) and *gesēon* (see), for example, occur in Chaucer as *y-thee* and *y-see*) may have tempted later writers of archaic tendencies to employ it in other verbal forms quite without any historical basis for doing so; this seems the explanation of such an error as Milton's "star y-pointing pyramid."[54]

In further explanation of the transformation of the inflectional endings of Old English into those of Middle English, one or two additional remarks may be made. The *-(e)s* ending (in place of *-eth*) for third person singular present indicative appears in Chaucer but rarely, and sometimes distinctly as a dialectal form; its regular use in the later language is explained as a taking over of a Northern ending, rather than as a development of the Midland *-eth*. Likewise, the Middle English *-e(n)* (in

[53] Emerson, p. 376.
[54] "On Shakespeare," l. 4.

the plural of the present indicative) can scarcely be explained as an outgrowth of Old English *-að*; rather it would seem that when a distinctive form was needed for this purpose (because *-að* would normally evolve into *-eð*, the same ending as that of the third person singular), the subjunctives in *-e(n)* and possibly the strong preterits of the indicative in *-e(n)* (<O. E. *-on*) furnished the model.

The normal Modern English endings may be listed for purposes of comparison:

INDICATIVE

	PRESENT			PRETERIT[55]	
	Sing.	*Plur.*		*Sing.*	*Plur.*
1.	—	—	1.	—ed	—ed
2.	—	—	2.	"	"
3	—s	—	3.	"	"

SUBJUNCTIVE

PRESENT		PRETERIT	
1, 2, 3. —	1, 2, 3. —	1, 2, 3. —ed	1, 2, 3. —ed

The imperatives, singular and plural, and the infinitive are without ending. The present participle ends in *-ing*, and the past in *-d*, *-ed*, *-t*, *-n*, or *-en*. Archaic or poetic language occasionally substitutes the ending *-est* (always preceded by *thou*) in the second person singular present and preterit indicative, and the ending *-eth* in the third person singular present indicative.

If, then, we summarize the leveling of verbal endings in Modern English, we observe that only one personal ending, the *-s* of the present indicative third person, has survived. To offset this impression of simplicity, how-

[55] Once more, the strong verbs are distinct from the weak in the preterit. Now, however, only a single preterit stem is used, which is made distinct from the present by internal vowel change and which takes no ending.

ever, it is to be pointed out that Modern English has built up, on foundations laid in Old and Middle English, a most elaborate,[56] though scarcely complicated, system of compound forms. The additions include a future tense by means of auxiliaries; a complete passive voice; what amounts to a new mood, the potential subjunctive (with *can*, *must*, *may*, and so forth), as well as a reconstruction of the subjunctive-optative; and a differentiation into three distinct types of statement—simple or indefinite, progressive or definite, and emphatic. To illustrate the last point, it may be remarked that Modern English may vary such phrases as "I give," "I walk," "I gave," and "I walked" in either of two ways: "I am giving," "I am walking," "I was giving," and "I was walking"; or "I do give," "I do walk," "I did give," and "I did walk." Thus, while Modern English on the one hand has reduced the number of *different* forms to but six for strong verbs and five for weak (as compared with a maximum of twenty-five in Gothic and fourteen in Old English), it has also greatly increased the number and variety of verbal phrases. The history of the English verb in general is therefore a particularly striking instance of the progress from synthesis toward analysis, of the substitution of invariable and separable form-words for longer one-word inflections.

Now that the review of the parts of speech in which inflection occurs has been concluded, it is appropriate to examine in greater detail a question already suggested, and one which, as has just been remarked, the develop-

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[56] A typical presentation of modern verbal conjugation, that in House and Harman's *Descriptive English Grammar* (New York, Prentice-Hall, 1931), takes ten pages in its enumeration of the forms now in use in a single verb

ment of the verb particularly places before us. Is the evolution of a type of inflection that is chiefly analytical rather than synthetic, in the species of word-formation that it implies, to be thought of as beneficial or detrimental? Parenthetically it may be remarked that unless one believes that everything happens for the best in this best of all possible worlds, it is *not* necessary to believe that every change which on the whole is beneficial must be felt to be unqualifiedly so. Nor, on the other hand, is it necessary to believe that loss at one point implies loss at every point. Changes in language, like changes in other human institutions, are much more likely to be compounded of both profit and loss. Our question, then, is not necessarily whether inflectional simplification is all profit or all loss, but rather, granted that one is likely to entail some measure of the other, whether the advantages outweigh, or do not outweigh, the disadvantages. It is clear, of course, that if we have faith in the effectiveness of Modern English, we must believe that the advantages are, on the whole, more important than the disadvantages. Even though our conclusion is thus anticipated, it is still of value to pursue the inquiry to the extent of ascertaining, as definitely as possible, just what has been gained and what has been lost as a result of the long-continued process of inflectional leveling. In doing this, we shall not confine ourselves to the differences between older and more recent aspects of the English language, but shall at least glance at the larger question of the advantages and disadvantages of a language that is largely analytic as compared to one that is largely synthetic.

If, then, we look first at the elements of loss that are incidental to inflectional simplification, the first general-

ization that suggests itself is this: The sound changes that are brought about in the evolution of Modern English inflection have meant a sacrifice of musical quality. There is no figure of speech, for example, in the familiar statement that Chaucer's language is more musical than ours. It is a matter susceptible of definite proof. Such a line as "And smale foules maken melodie" is superior in musical content to the Modern English line that represents the translation of the words into their present forms and sounds—"And small fowls make melody"—for the very specific reason that in the modernization, four vowels have been lost,[57] while all the consonants but one are retained. And vowels are essentially musical notes, while consonants are brief noises. To decrease the percentage of vocalic sounds and increase that of consonantal sounds is therefore to make the language more harsh. In the line just considered, one may observe how the omission of vowels takes away a certain tripping melody and substitutes uglier consonantal combinations. The point may be summarized in the assertion that inflectional leveling frequently means the loss of vowels; this is especially striking in the comparison of Middle and Modern English, since an Old English inflectional ending consisting of vowel plus consonant is often represented in the Middle period by the vowel alone.

A more fundamental disadvantage, however, since it affects the utility rather than the beauty of language, is that inflectional leveling has brought about a greater

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[57] To be strictly accurate, it should be added that one of the original vowels is replaced with a diphthong—but this scarcely affects the present point. Further, the loss of the single consonant is not altogether typical, for *make* is as frequent as *maken* in Middle English.

danger of ambiguity. When words are stripped of their inflectional endings, all sorts of duplications in form are created. The mere appearance or the mere sound of the word sometimes gives no clue as to whether it is, for example, an infinitive or an indicative form of the verb, or whether it is a verb in the present or the preterit tense, or even whether the form is a verb or a noun. Perhaps the most extreme examples are the invariable verbs of Modern English. Such forms as *cast*, *cut*, and *let* are thoroughly ambiguous: they may represent absolutely any use of the verb except the third person singular present indicative and the present participle[58]; and they may be either verbs or nouns. There is, of course, something to be said for the simplicity of expression that this kind of duplication of forms implies. At present, however, we are concerned with the fact that in reading Modern English one sometimes has occasion to wonder whether *they cut*, for example, means "they are cutting" or "they were cutting," or whether (to take another type of duplication) *we read* implies the sounds [rɛd] or [ri:d].

An important result of the increasing duplication of forms in the development of English has been the greater and greater necessity of observing a uniform and stereotyped order of words in the sentence. Modern English is more definitely restricted than Old English, and much more than such a language as Latin or even Modern

[58] The ambiguity of *let*, incidentally, goes further than this, since two separate Old English verbs have grown together into the present form. Curiously, they had almost opposite meanings—"to allow" and "to hinder." Both senses are present in early Modern English; the Biblical "let or hindrance" and Shakespeare's "Thy kinsmen are no let to me" (*Romeo and Juliet*, II, ii, 69 [Q1.]), and "I'll make a ghost of him that lets me" (*Hamlet*, I, iv, 85) represent the less familiar meaning.

German, to the one order: subject, predicate, object. The reason, of course, is that paucity of inflectional and unambiguous forms makes it necessary to adhere strictly to a prescribed sequence of our largely invariable words. It may be replied that there is no loss here; that if, to avoid ambiguity, we are compelled to use just one word-order, so much the better, in the interests of simplicity. But are there no useful purposes served by varying the order? It would seem that highly inflected languages have a decided advantage in this respect, in that graceful variations in expression and subtly differentiated shades of emphasis are possible in a measure which is denied to the slightly inflected language. To justify this assertion definite comparisons are necessary.

If we wish to state in English that Romulus founded Rome, there is only one straightforward way of doing it: "Romulus founded Rome."[59] To reverse subject and object—"Rome founded Romulus"—is to violate idiom, if not truth. The Latin order that most nearly corresponds to the English subject, predicate, object is subject, object, predicate: *Romulus Romam condidit.* Here, however, the order is not necessitated by the ambiguous appearance of the subject and of the object, for *Romulus* is clearly marked as a nominative and *Romam* just as clearly as an accusative. The Latin order, in fact, is subject to variation to express minor shades of emphasis. Thus, *Romam Romulus condidit* is not so much "Romulus founded Rome" as "Rome was founded by Romulus," but it has the advantage of avoiding the awkward passive

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[59] The illustration is suggested by Classen, *Outlines of the History of the English Language*, pp. 15 and 16.

construction; and while *Condidit Romulus Romam* can be turned into English as "The founding of Rome was done by Romulus," the eight English words are at best a clumsy paraphrase of the three Latin ones.

A further illustration of a kind of rhetorical effectiveness that is impossible to the language of few inflections is such a Latin sentence as this: *Astra regunt homines, sed astra regit Deus.* The neat parallelism of the Latin is not to be taken over in English, for "The stars rule men, but God rules the stars" varies the position of "the stars," while "The stars rule men, but the stars are ruled by God" introduces the passive voice in the second clause and thus sacrifices a certain unity of expression.

It is evident, then, that there *is* a real disadvantage to English in being restricted, through inflectional simplicity, to a regular word-order. That writers of English have found this restriction irksome is attested by the occasional attempts, particularly in poetry (where the exigencies of rhyme and metre may be more responsible than a desire for grace or emphasis), to get away from it. A stock illustration is this line in Gray's *Elegy*:[60]

And all the air a solemn stillness holds,

where it is impossible to tell which of the two nouns that precede the predicate is subject and which is object. Inversions of all sorts, in prose as well as in poetry, are likely to run the risk of similar ambiguity; at best, they occasion difficulty or hesitation for the reader.

The necessity for a set word-order in Modern English extends to the position of modifying words in the sentence. Modifying words must not only be placed in close proximity to the words modified; almost always

[60] Quoted, for example, in Jespersen, *Language*, p. 345.

they directly precede such words. The split infinitive, as we shall see, exhibits this principle in operation and taking precedence over another convention. The usual position of the qualifying adjective is another illustration. Such a line of Chaucer's as this:

Thebes with his olde walles wyde[61]

typifies the older, freer order—the noun posed between the two modifying adjectives, not preceded by both. Here the vestige of adjective declension, the plural final *-e*'s, suffices to attach them visibly to the plural noun. It is the loss of these endings that eventually makes it necessary to alter the position of the adjectives, so that their function is made evident by position alone, not at all by form. In Modern English there is, of course, no other order than "its old, broad walls." Occasional exceptions[62] like Kipling's title *Captains Courageous* and such advertising phrases as "suburb superb" and "house beautiful" call attention to themselves by their very oddity.

So much for the debit side of the ledger. What has been pointed out is that inflectional simplification involves above everything else the danger of ambiguity and necessitates a careful observance of strict rules as to the order of words in the sentence, in order to lessen that danger. Before leaving this point, however, it may be added that even highly inflected languages are not entirely free from the possibility of ambiguity. It is clear that no language can escape this danger so long as

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[61] "Knight's Tale," l. 1880. *Cf.* also a favorite Chaucerian phrase: "my blisful lady free" (i.e., "my blessed, generous lady").

[62] Professor G. G. Struble suggests another type of exception: "twelve good men and true."

there is any duplication of form. The Latin phrase *Malo malo malo malo,* translated by the jingle

> I'd rather be
> In an apple tree
> Than a bad man
> In adversitee,

may serve to illustrate, rather grotesquely, the possibilities of duplication of forms in a highly inflected language. The reader may be interested, too, in working out the various possible translations of a sentence suggested by Jespersen[63]: *Horatius et Virgilius poetae Varii amici erant.* The amazing variety of possible meanings here is of course dependent on two facts: *-ae* and *-i* may be either genitive singular or nominative plural endings; and the Latin word-order is not at all a fixed one. We are not to suppose, then, that a high state of inflection is a guarantee against ambiguity any more than we are obliged to feel that the resulting economy in numbers of words is an unqualified blessing.

Turning to the positive merits of the language of few inflections, it would appear that, from the present point of view, the most conspicuous advantage that a language like English enjoys over one like Latin is the comparatively small place given to the expression of grammatical or syntactical ideas. If simplicity can sometimes be connected with ambiguity, it can also be connected with the suppression of the irrelevant. When we say "the inflections disappeared," we express the idea of plurality once, and once only, in the *-s* ending of the noun; but a more highly inflected language would express it twice more—in the form of the article and in

[63] *Language,* p. 343.

the ending of the verb. The needless repetitions, going far beyond the demands of clarity, such as are common in a synthetic language, are largely eliminated. Bradley[64] cites, as a "somewhat extreme instance" of the obtrusion of grammar on the attention, the Latin phrase *duōrum bonōrum virōrum*. Here the attention is certainly unduly distracted from the really important parts of the phrase, the *du-*, *bon-*, and *vir-*, to the three sonorous (and accented) *-ōrum*'s, which after all mean nothing more than "masculine, genitive, plural." Bradley felicitously labels the relative absence of this sort of thing in English its "noiseless grammatical machinery."

The Latin phrase just quoted suggests still other aspects of the contrast between the synthetic and the analytic types of expression. If, beneath

duōrum bonōrum virōrum,

we set

of two good men,

we observe that the greater diffusion of English, usually assumed to exist, is present, if merely numbers of words are counted; there are, that is to say, four words of English as against three of Latin. Actually, however, more space is required for the Latin phrase, and more syllables (in the proportion of nine to four) are present in it. Jespersen[65] ingeniously advances the formula $axyz + bxyz + cxyz$ (in which a, b, and c stand for root ideas, and x, y, and z for inflectional ideas) to suggest the synthetic, and $(a + b + c)xyz$ to suggest the analytic, method of expression. The Latin phrase mentioned above is a concrete illustration of the first formula, while

[64] *Making of English*, p. 77.
[65] *Language*, p. 351.

the English "of two good men" is true to the analytic ideal in doing away with the repetition of the common factors. Thus, case is expressed but once, through the preposition *of;* number is expressed but once, through the plural form of *men;* and gender is not expressed at all—and there is nothing to regret about its absence.

The elimination of all inflectional distinctions in the adjective, the definite article, and the possessive pronoun is perhaps one of the most obvious and least debatable advantages of inflectional simplification. Surely it is a clear gain for English to be able to say "the wife and children" rather than *la femme et les enfants*, or "my father and mother" rather than *mein Vater und meine Mutter.* The gain as compared with German is greater than as compared with French, for German has, in addition to the distinction for number that it shares with French, a more elaborate set of distinctions for case. Thus *mit oder ohne* cannot be used with the same freedom as *with or without* or *sans ou avec*, for the reason that *mit* is followed by the dative case and *ohne* by the accusative. English is, however, superior to both French and German in the greater ease with which the parts of speech just mentioned can be used—for still another reason: the leveling of inflectional distinction has been accompanied by the substitution of natural for grammatical gender. "For this irrational distinction," as Logan Pearsall Smith puts it,[66] " . . . is yet found, as a survival of barbarism and a useless burden to the memory, in all the other well-known languages of Europe."

Among the advantages accruing to the language through inflectional leveling it seems justifiable, on the

[66] *The English Language*, p. 14.

whole, to list the shortening of words that has largely been brought about in this way. To strip the roots of words free from syllables that express frequently irrelevant grammatical relations must be reckoned a benefit. And if the effect of this, especially on our native vocabulary, is to produce many monosyllables, the process still need not be regretted. After all, the Anglo-Saxon monosyllable is quite likely, in practice, to be ranged side by side with the borrowed polysyllable, and the contrast is often admirable and effective. Then, too, every student of English literature must be aware of the splendid use that has been made of monosyllables alone. The matter will be referred to again, so that this point need not be labored here; but perhaps a single example may be mentioned. The marvelously poignant last line of Milton's sonnet "To his Deceased Wife":

I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night

surely owes part of its effectiveness to the slow movement that the succession of weighty monosyllables entails.

To sum up, then: it has been argued that the simplification of English inflections, proceeding of course hand in hand with phonetic obscurings and with the discarding of grammatical gender, has meant the triumph of analysis—a triumph that differentiates English in degree if not in kind from other European tongues. The elimination of the superfluous and the development of the most economical and direct means of expression are victories of no mean consequence. One last question still suggests itself about the process as a whole: Has inflectional simplification run its course in English, or are we to regard the language of the present and the future as being

susceptible of it in the same measure as the language of the past?

The latter part of our question evidently answers itself. There can scarcely be the same measure of inflectional leveling in the future that there has been in the past for the obvious reason that there is far less room for it in Modern English than there was in Old English. Theoretically, of course, there is still opportunity for it in many places. We might, for example, make all plural nouns end in *-s*, and all preterits of verbs end in *-ed:* we might say *mans* instead of *men*, and *ringed* instead of *rang*. Here, however, it is evident that the powerful counter-influence to the trend toward regularity and uniformity is habit or custom, particularly well-established and unassailable in forms that are in constant use. Revolutionary changes of the sort suggested are not in the least likely in any time that we can at present foresee. What can be expected in the way of inflectional simplification is less spectacular: the reducing of three principal parts for verbs like *swim* and *drink*, for example, to two by the leveling of the distinctive form of the past participle to agree with that of the simple preterit. Colloquial language, as we have seen, has already made these changes. Colloquial speech tends also to eliminate the distinction between the two auxiliaries of the future tense, and to destroy a special accusative form for *who*. Perhaps, too, the tendency, sometimes evident even in educated speech, to level the distinctive third person singular of *doesn't he* to *don't he*, on the analogy of the other forms of the conjugation, may be thought of as an additional illustration. On the whole, however, we are probably justified in thinking of inflectional leveling as a historical phenomenon that has well-nigh reached the

limit of its operation. It may, in the future, wear away this or that inflectional excrescence that still protrudes, but it is bitterly opposed by the teaching of the schools, and this, with the smaller field that is still open to its influence, will restrict its results to exceedingly limited dimensions. Theoretical considerations of economy, it must be added, have small weight against educational conservatism and long-established custom. It can be argued that the *-s* ending of the third person singular present tense of verbs in general and the anomalous forms of the verb *be* are impediments to the free and facile expression of thought. Likewise, as has more than once been pointed out, it would be logical to eliminate *these* and *those* as special plural forms (on the analogy of *the* or of *my*, *your*, or *his*). Nevertheless, there is not the slightest likelihood of these changes taking place. On the whole, even from the angle of theory, the best and most desirable simplifications have already been made. Inflectional leveling will be less successful in the future because it has been so successful in the past.

References for Further Reading

The histories of the English language referred to on page 37 (Chapter II) or page 64 (Chapter III), and, in addition:

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CHAPTER VI

English Sounds and Their History

FOR even the most cursory survey of the sounds of our speech and their use in the language of the past and the present, recourse to a phonetic alphabet is virtually inevitable. The reason, of course, is that while all existing alphabets are inadequate to the task of indicating, with complete accuracy, the actual sounds of speech, and while the spelling of all languages is to some degree unphonetic, these shortcomings are, in Modern English, peculiarly acute. It is to be observed, however, that the difference is rather one of degree than of kind. Perhaps we are accustomed to think of Italian as standing at the opposite end of the scale from English, among modern European languages, in that its spelling is as reliable a guide to its pronunciation as that of English is unreliable. But if a phonetic alphabet implies a single and invariable meaning for every symbol, one has only to observe the inconsistent use of *c* and *g* in such proper names as *Galli-Curci* and *Giovanni Boccaccio* in order to realize that Italian too falls short of the phonetic ideal. It is equally clear, nevertheless, that if the spelling of Italian is not altogether satisfactory, from the present point of view, that of Modern English may fairly be described as totally, and indeed almost ludicrously, unsatisfactory. To use a phonetic alphabet for the discussion, on the printed page, of English sounds, past and present, is therefore imperative.

A phonetic alphabet may be invented for more than one purpose. It may be intended as a complete substitute for our ordinary alphabet; the eventual goal of the systematic movement for the reformation of English spelling, promoted by the Simplified Spelling Board, is the replacing of our present alphabet with a phonetic one. More frequently, however, the use of a phonetic alphabet has the less ambitious purpose of serving, purely as a temporary expedient, to present the sounds of speech in a clear and unambiguous fashion. Such is the use that will be made of a phonetic alphabet in the following pages. For our purpose, too, it is unnecessary to aim at the highest degree of precision in differentiating among sounds. What phoneticians describe as a "broad" rather than a "narrow" system of notation will therefore serve. The basis of such a system, almost necessarily, is the alphabet of the International Phonetic Association, with whatever minor modifications seem desirable for the needs of an elementary discussion of phonetics, which will emphasize, of course, Modern English and, more particularly, present American pronunciation.

Ideally, one might begin with an entire reconstruction of the present alphabet. The Roman letters that, in the sixth century, superseded the runic alphabet used by the Germanic invaders are not particularly successful in expressing the relation between one consonantal sound and another. It is true that *m* and *n* do imply, by their appropriate similarity in form, a certain real parallelism in the sounds which these symbols indicate. These two, however, are the exception. As we shall see in a moment, *t-d*, *k-g*, *f-v*, and so forth, stand for paired sounds that ought, logically, to be represented by pairs of similar but differentiated symbols. The symbols of Pitman

shorthand (ıl,_ _,ᵕᵕ) are, from this point of view, very much better. The conventional symbols, however, are so thoroughly established in general European use that the International Phonetic Alphabet could scarcely discard such of them as have a relatively standard meaning. For vowels too, most European languages (not, however, Modern English) agree fairly well on certain basic sounds that can be represented by generally understood symbols. The so-called Continental values are therefore the starting point for the indication of the vowels in our phonetic alphabet. To these letters must be added, for the vowels, additional symbols to stand for some at least of the many vocalic sounds that the five basic symbols do not unequivocally represent; and, for the consonants, additional symbols to stand for elementary sounds—like those represented by *sh* (in *she*) and *ng* (in *sing*)—that nevertheless have no place in the usual alphabet.

A possible alternative to such a scheme as that of the International Phonetic Alphabet is to follow the system used in many of our best dictionaries, and to indicate pronunciation so far as possible without respelling—by employing the diacritical markings, for example, of the Websterian system of notation. Phoneticians, however, are almost unanimous in decrying the use of these markings as unscientific and as thoroughly misleading in that they continually suggest a relation that does not exist between present-day spelling and pronunciation. Their familiarity to many Americans, which has come about through their use in dictionaries, can only be deplored. Whatever small trouble the memorizing of the phonetic alphabet entails, the reader may be assured that the time spent in mastering it will be well spent, for

it will give him the key to reading most of the recent works on phonetics that are best worth reading. However, before proceeding to the description and classification of English sounds, which will involve the use of phonetic symbols, it will be convenient to glance very briefly at the physiology of sound production.

It is conceivable that speech sound may be produced by the inhalation as well as the exhalation of the breath; certain African tongues, for example, are said to employ different varieties of inhalation, and even in English, its use in certain exclamations is not unfamiliar. This possibility may, however, be virtually excluded if our discussion is to be limited to the normal sounds of English speech. We may assume, then, that the sounds of speech are produced by breath which is emitted from the lungs and which passes through the larynx and finally emerges from the oral or the nasal cavity. If the breath is entirely unmodified in its passage, the result is an inaudible, or almost inaudible, sound. This is the sound of ordinary breathing; when the breath is emitted with more force than usual, it becomes the sound [h].[1] To produce any other speech sound, however, there must be modification of the air which is expelled from the lungs. This modification may take place in either or both of two places: the larynx and the resonance chamber—by which latter term is meant the general cavity of the mouth and of the nose.

Before continuing with the idea of modification, however, it will be useful to go back a step. The breath, which may be modified in the larynx or in the resonance

[1] Brackets are used here and elsewhere to indicate that the letters included within them are to be understood as phonetic symbols.

chamber, is furnished by the lungs. This then is the first function of the lungs: to provide the raw material of speech sound. Their second function is to furnish the breath in varying degrees of force, to impart to speech the quality which we know as *stress*. This, as we have seen, is of primary and peculiar importance in the Teutonic languages, since the Teutonic accent is entirely a matter of stress, and since the English habit of overstressing certain syllables and understressing others has largely contributed to the inflectional leveling of Modern English. The whole system of Teutonic versification, too, is built on the distinction between the stressed and the unstressed syllable.

From the lungs, the air passes through the bronchial tubes and the trachea (windpipe), to the latter of which is attached, on the top, the larynx or voice-box. The breath then emerges from the glottis, or rift between the membranes of the larynx. These membranes are called the vocal cords. If the glottal rift is wide, the breath passes through without causing the vocal cords to vibrate, and the resulting sound is merely unmodified breathing.[2] If, however, the rift is made smaller by the tautness of the vocal cords, the cords vibrate and the quality known as *voice* is imparted to speech. This happens in the production of all vowels, and in the production of the voiced, as opposed to the breath (or voiceless), consonants. The action of the vocal cords likewise imparts another general quality (besides voice) to the breath used in language. This is *pitch*, the distinction between a high and a low sound (as these terms are used in music). The rate of vibration of the vocal cords controls the

[2] Or [h], as noted above.

pitch, rapid vibration making for high sounds and slow vibration for low sounds. The reader is probably familiar with the way in which a violin string may be made to give forth a higher and higher tone as its length is diminished by the fingers of the player, and as the rate of vibration is thereby increased. However, the parallel with the vocal cords is misleading if it suggests a similar picture of strings freely vibrating in space: the vocal cords are of course membranes attached to the sides of the larynx. It should be added too that while distinctions of pitch are of considerable importance in many languages—the original Indo-European accent is thought to have been a matter of pitch rather than stress, and certain languages (like Chinese) utilize pitch[3] as a means of distinguishing the meaning of one word from another—it plays in English, and in the Teutonic languages generally, a much less significant part than stress.

So far, we have been concerned with general qualities—stress, voice, and pitch—that are imparted to speech sound by the action of the lungs or of the larynx. The resonance chamber, on the other hand, is the place where the individual differences that separate one consonant from another and one vowel from another are made. The breath passes from the larynx into the pharynx, and is then expelled from the mouth or, in the case of the nasals [m], [n], and [ŋ], from the nose. The principal modifiers of the oral cavity and those that give the final differentiations to speech sound are these: the soft palate (or velum), which can be raised to shut off

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[3] In the Cantonese dialect, eight degrees of pitch are said to be distinguished.

the nasal cavity; the hard palate, which is the roof of the mouth from about the middle to the gums; the gums (or alveoli); the teeth, upper and lower; the tongue; and the lips. The parts that these organs play in the formation of speech sound will be indicated in the description and classification of the vowels and consonants.

To divide the sounds of speech into vowels and consonants is the usual custom, but the basis of this distinction is by no means as obvious as might, at first sight, appear. Though it is evident that all vowels are voiced, it clearly will not do to describe vowels as the voiced sounds and consonants as the breath sounds, for such consonants as [b] and [v] are also voiced. On the other hand, it just as clearly will not serve to describe vowels as the prolonged sounds and consonants as the momentary sounds, for such consonants as [f] and [s] are capable of indefinite prolongation. The most useful approach toward separating the vowels from the consonants, on the whole, would seem to be to conceive of all speech sound as due to some degree and kind of obstruction which is offered to the breath. If the obstruction is entirely in the larynx, and the breath passes through the resonance chamber without audible friction, the resulting sound is a vowel. If, on the other hand, there is obstruction in the resonance chamber which causes complete or partial stoppage of the breath, and hence audible friction, the resulting sound is a consonant. Vowels are then, on the whole, open or unobstructed sounds, and consonants, on the whole, narrowed or obstructed sounds. Yet [h], the one sound entirely unobstructed (even in the larynx) and therefore completely open, is nevertheless listed among the consonants. For a demonstration of the shadowy line that

separates the vowel from the consonant, one may also consider how the sound indicated in spelling by the symbol *r* may have so little friction that the consonant imperceptibly shades into the vowel.

The differentiation just suggested has, however, a sufficient degree of reality—to say nothing of the force of common habits of thought—to commend its use here to the extent of classifying consonants and vowels separately rather than as a single body of sounds. Consonants are the more readily classified, because audible friction implies a fairly definite place and kind of obstruction that can, usually, be adequately identified. The three questions that anything like a complete description of a consonant makes necessary are these: (1) Do the vocal cords vibrate, or do they not? (2) Is the breath completely or only partially stopped? (3) Where and how is the final modification provided in the resonance chamber?

The first two questions involve no special difficulty or need for elaboration. With a very little practice, it is easy to discern whether a given consonant is voiced or not. The readiest test,[4] perhaps, is to frame one's vocal organs to pronounce a given consonant; do not make the sound audible, but observe whether there is or is not tension in the larynx. Thus when one is about to, but does not, pronounce [b], he should be able to feel strain in two places—the lips and the throat. The corresponding breath consonant [p] provides the same feeling in the lips, but not in the throat. A similar contrast is produced by [d] and [t], [g] and [k], [v] and

[4] Another test that is frequently recommended is to pronounce breathed and voiced sounds while one's ears are stopped; a buzzing sound should be audible in the latter case, but not in the former.

[f], [z] and [s], and so forth. This is the distinction between voice and breath. Likewise, the difference between the stop and the continuant is readily apparent. The breath is temporarily but completely checked in pronouncing such consonants as [b], [p], [d], and [k]; after its stoppage, it is allowed to burst forth in a brief explosion. These are the stops. The continuants,[5] on the other hand—[s], [v], [ʒ], and so forth—are made by narrowing the aperture through which the breath emerges, without closing it entirely, so that the breath comes forth as a continuous rather than a momentary sound.

To answer the third question—that of the how and the where—implies a complete classification of consonants. Before giving this, it will be well to distinguish the two sets of terms that must be used in this twofold description: those that name the organs active in the articulation, and those that state the manner in which the articulation occurs. A simple system of terminology, for the first point, includes (with certain subdivisions) such terms as labials, dentals, palatals, and velars; for the second point, it includes—besides stops and continuants—such terms as nasals, laterals, and fricatives. To go into further detail, the labials or lip-sounds include both bilabials, or sounds in which both lips are active, and the labiodentals, or sounds formed between the

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[5] The term *continuant* is avoided by some writers because it seems to imply that *only* these sounds can be varied in length, whereas actually "stops" can be held as long as "continuants," and in this sense a "stop" may *be* a "continuant." To avoid whatever contradiction exists here, *fricative* more satisfactorily designates most of the sounds that are often called continuants; but fricatives do not include laterals or nasals. What is to be emphasized, at any rate, is that the distinction between *stop* and *continuant* is less absolute than the terms imply.

lower lip and the upper teeth; the dentals are more accurately subdivided into the less common (in English) pre-dentals, sounds in the production of which the tip or blade of the tongue[6] touches the upper teeth, and the alveolars (or post-dentals), sounds articulated against the gums or teeth-ridge by the blade or tip of the tongue; the palatals are the sounds made by the front of the tongue against the hard palate; and the velars are those made by the back of the tongue against the soft palate. As to the other set of terms, those descriptive of the *manner* rather than the place of articulation, the nasals or nose-sounds are those in the production of which the soft palate is lowered so that the breath passes out through the nose only, the oral cavity being completely closed at some point; the laterals or side-sounds are those in which an obstacle in the middle of the mouth makes it necessary for the breath to emerge from the two sides rather than the center; the fricatives are those in which the narrowing of the passage above the tongue makes the breath escape with a whistling, puffing, or hissing sound.

From the points of view that have been indicated, then, the principal consonants of English may be arranged as in the following diagram.[7] Where two consonants are enclosed in parentheses, the first is the breath sound and the second the voiced sound; the others, those given separately, are all voiced.

[6] For phonetic purposes, the upper surface of the tongue is conceived as having three principal parts: the part opposite the gums when the tongue is in the position of rest is called the *blade*, and this includes the extremity, or tip; the part opposite the hard palate is called the *front;* and the part opposite the soft palate is called the *back*.

[7] This classification follows chiefly, with minor modifications and simplifications, those given by Professor Daniel Jones in *The Pronunciation of English*, p. 9, and *An Outline of English Phonetics*, p. 15.

		Labial		Dental		Palatal	Velar
		Bi-labial	*Labio-dental*	*Pre-dental*	*Alve-olar*		
Stops		(p, b)			(t, d)		(k, g)
Continuants	nasal	m			n		ŋ
	lateral				l		
	fricative		(f, v)	(θ, ð)	(s, z) (ʃ, ʒ) r[8]	j	

The sounds least satisfactory to classify according to this scheme, and hence those omitted for the present, are the thoroughly ambiguous [h] and the semivowels [w] and [ʍ]. It might be added that [j] and [r], in their usual American treatment, are perhaps better described as semivowel glides (tongue-glides, however, rather than lip-glides like [w] and [ʍ]), and therefore are with some misgiving classified on our chart as fricative consonants. By a *glide* is meant a consonant in the articulation of which the vocal organs are continually changing; it is neither a pure stop nor a pure continuant, and it bears indeed almost as much affinity to a vowel as to a consonant. Further attention will be given to the sounds just mentioned after the other consonants have been described in some detail.

Of the phonetic symbols that have been used in the foregoing catalog, [p], [b], [t], [d], [k], [g], [m], [n], [l],

[8] This symbol stands, not for the rolled or trilled *r*, as it does in the International Phonetic Alphabet, but for the American *r* described on p. 178.

[f], [v], [s], [z], [w], and [r] are familiar from their use in the ordinary spelling of English. [j], however, has a special use—that commonly represented in the usual spelling by *y* rather than by *j* (which is phonetically a double consonant, [dʒ]). The only new symbols are [ʍ], [ŋ], [θ], [ð], [ʃ], and [ʒ]. They all stand for familiar sounds in English pronunciation, but the first five are represented in the conventional spelling by two symbols each, while the last lacks a corresponding letter or letters in the alphabet. For phonetic purposes, therefore, new symbols have had to be created. [ʍ] corresponds to the spelling *wh* (in Old English, *hw*), and [ŋ] to *ng* (where the two letters represent a single sound, as in *sing*). [θ] and [ð] are, respectively, the voiceless and voiced values of the digraph *th*—the first as in *thigh*, the second as in *thy*. [ʃ] is conventionally represented by *sh*, as in *shall*, *wash*, and so forth; its voiced equivalent is [ʒ], the sound occurring in such words as *pleasure* and *azure*.

The consonants will now be reviewed in somewhat greater detail and grouped, in part at least, according to another terminology. We may begin with the series of stops. [p] is the voiceless lip-stop and [b] the corresponding voiced sound. [t] is the voiceless alveolar point-stop (that is, the stop formed by the point or tip of the tongue touching the upper gums); [d] is the corresponding voiced sound. In French and German, [t] and [d] are dentals in the stricter sense, for in their formation the point of the tongue touches the teeth rather than the gums. The remaining stops are [k] and [g], respectively the voiceless and the voiced back sounds—that is to say, sounds articulated by the back of the tongue against the soft palate. This is the meaning of "velar," and accounts for the position of [k] and

[g] in our chart. A more complete classification, however, would have to discriminate between the initial consonants of *coop* and *keep*, and similarly between those of *goose* and *geese*. *Coop* and *goose* include the sounds we have described (back soft-palatal stops), but the corresponding sounds in *keep* and *geese* are not velar but hard-palatal—in other words, the stops articulated by the front of the tongue against the hard palate. The explanation, of course, is that the precise value of [k] or [g] is determined by its vocalic surroundings: the sound shifts from back to front with the accompanying vowel. In our alphabet, therefore, [k] and [g] are not completely unambiguous symbols.

The nasals will be referred to next. All are voiced and continuant. [m] is a lip, [n] a point, and [ŋ]—variable like [g]—a front or a back, sound. In each case, to put it differently, there is a closure of the oral cavity: by the lips, by the point of the tongue against the gums, by the front of the tongue against the hard palate, or by the back of the tongue against the soft palate.[9] While the oral cavity is thus completely stopped, the breath is allowed to escape through the nose. It will be noticed also that the conformation of the oral cavity for [m] is like that for [b], and that [n] and [d] and [n̪] and [g] likewise are parallel. This explains why it is that when one has a cold, the nasals tend to be replaced by the corresponding (voiced) stops; one says [sprɪg] instead of [sprɪŋ], and [bɑɪ do:z] instead of [mɑɪ no:z], for the reason that the stoppage of the nasal passages transforms what should be nasals into oral and stopped sounds. As has been said, the symbol [ŋ] is necessarily used in order

[9] For the last differentiation, compare the [ŋ] in *sing* with that in *song*.

to represent a single sound by a single symbol. The conventional spelling is unsatisfactory, too, in that the *ng* may sometimes stand for [ŋg] as well as [ŋ]; the former is represented in the pronunciation of *finger*, and the latter in that of *singer*.[10] It will be noticed also that "dropping the *g*"[11] is far from being the explanation of what happens when "going hunting" is transformed into "goin' huntin'"; this is of course not the dropping of a consonant, but the substitution of one nasal for another ([n] for [ŋ]).

The one lateral consonant is [l]. It may be described as a voiced alveolar point continuant. Normally, in its production, the tongue-tip is placed against the roots of the upper teeth and the blade against the gums just above them, with a channel left on each side of the tongue for the passage of the breath. With some speakers, however, the breath emerges from one side only. [l] is a consonant that sometimes approximates a vowel, for its formation varies with the vocalic setting. Thus, while the point continues to touch the gums, the back of the tongue may assume various vowel positions. This is particularly noticeable when [l] is final, as in such a word as *people*. The pronunciation, sometimes called "dark *l*," and represented by the spelling *peepul*, illustrates the *u*-type of [l]—the sound, that is to say, that approximates the vowel [ʌ]. The vocalic character of [l] is also exemplified in the fact that it may carry a syllable: phoneticians recognize a syllabic [l] in *battle*, *little*, and

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[10] In German, however, *Finger* and *Singer* are alike in this respect.

[11] In Galsworthy's *Maid in Waiting*, this tendency in Aunt Em's speech is explained through her having been at a school "where an undropped *g* was worse than a dropped *h*"; it is neatly put but phonetically inadmissible.

apple which is parallel to syllabic [n] and [r][12] in such words as *heaven* and *dinner*. What makes this possible is of course the fact that [l] has both comparatively high sonority and relatively little friction.

The fricatives form the most numerous group of consonants. In the pronunciation of [f] and [v], the lower lip and upper teeth are brought together, and the breath emerges either through the openings between the teeth or, if this is impossible, through a narrow opening between the edges of the teeth and the lip. [f] may therefore be called the voiceless lip-teeth continuant and [v] the corresponding voiced sound. In [θ] and [ð], the point of contact is between the upper teeth and either the tip or the blade of the tongue. The air stream passes either through a narrow opening between the tongue and teeth or through the interstices of the teeth. [θ], then, may be described as the voiceless blade-teeth (or point-interdental) continuant; [ð] is the voiced equivalent. It will be observed that the formation of [f] and [θ] and of [v] and [ð] is much alike: in both pairs of sounds, the column of air emerges either from between the upper teeth or through a narrow passage between the teeth-edges and either the lower lip or the tongue blade. This accounts for the frequent substitution by children of [f] for [θ] and [v] for [ð], in words like *think* and *with*.

The gums as well as the teeth are used in the formation of the sibilant[13] fricatives [s], [z], [ʃ], and [ʒ]. There are more ways than one to form each of these sounds, but

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[12] E. Kruisinga (*Handbook of Present-Day English*, Part I, p. 23) distinguishes a group of sounds that form "an intermediate class between consonants and vowels." These sounds—[m, n, ŋ, l, r]—he calls by the suggestive but impossibly ugly term "vowellikes."

[13] Or "hissing."

the attempt will be made to describe the *typical* formation of each. For [s], the tongue-tip approaches but does not touch the upper teeth, while the edges of the blade are in light contact with the gums; the hissing sound is produced by the air being expelled in a narrow stream above the tongue and between the edges of the lower and the upper teeth. [s] may be called the voiceless blade-gum continuant, and [z] the voiced equivalent. The other sibilants, [ʃ] and [ʒ], may be labelled similarly, the former of course being the voiceless and the latter the voiced sound. In the formation of [ʃ] and [ʒ], however, the tongue is lower and farther back than for [s] and [z], and its point is more blunted. The channel over the blade for the emission of breath is therefore broader and deeper, and the breath emerges with a "hushing" rather than a "hissing" sound. The two sounds [ʃ] and [ʒ] are represented in conventional spelling in a variety of ways, the one appearing, for example, in *shoe, sugar, chandelier, mission, motion,* and *anxious,* and the other in *delusion, azure, leisure,* and *massage.*

No other consonant presents so much difficulty and so much variety as that represented in the conventional spelling by the symbol *r*. This symbol stands, in different words or in the pronunciation of different localities, for sounds that vary from one made in the back of the mouth by the tapping of the uvula (the "Northumbrian burr") to one that has so little friction that it has no consonantal quality at all. It frequently stands, indeed, for a sound that is altogether lost in Modern English. Hence the statement, always puzzling at first to American readers, but appearing in all English books on phonetics, that "in Standard English *r* is not sounded when followed by another consonant, or when final (unless

followed by a word beginning with a vowel)." By "Standard English," English phoneticians mean, of course, that of Southern Englishmen, or, as Professor Jones[14] more explicitly puts it, "that of Southern Englishmen who have been educated at the great public boarding schools." Incidentally, an American may perhaps be permitted to express wonder that the pronunciation of so small a proportion of the English-speaking world can still be "standard."

The symbol *r*, then, stands for a great number of sounds, variously designated as "burred," "rolled," "trilled," "semi-trilled," "vocalic," "glide," and "lost." For the present purpose, since we are concerned primarily with the pronunciation of present-day American English, it will be necessary to distinguish only between the two varieties of *r* that are common in general American practice. The more energetic and distinct sound, that designated here as [r], may be called the point-gum voiced fricative. In its production, the tongue-point lightly touches the upper gums; friction is created when the breath forces itself through this point of contact. This sound is present in the usual American pronunciation of *r* both initially and when preceded by a consonant —as in such words as *ring* and *throw*—and also when occurring between vowels, as in *American*. The other sound, [ɹ], is a fainter echo of [r] and tends to replace it in the speech of many Americans. It may fairly be doubted whether [ɹ] is accurately to be designated a consonant at all. In its production, the tongue point merely rises *toward* the gums, and both the point of contact and the friction incidental to [r] are absent. It

[14] *Outline of English Phonetics*, p. vi.

seems, however, proper to recognize this weak *r* as present in the general American pronunciation of such words as *bar*, *board*, and *never* ([bɑːɹ], [bɔːɹd], [nɛvəɹ]), and to distinguish between a weakening of the *r* and its complete disappearance; in the South, for example, these three words are likely to be [bɑː], [bɔːd], and [nɛvə], and in New England [ba], [bɔːd], and [nɛvə].

The trilled (rolled) or semi-trilled *r* is so infrequent in American speech as to make it unnecessary to use a special symbol for it. Englishmen, however, ordinarily use the semi-trilled *r* (accomplished by a single tap of the tongue against the hard palate just above the gums) when *r* is intervocalic; thus, the word *American* as pronounced by an Englishman is different from the same word as spoken by an American in the single trill given to the *r* as well as in the sharper enunciation of the *e*. On the other hand, Englishmen commonly omit the final *r* (as in *car*, *star*, and *far*) which is made [ɹ] by Americans. A prolonged trill or roll of the *r* is characteristic of Scotch pronunciation, but the prolonged *r* heard in the speech of Americans of the Middle West and the North Central states is not usually a trilled but a hard-palatal or back *r*, made by curving back the point of the tongue toward the middle of the hard palate.[15] One last variety of the American *r* may be noted: that associated with the speech of New York City and its immediate vicinity. This, called by Kipling the "unreproducible slid *r*," and especially noticeable in such words as *earl*, *girl*, *first*, and *hurt*,[16] is usually indicated (though not quite accurately) by dialect writers through

[15] Professor C. K. Thomas, *American Speech*, X, 2 (April, 1935), p. 111, believes that a low-point high-mid *r* is also common in the United States.

[16] See Mencken, pp. 367–368, and Menner, R. J., *American Speech*, XII, 3 (Oct., 1937), pp. 169–171.

a substitution of the diphthong *oi*, phonetically [ɔɪ]—or, more accurately, [əɪ]—for *r* (and the vowel preceding).

A final point about the consonant *r* is perhaps worth adding—its affinity for *l* and its tendency to interchange with it. The symbols *l* and *r* do not perhaps, at first sight, seem to stand for sounds that should be likely to be confused, but we have seen that [r] and [l] are produced in very similar ways. It is not to be wondered at, then, that those to whom one or both sounds are strange should have difficulty with them. The tendency of the Chinaman in speaking English to transform all *r*'s into *l*'s—*Fliday* for *Friday*, *'Melican* for *American*—is well known; to a Japanese ear, too, it is evident that *l* and *r* are identical.[17] Helen Keller, learning to pronounce not, as is generally done, by imitating the spoken sounds, but rather by learning how the vocal organs frame the sounds, found that to discriminate between *l* and *r* was the final difficulty to be overcome.[18] The phenomenon that has been called the "shift of liquids"[19]—the tendency of *r* and *l* to interchange—is a helpful principle in etymological study, for it at once relates words that otherwise seem quite distinct from one another. A striking instance is the group of words for "star" in various European languages. *Star* is at once recognized as a cognate of Latin *stella* if one has this principle in mind—and even more surely if one recalls that the Middle English form is *sterre* (O. E. *steorra*). Then there is the Greek *ἀστήρ* (familiar in English in

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[17] Louise Taylor, "Across the Pacific—Cerebrally," *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 149, No. 3 (March, 1932), p. 349.

[18] *Story of My Life*, New York (Doubleday), 1903.

[19] *Liquid* is a term sometimes applied to *l* and *r* alone, and sometimes to other vowel-like consonants.

the name of the flower *aster* and in such compounds as *disaster* and *astronomy*); the Latin form, too, is familiar in English words like *stellar* and *constellation;* the French *étoile* is from an Old French *esteile,* still used in English as the proper name *Estelle* side by side with the Latin *Stella;* the German form retains the *r*: *Stern.* Other instances are the Modern French word for "nightingale," *rossignol,* as compared with the Old French *lossignol;* and the English word *colonel,* still spelled with the *l* though pronounced with the *r.* Finally, variant forms of proper names, such as *Mary* and *Molly, Katharine* and *Kathleen, Sara* and *Sally,* may be mentioned.

Like [r] (in some of its pronunciations), [j] is a tongue-glide which approximates a vocalic sound. It is, therefore, frequently called a semivowel. In its production, the breath passes through a narrow aperture between the front of the tongue and the hard palate. Since the vocal cords vibrate, the sound may be called a voiced front fricative. [j] is most clearly a fricative consonant when it is followed by the high front vowel [i:], as in the word *ye.* Often it seems to be merely a manner of beginning a vowel[20] and to take its color entirely from the particular vowel which it precedes. It is evident, for example, that before a back vowel, as in *yawl* [jɔ:l], the [j] is not in the same position as in *ye* [ji:]: it is not only further back, but it is also definitely less a fricative consonant, for it has the open, unobstructed character of the vowel.

There remain (besides the ambiguous [h]) the sounds [w] and [ʍ], often also called, like [j], semivowels. The former, particularly, is obviously very like the vowel [u:], since in its formation, the back of the tongue is

[20] Kenyon, *American Pronunciation,* Ann Arbor (Wahr), 1935, p. 139.

raised toward the soft palate and the vocal cords vibrate. [w] is frequently described as the voiced lip-rounded back fricative, but it is doubtful whether it should be described as a continuant consonant in view of the fact that to prolong it is impossible. What is prolonged in the sounds associated with the spelling *w* is the following vowel (since *w*, like *y*, occurs only before vowels). It is, perhaps, more accurate to think of it as a lip-glide than as a fricative. [w] is the sound indicated not only by the spelling *w* but also by *wh*, so far as the usual pronunciation of Southern England is concerned. Jespersen says, indeed, that "a great many 'good speakers' always pronounce [w] and look upon [hw] as harsh or dialectal."[21] It is clear, however, that there is a counter-tendency, in England as well as in America, to cultivate the pronunciation [ʍ] in most words spelled with *wh*. The present writer's observation does not, however, coincide with that recorded in most American works on phonetics—to the effect that [ʍ] is the *usual* American pronunciation in most words spelled with *wh*. The schools, indeed, make a gallant effort (just how laudable must be a matter of opinion) to introduce [ʍ], but their efforts seem on the whole crowned with no more success, in natural American pronunciation, than somewhat similar efforts in favor of [ju] as opposed to [u:].[22]

[21] *A Modern English Grammar*, Part I, 13–51. Wyld remarks, *Short History of English*, New York (Dutton), 1927, p. 33, that the other sound, [ʍ], has been "introduced comparatively recently—within the last thirty and forty years—apparently through Scotch and Irish influence, backed up by the spelling. Many excellent speakers of Standard English never use the sound at all." Jones observes (*Outline of English Phonetics*, p. 4) that it is more commonly heard, in the educated speech of Southern England, from ladies than from men; and the editors of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* believe that, in the same region, it is chiefly confined to "purists in pronunciation."

[22] *Cf.* p. 236.

The symbol [ʍ], used here in deference to very general practice,[23] would seem to imply that the sound it designates is closely allied to [w]—different from it, in fact, only in being voiceless rather than voiced. This is, indeed, the usual description of it: the voiceless lip-rounded back fricative. It may, however, be questioned whether the symbol [hw] (used, for example, by Jespersen and by Kenyon) is not a more accurate designation of the sound under consideration. Professor Kenyon's description of the sound[24] as beginning "with a quick increase in the force of the breath identical with that found in the sound of [h]" seems to the present writer entirely just. If so, it is accurately characterized by the double symbol [hw] as being essentially [w] with an initial increase in stress. Conceivably, however—especially in unusually careful or emphatic enunciation—the sound may be the voiceless fricative which [ʍ] is intended to designate. Its use in England, as has been said, is often deprecated as artificial and pedantic,[25] and it is also perhaps less commonly to be heard in unforced American speech than is usually admitted.

As to [h], the last of the consonantal symbols to be discussed, Professor Krapp's observation[26] that "there are as many varieties of [h] as there are varieties of vowels before which it may stand" may be quoted. Evidently [h] is always voiceless rather than voiced; however, considering its distinctly "open" character, its usual designation as "fricative" is somewhat unsatisfactory.

[23] In the works, for example, of Jones, Ripman, Grant, Krapp, and Mrs. Aiken.

[24] *American Pronunciation*, 1924, p. 76.

[25] Ripman observes, "It is taught by professors of elocution, and is therefore commonly heard at recitals and also at amateur theatricals." *The Sounds of Spoken English*, New York (Dutton), 1914, p. 39.

[26] *Pronunciation of Standard English in America*, p. 15.

What friction there is varies from that made by the narrowing of the glottis by partly closing the vocal cords, to that made by the sudden pressure of the front of the tongue against the hard palate. The former sound is that which occurs in the ejaculatory *Ha!;* the only difference between the sound of this exclamation and that of *Ah!* is that in the one the glottis at first is half-open and later closed, while in the other (the vowel [ɑ:]) the glottis is kept closed. In the glottal [h], the tongue is in the normal or neutral position, but an entirely different sound (though here designated by the same symbol) may be made by the contact of the tongue with the hard palate. This is the front fricative [h] that occurs in *he* [hi:]. Still more strongly fricative is the initial sound in such words as *hue, huge, human;* here it approximates, indeed, the *ch* of German *ich.* Much more commonly, however, [h] is merely unmodified breath, appropriately designated "rough breathing" by the Greeks, and perceptible only—especially medially, in such a word as *behind*—by the increased stress with which the syllable following it is pronounced. [h] may usually, therefore, be thought of less as a distinct sound than as a manner of beginning another sound.

Vowels lack the definite points of contact or friction that characterize consonants and are therefore much more difficult to classify and enumerate. To the question of how many vowels exist in the pronunciation of Modern English, the answer must vary according to the type of pronunciation described and, what is even more important, according to the fineness of the distinctions made. Thus, Sweet[27] has evolved no less than seventy-

[27] Sweet, Henry, *Primer of Phonetics* (3rd ed.), and *Sounds of English,* London (Oxford).

two distinct phonetic symbols to stand for a corresponding number of vocalic sounds. It is clear that a much less elaborate system of notation will have to suffice for our present purpose, and that only vowels that are readily perceptible as distinct sounds, and sounds current in contemporary American speech, can possibly be given a place. The readiest starting point for our discussion of vowels will be the five symbols used in the conventional alphabet: *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*. The meaning of these letters as phonetic symbols is, however, not at all accurately suggested by their use in Modern English spelling. The values—the so-called "Continental" ones—are much nearer those associated with these letters as used in Old English, or in German, Italian, or Latin. In other words, [ɑ:] is the sound of the first vowel in *father;* [e:] is the sound of the vowel in *ate;* [i:] that in *seen;* [o:] that in *note;* and [u:] that in *boot.* To these, the symbols of two other fundamental sounds for English pronunciation should be added at once: [æ] for the vowel in *hat,* and [ɔ:] for the vowel in *awe.* These seven sounds may now be associated with their positions and their formation in the mouth.

The four types of classification most readily applied to vowel sounds are high-low, front-back, tense-slack, rounded-unrounded. These terms are in large measure self-explanatory, but a word may be added as to the application of the several distinctions. Raising and lowering the lower jaw accounts for differences in height; thus, [i:] and [u:] are pronounced with the jaws nearly closed, while [e:] and [o:] require a wider opening, and [æ] and [ɔ:] still a wider one. The first pair may therefore be called the high sounds, the second the mid-sounds, and the third the low sounds. The same pairs

of vowels may be used to illustrate the front-back distinction: when [i:] and [u:] are pronounced in succession, it will be observed that the tongue is extended forward for the former, and retracted, with its tip sunk and its back raised, for the latter; similar differences hold between [e:] and [o:] and between [æ] and [ɔ:]. The tongue positions thus indicate that [i:], [e:], and [æ] are front vowels, and [u:], [o:], and [ɔ:] back vowels; the point is that in the first group the tongue-front is the highest part, and in the second the tongue-back. There are also central, or mixed, vowels, made with an intermediate part of the tongue in the highest position. To these we shall return in a moment. Of the seven sounds enumerated in the preceding paragraph, the one most doubtfully classified is [ɑ:]; it has been disputed whether this vowel, in English pronunciation, is properly classified as mid-back or low-back, or even whether it is a back vowel at all.[28]

In addition to high-low and front-back, two other types of classification have been mentioned and will be referred to briefly. The rounded-unrounded distinction gives no special difficulty. The most unmistakably rounded vowels are, in order, [u:], [ʊ] (to be defined presently), and [o:]—all back and either high or middle vowels. [o̜:] is either rounded or unrounded in American speech, while the other sounds, both those already referred to and those to be referred to, including the front, the mixed, and some of the back sounds, are

[28] *Cf.* Noël-Armfield, G., *General Phonetics* (4th ed., 1931), p. 31. On the other hand, Mrs. Aiken classifies it as not only back, but low, as compared to low-mid [ɔ] and [ɔ:] (*English Present and Past*, p. 146). To the present writer, the sound appears to be lower, but also slightly more of a front sound, than [ɔ:]. This position agrees with that assigned to [ɑ:] by Kenyon (6th ed., p. 66) and by Jones (*Outline of English Phonetics*, p. 21).

unrounded. The final differentiation, that between the tense and slack (or lax) sounds, depends on the degree of muscular tension of the tongue. In this book, the colon is used to designate vowels that are tense, which are usually also the "long" vowels, as that rather unsatisfactory term is generally understood. It will be convenient to define most of the symbols that have not yet been explained, in enumerating the various "tense-slack" pairs of vowels. Thus, the tense [i:] has its slack, and slightly lower, counterpart in [ɪ], as in *hit;* and a similar difference in tensity and position holds between the tense [e:] and the slack [ɛ], as in *set.* So too in the back of the mouth, the [u:] of *soon* is both more tense and higher than the [ʊ] of *good.* There is no necessity of using the two symbols [o:] and [o], since in American speech, at any rate, the vowel seems the same in quality and equally tense, whether in an accented syllable or not. [ɔ:] and [ɔ], however, are perceptibly different, the former being tense and normally occurring only in stressed syllables, while the latter is the slack sound, regularly shorter than [ɔ:], which occurs in such words as *autumnal* and *auspicious.* Another tense vowel that must be mentioned is the long [ɛ:], which occurs only before *r,* in such words as *there, fare,* and so forth; it is to be distinguished from [e:] not only historically but also physiologically, since it is a slightly lower front sound. There are also these slack vowels: [ʌ], as in *hut;* [a], the intermediate or compromise sound of the vowels in such words as *calf, dance,* and *path* as heard in an American pronunciation that avoids both [ɑ:] and [æ][29]; and [ə], the obscure or colorless

[29] For a discussion of this sound, which probably occurs much less frequently than is generally supposed, see p. 234.

sound that is very generally current in the modern pronunciation of unstressed syllables (as in the first of *about* and the second of *China*). Finally, one other tense vowel should be added: the [ʌ:] of "*r*-less" speech,[30] in such words as *bird* and *hurt* ([bʌ:d] and [hʌ:t]).

We may now place the vowel sounds we have enumerated in a chart indicating their positions relative to each other and to the part of the oral cavity in which they are made. Tense vowels (which are usually also "long" vowels) are designated, as has been said, by the colon. It must be understood, however, that there is no unanimity of opinion among phonologists as to several of the positions indicated here.

	Front	*Mixed*	*Back*
High	i: (*see*) ɪ (*sit*)		(*food*) u: (*book*)ʊ
Mid	e: (*place*) ɛ (*set*)	ə (*villa*) ʌ: (*dirt*)[31] ʌ (*but*)	(*note*) o:
Low	ɛ: (*fair*) æ (*hat*)	a (*fast*)[31]	(*dog*) ɔ (*awe*) ɔ: ɑ: (*father*)

So far we have assumed that vowels are simple and single sounds. In practice, however, and more frequently in the pronunciation of the South of England (as opposed both to Northern English and to American pronunciation), this is by no means the invariable rule. It is perhaps not too much to say, indeed, that in the pronunciation of Modern English in general, all the

[30] This is almost the same sound as the one sometimes represented by a variation of [ə], a symbol which is therefore omitted here in the interest of simplicity.

[31] See the previous paragraph

"long" vowels tend to become diphthongs, completely or in part. The distinction is this: a pure vowel is made with one breath impulse and with the resonance chamber in one position; a diphthong is made with one breath impulse but with an alteration of the resonance chamber in the process. There are a number of partial diphthongs, then, especially in Southern English pronunciation, which consist of a pure vowel sound followed by a much weaker vowel glide. These occur in such words as *day*, *home*, *hear*, and *four* ([deɪ, hoʊm, hiə, fɔə]). A curious illustration of this tendency in Modern English pronunciation is the advice sometimes given to German students of English to pronounce such a word as *home* as if it had two distinct syllables [ho: + ʊm], in order to counteract the Germans' tendency to use the vowel sound natural to them, the pure [o:] only.

The full diphthongs of Modern English, then—those in which the two vocalic elements are unmistakable—are these four:[32] [ɑɪ], [ɑʊ], [ju], and [ɔɪ]. Partial diphthongs ([oʊ] and [eɪ]) are also sometimes heard in the United States, and regularly in Southern England, in such words as *go*, *snow*, *day*, and *play*. It remains for us to define the full diphthongs somewhat more completely. [ɑɪ][33] is the familiar sound, commonly but quite erroneously termed "long *i*," which occurs

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[32] The colon is omitted, as it is also in the diphthongal sounds just mentioned, for the sake of simplifying the symbols; but a more accurate notation would include it. In three of the four "full" diphthongs to which reference is made (and also in [eɪ] and [oʊ]), the sign of tenseness would come after the first vowel, since all these are "falling" diphthongs; that is, diphthongs in which the beginning rather than the end is stressed. The exception is [ju], more accurately [ju:]—a "rising" diphthong.

[33] Krapp (*Pronunciation of Standard English in America* and *The English Language in America*) prefers the symbol [aɪ].

in such words as *ice, high, buy,* and *right.* The fact that it is a diphthong rather than a single vowel sound is demonstrated by an attempt to prolong it; if this is done, only the second element, the [ɪ] (which in this case becomes [i:]) is likely to be prolonged. [ɑʊ] is another sound of wide occurrence, appearing in such words as *house, bough,* and *now.* [ju] is perhaps not strictly to be described as a diphthong—though it tends to alternate, in American speech, with the true (and falling) diphthong [ɪu]—but practical convenience, as well as the fact that the [j] is only slightly consonantal, argues for its inclusion here. It is the sound that occurs in such words as *pew, music, view,* and *beauty.* [ɔɪ] is the falling diphthong that occurs in words spelled with *oi* or *oy,* such as *boy, boil,* and *join.*

When we turn from a description and classification of the sounds of contemporary English to a review of the history of English sounds, two questions may very well be asked: How do we know that the sounds have changed? and How can we be confident of what the changes are? Since the invention of the phonograph and the "talkie," we have, it is clear, means of permanently recording the pronunciation of a particular time and place (or individual); but it is equally evident that before the late nineteenth century, any such infallible and mechanical methods were entirely lacking. There are, however, certain other ways of reproducing the pronunciation of an earlier time with some degree of accuracy. One way is through a study of the rhymes of the poets, and other uses of like sounds, such as puns and word plays. Another is through investigating old records that preserve the spelling of the illiterate. Still another is through comparing English sounds with those

of related languages, in which pronunciation has been comparatively stable. Illustration of the use of these methods will be given, but it may be observed parenthetically that it is too much to assume that the pronunciation of earlier periods *can* be reproduced with absolute fidelity. A great deal of work, for example, has been done on the pronunciation of Chaucer, and much has been learned about it; nevertheless, the result of it all is justly summarized by Professor Manly in these terms:[34] "If Chaucer could hear a good student read his poetry, the pronunciation would probably seem like that of a foreigner, but he would, we hope, be able to understand what he heard." We are not, then, to be too sanguine about the infallibility, for every detail of pronunciation, of the methods that have been employed.

The study of the rhymes of poetry clearly has wide applicability. If a sound that occurs at the end of a line can be identified with certainty, it follows, granting that the poet is a conscientious craftsman, that the sound of the final syllable of the rhyming line must be parallel. Changes in pronunciation since the eighteenth century, for example, are to be observed in a study of the rhymes of such poets as Pope and Cowper. The neat anticlimax of this couplet

> Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey,
> Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea[35]

falls deplorably flat in present-day pronunciation, but the lines must once have rhymed perfectly. If, as can be demonstrated, the word *obey* has remained virtually unchanged in its sounds, *tea* has altered greatly. The

[34] Introduction to J. M. Manly's edition of the *Canterbury Tales*, New York (Holt), 1928, p. 89.

[35] *Rape of the Lock*, Canto III, ll. 7 and 8.

old pronunciation, evidently, was not [ti:] but [te:]; the comparative method substantiates the conclusion, [te:] being also the pronunciation of the word in such languages as French and German and in certain dialectal forms of English—Irish, for example. A similar change is shown by the lines of Cowper's well-known hymn,

> God moves in a mysterious way, . . .
> He plants his footsteps in the sea . . . ,

for the vowel of *sea* has gone from [æ] through [e:] to [i:], and in the eighteenth century it was still in the middle stage. In Pope's famous attack on Addison, these lines occur as a rhyming couplet:[36]

> Dreading e'en fools; by flatterers besieged,
> And so obliging that he ne'er obliged.

Once more, a surviving dialectal pronunciation helps to make it clear that the sounds of *obliged* were once parallel with those of *besieged.* The reverse of this situation is often given by the conventional rhymes called "eye rhymes"—the employment, that is to say, of words spelled alike but sounded differently, where the poet's only justification is the fact that at some former time the words really did rhyme. It would seem, however, a rather illegitimate extension of poetic privilege to rhyme such words as *star* and *war* for no other reason than that such a seventeenth-century poet as Henry Vaughan did so. Lines like

> My soul, there is a country
> Far beyond the stars,
> Where stands a wingèd sentry
> All skilful in the wars

indicate a parallelism in sounds that no longer exists.

[36] *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot,* ll. 207 and 208.

The second method of inferring older pronunciation, an investigation of records that preserve the spelling of the illiterate, or, more accurately, the semi-literate, perhaps needs no special demonstration. It is obvious that one whose spelling is untrammelled by education will write English words differently, and more phonetically, than one handicapped—from this point of view—by notions of orthodoxy. Professor Krapp has thrown a great deal of light upon seventeenth- and eighteenth-century American pronunciation by studying old town records. Such spellings as *arst* for *asked* and *clack* for *clerk* are better clues to pronunciations in actual use than are statements of grammarians and lexicographers, who are likely to be concerned with how words should be pronounced rather than how they *are* pronounced.

The use of a third method, a comparison of English sounds with those of related languages, has already been suggested. It is this that is back of the reconstruction of the earliest sounds of English, and that leads to the assumption that, since the Teutonic languages generally have the values designated as the "Continental" ones, English once possessed these sounds too. Our spelling, from most points of view so bad, is sometimes of real service here in indicating earlier (and common Teutonic) pronunciations. Thus *oo* is now usually interpreted as [u:], [ʊ], or [ʌ], and *ee* as [i:] or [ɪ]; but the modern spelling clearly indicates that the earlier sounds were [o:] and [e:]. If, then, as has frequently been said, we spell words not as they are now pronounced but as they were formerly pronounced, the practice has at any rate the incidental value of throwing occasional light on older habits of pronunciation. At the least, it makes clear certain general directions of phonetic change.

In sketching the development of English sounds, the consonants, which have changed on the whole relatively little, may be disposed of first. Old English spelling is sufficiently phonetic to justify taking its symbols as our starting point. The following letters, then, have normally been used, from Old English times on, to designate consonantal sounds that are quite unambiguous and stable: *b*, *p*, *d*, *t*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *w*, and *x*.[37] Two other letters of the Old English alphabet—*f* and *s*—were used to designate both voiced and voiceless continuants; the Old English alphabet did not include *v* or *z*, except occasionally in late loan-words or foreign proper names, but these symbols were eventually borrowed to designate the voiced equivalents of voiceless *f* and *s*, which then in turn tended to be used (not quite consistently) to designate the voiceless sounds only. In addition to *v* and *z*, mention should be made of *q* and *j* as later additions to the original alphabet. The former, *q*, occurring in Modern English always in the combination *qu*, is, of course, due to French influence on the spelling[38]; no phonetic changes are involved in the rewriting of Old English *cwic* (living), for example, as *quick*. The symbol *k*, too, is rare in Old English, its sound being usually designated by *c*. Modern English *j* represents an evolution that will be referred to later, when Old English *c* and *g* are discussed.

Four other Old English symbols may be grouped together: *h*, *r*, *ð*, and *þ*. The first two, *h* and *r*, stand for sounds that have tended to be weakened or to disappear. Old English *h* was always sounded, and when

[37] In Old English, as in Modern, *x* = *ks*.

[38] The combination *qu* was borrowed at a time when its pronunciation in French was [kw], not, as it became later, [k].

closing a syllable, it was a palatal or a velar continuant, like German *ch* in *ich* or in *Nacht*. Later French borrowings had a mute *h* which has remained silent in a few words like *heir*, *honest*, and *hour*, and sometimes (especially in the pronunciation of England) in such words as *humble*, *humor*, *hotel*, and *human*. The *r* of Old English, a trilled or perhaps sometimes a "curved" or "cerebral" sound, has, as we have already seen, often been made much less energetic, and frequently disappears altogether, in modern pronunciation. As to the other two symbols, *ð* and *þ*, it is quite clear that Old English had both the voiceless and the voiced *th* that Modern English retains, though *ð* and *þ* were apparently used indifferently for both sounds. When intervocalic, *ð* (*þ*) would inevitably become voiced, like *f* and *s* (*cf.*: *oven* [<O. E. *ofen*], *risen*, and *other*).

The two remaining symbols of the Old English alphabet, *c* and *g*, were both used quite variously. The one, *c*, while never having the [s] sound it occasionally has in Modern English, varied, as it does in Modern English, from a front to a back stop according to its vocalic environment, and was even, in certain positions, a palatal continuant. This is the origin of Modern English *ch* or *tch* [tʂ] of *chew* (<O. E. *ceowan*), *drench* (<O. E. *drencean*), *witch* (<O. E. *wicce*), and *pitch* (<O. E. *pic*). In the last three words, the fully dentalized pronunciation, [tʂ], was probably used even in early Old English. Palatalization also took place in the Old English combination *sc*, this becoming, before the end of the Old English period, the simple continuant [ʂ]. Thus, Old English *sceall*, *scur*, *wascan*, and *fisc* became respectively *shall*, *shower*, *wash*, and *fish*. A few words may perhaps be added on somewhat similar changes in

later stages of the language. In early Modern English, the [ʃ] sound developed also in words that had formerly been pronounced as [s + j]—for example *mansion*, *ocean*, *patience*, and *nation*. Later still, the corresponding voiced continuant [ʒ] replaced what had formerly been the double sound [z + j]. There is no satisfactory symbol for this consonant in modern spelling, nothing corresponding to the *sh* for [ʃ], but the sound itself is familiar enough, being found in such words as *measure*, *usury*, *azure*, and *osier*.

The letter *g* of the Old English alphabet was, like *c*, used with a variety of meanings. It was likewise (as is still the so-called "hard *g*" of Modern English) both a front and a back stop, and it was also, before front vowels and in certain other positions, a continuant [j]. The last pronunciation explains such Modern English words as *year*, *young*, and *yet* from the Old English *gēar*, *geong*, and *gīet:* before a front vowel, the consonant became a palatal continuant. In the later development of the prefix *ge*, the consonantal *y* gave way to the vocalic; Old English *gecleopod*, for example, became *yclept*, and a parallel change took place in Modern English *enough* (<O. E. *genōh; cf.* Ger. *genug*), Modern English *handiwork* (<O. E. *handgeweorc*), and so forth. The combination *cg* (or double *g*) probably had in Old English still another sound—[dʒ]; Old English *ecg* and its Modern English descendant, *edge*, are therefore phonetically identical. The similar spelling of such other words as *bridge*, *cudgel*, *hedge*, and *ridge* indicates a parallel history, but it should be noted too that the [dʒ] sound of Modern English is quite as generally represented by the symbol *j*, a borrowed letter which became familiar in Middle English in Romance loan-words such as *joy*

and *join*, and by the "soft" *g*. The sound [dʒ], however represented in spelling, is thus very common in Modern English in both native and borrowed words. Although in Modern French *g* before front vowels is pronounced [ʒ], rather than [dʒ] as in Old French, even recent English borrowings from French tend to alter the [ʒ] to [dʒ]; observe the popular tendency to make the final consonants of *massage* and *garage* like those of *message* and *courage*.

To summarize the foregoing account, it may be pointed out that to the consonantal sounds of Old English, the later development of the language has added only two single consonants, *sh* [ʃ] and *zh* [ʒ], and one double consonant, *ch* [tʃ]. The new symbols added—*v*, *z*, *q*, and *j*—involved no additional sounds, though the last (phonetically [dʒ]) has become, as we have seen, a far commoner sound in Modern English than it was in Old English, when it was represented by the combination *cg* (or *gg*). Moreover, the loss of *ð* and *þ* from the later alphabet did not mean a disappearance of sounds from the language, since both voiced and voiceless *th* are familiar in Modern English. It is nevertheless a fact that our consonantal sounds have not been quite so stable as this summary might indicate, for Old English sounds have sometimes been dropped altogether, and certain alterations have taken place on a large scale. The details of some of these changes will now be referred to.

The most conspicuous losses are palatal and velar consonantal sounds, frequent in Old English but rare in Modern English. The virtual disappearance of these values for the symbols *g* and *h* in Modern English helps to make present pronunciation strikingly different from

that of Old English (and German). The consonant *r*, too, as we have seen, has become in modern English and American pronunciation something quite different from what it was. Initial *k* (in Old English, usually *c*) when preceding *n* has likewise changed its character: the spelling of words like *knight*, *knave*, *knit*, *knee*, and *knead* reminds us that here is a frequent loss. Initial *w* in the combination *wr* in modern spelling (in words like *wrath*, *wretch*, *wrist*, *write*, and *wrong*) carries a similar suggestion. Parallel and, to modern habits of pronunciation, likewise difficult combinations are the *hl* and the *hr* in such Old English words as *hlāf*, *hlūd*, and *hlystan*, and *hring*, *hrōf*, and *hrōst*. In these cases, however, Modern English has dropped the initial consonant in spelling as well as in pronunciation: the modern forms are *loaf*, *loud*, and *listen*, and *ring*, *roof*, and *roost*.

The change of *g* and *h*, referred to above, is a type of the phenomenon known as vocalization, the change of a consonant into a vowel. Loss of palatal or velar continuants in such words as Old English *heah*, *ðurh*, *niht*, and *bōg* gives Modern English *high*, *through*, *night*, and *bough*, in which the spelling still testifies to the former consonantal quality of the final sounds. This vocalization was not complete until the early Modern English period. In some words, moreover, it did not take place at all, though even here the palatal-velar continuant was lost; in *laugh* and *tough*, for example, it was transformed into the labiodental continuant. Next to *g* and *h*, the consonants most likely to be vocalized, or completely assimilated[39] to the vowels, were naturally

[39] There is no hard and fast line of demarcation between "vocalization" and "assimilation," any more than there is between the vowel and the consonant. In ordinary use, however, "assimilation" emphasizes

those most like vowels; the semivowels *w* and *y* and the "vowellikes" *m*, *n*, *l*, and *r* have therefore been particularly subject to this process. We have already referred to the vocalization of the Old English prefix *ge* [>*ye*>*y* (*i*)]; as for *w*, to compare the spelling and pronunciation of Modern English *two*, *who* (<O. E. *hwā*), *sword*, and *answer* is to suggest a like development. The disappearance of the [l] sound in such words as *walk*, *talk*, *folk*, *half*, *calf*, and *calm* is a kindred process, as is the widespread loss of *r* in present-day pronunciation. Not only *l* and *r* but also *m* and *n* are, very often, sufficiently vocalized in present pronunciation to enable them to carry a syllable; they are endowed, in other words, with some of the quality of a vowel. In such words as *heaven*, *able*, *bottom*, and *maker*, the syllabic or vocalized pronunciation of the final consonant has probably been in vogue for the whole of the Modern English period.

A number of the other changes to which English consonants have been subject must be referred to briefly. Assimilation in the strict sense—that is, absorption of one consonant in another of like quality—is illustrated in the loss of *n* in words like *damn*, *hymn*, *autumn*, and *column*, and in others like *mill* (<O. E. *myln*) and *kiln* (so spelled, but usually pronounced [kɪl]). Here the neighboring *m* or *l* has absorbed the *n*. A phenomenon that has operated much more widely is that known as "voicing." In late Middle or early Modern English many formerly voiceless consonants were transformed into the corresponding voiced sounds. This development affected consonants (not initial) with voiced surroundings and following an unstressed or weakly stressed

the disappearance, and "vocalization" the replacing, of a sound; and of course only "assimilation" can be applied to vowels.

vowel. Through it, these changes took place: [f] > [v], [θ] > [ð], [s] > [z], [tʃ] > [dʒ], and, later than the others, [ks] > [gz]. A few illustrations follow:[40] *of* (now with [v], but in Middle English, with [f]), the stressed and voiceless form being retained in adverbial *off; the, they,*[41] and so forth (in Middle English, with [θ], but now with [ð]); the *s* ending of plural and possessive singular nouns, and of third person singulars of verbs now frequently pronounced [z]; Modern English *knowledge, cabbage,* and *partridge,* as compared with Middle English *knowleche, cabach,* and *partriche.* The reverse process, "unvoicing," is also to be found. The dental preterit *ed* has been regularly unvoiced whenever the loss of its vowel has brought the final *d* into juxtaposition with a voiceless consonant; thus the final [d] of *walked* and *voiced* itself has been unvoiced to [t], while that of *wagged* and *raised* has remained [d]. Perhaps the next most frequent type of unvoicing is the change of final [ð] to [θ]. This also is frequently due to the loss of a vowel; in Modern English *youth, earth,* and *both,* the final [θ] replaces an older [ð], a sound inevitable in Middle English *youthe, earthe,* and *bothe.*

Other instances of consonantal change might be added. In various ways, consonants have been added, dropped, and interchanged. The vagaries of *r,* some of which have already been mentioned, will serve to illustrate several of these possibilities. We have already referred to the frequent interchange of *l* and *r*—"shift of liquids"[42]—

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[40] For a full account, see Jespersen, *Modern English Grammar,* Part I, 6.511–6.90; and "Voiced and Voiceless Fricatives," *Linguistica,* pp. 346–383.

[41] The voicing of these *initial* consonants seems due to their frequent position between vowels in the sentence.

[42] See p. 180.

when one of these consonants occurs but once in a word; there is also another type of interchange, due apparently to "dissimilation," when two *r*'s occur in a word. Modern English *pilgrim*, *laurel*, *purple*, and *marble*, for example, correspond to Latin *peregrinum*, *laurarium*, *purpur*, and *marmor*, and the substitution of *l* for one of the *r*'s has taken place either in Old French or in Middle English. "Metathesis," or change of position within the word, not infrequently affects *r*—the neighboring vowel has changed positions with *r* in these words, sometimes very early in their history: *bird*, *fresh*, *grass*, *third*, *thirty*, *through*, *wright*, and *wrought*. The addition of an unetymological *r* is seen in *bridegroom* (*cf.* Ger. *Bräutigam* and O. E. *guma*, "man"), *cartridge* (*cf.* Fr. *cartouche*), and *hoarse* (<O. E. *hās*); a noteworthy case of its loss, which here occurred before the end of the Old English period, is Modern English *speak* and *speech* (*cf.* early O. E. *sprecan*, and Ger. *sprechen*). Other consonants than *r* may, of course, be subject to similar waverings: an additional or "excrescent" *n*, for example, is to be observed in *nightingale* (*cf.* Ger. *Nachtigal*), *passenger* (*cf.* Fr. *passager*), *messenger* (still *messager* in Caxton); moreover, as we have already seen,[43] the dropping of an *n*, especially when final, is very common indeed. Similarly, *d* has been frequently added—*sound* (*cf.* Chaucer's *soun*), *thunder* (*cf.* Ger. *Donner*, Fr. *tonnerre*), *hoarhound* (*cf.* M. E. *horehoune*), and the vulgar *drownd* for *drown;* it has likewise occasionally been dropped: *lawn* (<M. E. *laund*) and *scan* (<*scand*).

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[43] P. 199.

The foregoing account of English consonants should not be interpreted as indicating that the consonants have greatly altered in the development of the language from Old to Modern English. On the contrary, though it has been possible to point out many alterations in individual words and to see certain larger shiftings that apply to groups of words, it may still be affirmed that the consonantal system of Modern English is not widely different from that of Old English. The contrast with the vowels is most striking: the symbols for the consonants still mean, for the most part, exactly what they meant in Old English, but the symbols for the vowels have been given an utterly different meaning. Moreover, almost all the changes that have taken place in the use of the consonants have been readily accompanied by new spellings of the words in which the changes occurred; but the alterations in the vowels of English words have been so great that spelling has lagged far behind pronunciation and is now hopelessly unphonetic. All that can be done here in sketching the history of vowel-sounds is to indicate certain general trends.

There is, fortunately, one very clear trend that has had most far-reaching consequences upon the development of our vowels. The "great vowel-shift," as Jespersen has termed it,[44] consists of the surprisingly uniform raising of all Old English long, or tense, vowels; the necessary and quite regular exception to the upward direction of the shift is that the two vowels that were already high—[i:] and [u:]—split into the diphthongs [ɑɪ] and [ɑʊ]. The general course of the shift may be represented as shown at the top of page 203.

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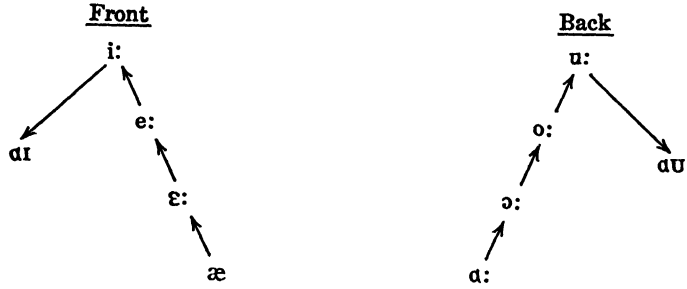
[44] *Modern English Grammar*, Part I, 8.11.



If a cause may be assigned for this phenomenon, it would seem to be the very human tendency of laziness in operation—pronouncing the vowel with as little effort as possible, and hence with a smaller and smaller opening of the lips. To give typical illustrations of the results, by pairing Old English words and their Modern English descendants,

[æ] > [i:]	sǣ,[45] sea; clǣne, clean; hǣlan, heal
[e:] > [i:]	grēne, green; tēð, teeth; sēcean, seek
[i:] > [ɑɪ]	īs, ice; wīf, wife; hȳdan, hide
[ɑ:] > [o:]	bān, bone; bāt, boat; wrāt, wrote
[o:] > [u:]	tōð, tooth; sōna, soon; dōm, doom
[u:] > [ɑʊ]	mūð, mouth; hūs, house; ūt, out

These shifts will be detailed somewhat more particularly.

The change from [æ] or [ɛ:], through [e:], to [i:] affected not only Old English words spelled with *æ* (in Mercian, generally *ē*), but those with *ēa* as well; for usually this diphthong simplified to the single vowel [ɛ:]. This accounts for the present pronunciation of words like *beacon*, *east*, and *stream*, in which the spelling

[45] The Old English vowel *æ* was apparently not unlike the vowel of Modern English *hat* or *man* lengthened; however, it would perhaps be more nearly accurate to designate it [ɛ:], and to give the shift referred to here as from [ɛ:] to [i:].

still preserves the Old English diphthong *ēa*. The [ɛ:], or "open" *e* sound, as it is often called, was kept in both classes of words until Elizabethan times. In the seventeenth century, probably, the [ɛ:] was replaced by [e:], and vowels from Old English *æ* were no longer distinguished from those from Old English *e*. Words with Old English *ē* had, in the meantime, been preserved with the original [e:] unchanged. That the distinction between [ɛ:] and [e:], or "open" and "close" *e*, was a real one in late Middle English is illustrated by the rhymes of Chaucer, in which the two types of *e* are scrupulously distinguished. The Old English diphthong *ēo* also developed, for the most part, like close *e*; for it ordinarily lost its second element—hence, Modern English *deep*, *thief*, and *be* (<O. E. *dēop*, *þēof*, and *bēon*). Throughout the Middle English period, both "open" *e* (<O. E. *æ* or *ēa*) and "close" *e* (<O. E. *ē* and *ēo*) were designated indifferently by *e* or *ee*; but, as remarked above, the two sounds were distinct until well within the modern period. The subsequent development, beginning, it is supposed, in the eighteenth century, was a raising to [i:] of all the varieties of *e* that have been mentioned. In late Modern English, especially in the pronunciation of England, this [i:] tends to be diphthongized; the sound may be indicated by the combination [ij]. It is also rather frequently shortened to [ɪ]: *been*, for example, is in American pronunciation [bɪn] more frequently than [bi:n], and *creek*, *league*, and *eagle* are sometimes [kɹɪk], [lɪg], and [ɪgl].

In the back of the mouth, the shift [ɑ:] to [ɔ:] to [o:] to [u:] parallels what has just been noted for the front vowels. There is the difference, however, that the usual raising of the lowest vowel [ɑ:] has been to [o:] only. The highest vowel, [u:], has been developed ordinarily from

an Old English [o:], not from [ɑ:] or [ɔ:]—whereas the highest front vowel, [i:], has been developed both from Old English [ɛ:] (or [æ]), and from Old English [e:]. [ɑ:] must regularly have gone through the middle stage [ɔ:] before [o:] was reached; [ɔ:] was, accordingly, the usual Middle English pronunciation of the vowel in words that had been spelled in *ā* in Old English and were now *o*. This was the so-called "open" *o*, which existed side by side with the "close" *o* with no difference in the Middle English spelling, just as the "open" and "close" *e* were indistinguishable. The "close" *o* was, of course, the vowel of many Old English words spelled with *ō*, which persisted unchanged in Middle English. The Modern English history of the *o*'s, however, is different from that of the *e*'s in that the Old English [ɑ:] (M. E. [ɔ:]) changed to [o:] and remained that in Modern English; whereas the Old English [o:] (M. E. [o:]) was raised to [u:] in early Modern English. The spelling has retained the *o* or, more commonly, the double *o*, of Middle English, in spite of the fact that that vowel is now of utterly different quality. Thus, we have the absurdity of spellings like *food* and *goose*, in which [u:] is designated by double *o*. This [u:] is frequently "shortened" (more accurately, made lax and slightly lowered) in the standard pronunciation of such words as *good* and *hook*, and in a widely used pronunciation of *room*, *roof*, *root*, and the like. Occasionally, it is lowered and "fronted" to the "mid-mixed" position of [ʌ]; such a word as *blood* has evidently gone through all these stages: [blo:d], [blu:d], [blʊd], [blʌd].

Vowels that were already in Old English in the highest position—the front [i:] and the back [u:]—split into

diphthongs that have become the Modern English [aɪ] and [aʊ]. Though the point is disputed, Jespersen[46] argues that it was at this upper end that the great vowel shift began; in other words, that it was the diphthongization of [i:] and [u:] that allowed [e:] and [o:] to move upwards and occupy the places formerly held by [i:] and [u:]. Words with the [i:] sound included words spelled in Old English in *y* as well as in *i*, for the originally distinct vowel designated by *y*—rounded like the German *ü*—had conformed, within the Old English period, to that designated by *i*. The pure [i:] probably became diphthongal before the end of the Middle English period and assumed the present pronunciation perhaps in the seventeenth century. [u:] seems to have developed in a parallel way. It is interesting to observe that in this case, diphthongization has not taken place in the Scotch and Northern English dialects: *house* is still [hu:s] in Scotch pronunciation, exactly as it was in Old English.

The lax, or "short," vowels did not as a rule take part in the upward shift. Their development has less regularity and simplicity about it for the additional reason that lax vowels have been more affected by their consonantal environment. Only the most conspicuous and uniform developments can, therefore, be summarized here.

Old English *a* (as distinguished from *ā*) had, apparently, the sound of the *a* in *artistic*, as distinguished from the *a* of *art*. This sound remained throughout the Middle English period, but was finally fronted, probably in the seventeenth century, so that we have such Modern English words as *sand*, *thank*, *have*, and *saddle*, from

[46] *Modern English Grammar*, Part I, 8.12–8.22.

Old English *sand, þanc, habban,* and *sadol.* Some of these originally short *a*'s followed another development: they first lengthened in Middle English to [ɑ:], after Old English *ā* had become [ɔ:]; and much later, in Modern English times, they went up and forward to [e:].[47] This is the history of an exceedingly large number of Modern English monosyllables, in which the spelling still bears witness to the original *a* of the stem; *ape* (<O. E. *apa*), *shake* (<O. E. *sceacian*), *knave* (<O. E. *cnafa*), *name* (<O. E. *nama*), and *bathe* (<O. E. *baðian*) are a few examples. The present pronunciation of this sound tends to introduce a glide, or [ɪ] sound, after the [e:]. Another low vowel of Old English, the *æ* of such words as *sæt, glæd, æx,* and *þæt,* has undergone a still more curious history. It was evidently a front vowel in Old English, became a back vowel (short [ɑ]) in Middle English, and went forward again to [æ] in Modern English.[48] The Modern English spelling is the same as the Middle English, but the pronunciation (except for certain Northern dialects, where [ɑ] is still to be heard) has gone back to the [æ] of Old English.

Two other short vowels of Old English—the front vowels [ɛ] and [ɪ]—have survived with little or no change in Middle English and Modern English whenever they remain short and occur in stressed syllables. The spelling is usually unchanged: *ebb* (<O. E. *ebba*), *help* (<O. E. *helpan*), *length* (<O. E. *lengð*), *step* (<O. E. *steppan*), *west* (<O. E. *west*), and so forth. Before certain nasal combinations, however, [ɛ] has been replaced with [ɪ];

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[47] Probably first to [æ], then to [ɛ:], and at last to [e:] or [eɪ].

[48] It is so curious a history that its truth has been doubted. For a defense of the theory, see Jespersen, *op. cit.*, Part I, 8.63; for a recent expression of doubt, see Mrs. Aiken, *Why English Sounds Change,* p. 93.

thus, Old English *sengean* has become Modern English *singe*, Old English *hlence* Modern English *link*, and Old English *streng* Modern English *string*. In one or two instances, the modern spelling retains the *e* in spite of the fact that the sound has long since become [ɪ]; this is true of *England* (<O. E. *Englalond*). Modern [ɪ], however, usually represents the very regular survival of Old English short *i*; a few illustrations are *drink* (O. E. *drincan*), *fish* (O. E. *fisc*), *if* (O. E. *gif*), *in* (O. E. *in*), *rib* (O. E. *rib*), and *this* (O. E. *ðis*). In Old English, the symbol *y*, originally representing a sound distinct from that represented by *i*, finally came to stand for the same sound. As a result, short *y* has fallen in with short *i*, just as long *y* fell in with long *i*; and as *ȳ* took on, with *ī*, the sound [aɪ] in Modern English, so *y*, with *i*, remained unchanged, except for the spelling. Modern English *fill* (O. E. *fyllan*), *pit* (O. E. *pytt*), and *sin* (O. E. *synn*) represent this survival.

There remain the short back vowels *o* and *u*. Short *o* of Old English was phonetically [ɔ], not a shortened value of [o:]. This sound has persisted with little or no change to the present time, so far as the "standard" pronunciation of England is concerned. Words in point are *ox, fox, pot, got*, and so forth. Except for New England, however, the usual American pronunciation is not [ɔ], but a shortened form of [ɑ:]—that is to say, the first vowel of *artistic*. Curiously enough, it is also an American tendency to lengthen the Old and Modern English [ɔ] to [ɔ:] (instead of introducing the [ɑ] sound) when the [ɔ] is followed by [ŋ] and sometimes when it is followed by [d], [g], or [k]. Americans pronounce *long* with a vowel that is perceptibly longer than that used by Englishmen, and sometimes *god* and *hog* in a way that dialect writers render

gawd and *hawg*. Old English and Middle English short *u* ([ʊ]) has usually developed into Modern English [ʌ], a "mid-mixed" sound that is without the rounding characteristic of both [u:] and [ʊ]. This is illustrated in *love* (<O. E. *lufian*), *sun* (<O. E. *sunne*), *wonder* (<O. E. *wundor*), and so on. The [ʊ], however, is frequently preserved in the neighborhood of labial consonants; Modern English *full* and *pull* illustrate this possibility.

The original diphthongs of Old English have been lost, as such—usually through the emergence of the predominating element as a single vowel; we have seen, for example, how *ēa* and *ēo* conformed with *ǣ* ([ɛ:]) and *ē* ([e:]), respectively, and developed in the same way. It might be added that the corresponding short *ea* and *eo* simplified in a parallel way. Moreover, of the several new diphthongs that were developed in Middle English, all but two have been made monophthongs in Modern English. Thus, [ɑʊ] in such a Middle English word as *faught*, and the closely akin [ɔʊ] of *thought*, have altered to [ɔ:]; while in other cases a diphthong made up of [ɔ:] + [ʊ]—as in *soule* (soul)—has simplified to [o:]. Likewise, Modern English [e:] often represents a sound that was a diphthong in Middle English; in fact, two separate diphthongs are represented here, for the spellings *ai* and *ei* stand for sounds that are rhymed in Chaucer but that in earlier Middle English were distinct. *Day*, *may*, *sail*, *play*, and *way* are of this group. The exceptions to the process of monophthongization are the borrowed *oi* ([ɔɪ])—in French loan-words like *join*, *joy*, and *toil;* and [ju], which has a double source—Middle English *eu* (or *ew*) and *iu*. The *eu* was originally [ɛʊ], found in words like *few* and *new;* and the *iu* was originally

[ɪu], found in words like *humor* and *rude*. Even here, monophthongization has taken place to some extent in Modern English; for while *few* and *humor* are invariably pronounced with [ju], most Americans substitute the simple vowel [u:] in *new*. It may be in order here to emphasize once more the idea that what we commonly call the simple or pure vowels of Modern English are really not monophthongs in practice. Modern English lacks, in a strict sense, the pure vowels of Old English or of Modern German; Modern English [e:], [i:], [o:], and [u:] all tend, in degrees varying in different parts of the English-speaking world, to be diphthongal.

Reference has been made, so far, to vowels that occur in stressed syllables and in native words. It has seemed unnecessary to complicate this survey by treating of borrowed words, for the reason that, in the main, the vowels of such words follow the development of native words of like sound. But it should not be imagined that anything like the complete history of even the native vowels has been given. For one thing, the separation into three categories—long (or tense) pure vowels, short (or lax) pure vowels, and diphthongs—is somewhat unreal. Something has been said of the interchange of single vowels and diphthongs; and much more might be said of the lengthening of short vowels and the shortening of long ones. More striking than such changes, however, and so far-reaching in its consequence that the entire character of English pronunciation has, through it, been altered, is the general obscuring that has occurred in the vowels of unaccented syllables. The matter has already been touched on[49] as one of the fundamental

[49] See p. 29.

causes of inflectional leveling. Here it may be briefly recapitulated from the angle of the phonetic changes involved.

Before the end of the Old English period, every unaccented *a*, *e*, *o*, and *u* tended to become a vowel that was spelled *e* and was presumably pronounced [ə]. These are typical illustrations: O. E. *oxa*, M. E. *oxe;* O. E. *foda*, M. E. *fode;* O. E. *heorte*, M. E. *herte;*[50] O. E. *swēte*, M. E. *swete;* O. E. *nacod*, M. E. *naked;* O. E. *wundor*, M. E. *wonder;* O. E. *lufu*, M. E. *love;* and O. E. *sunu*, M. E. *sune*. Unaccented *i* ([ɪ]), however, tended to remain unchanged through Middle and in Modern English; note the second syllable of *English*, *shilling*, and *evil* (though here the *l* has become syllabic, and the [ɪ] consequently lost, in colloquial pronunciation). The [ɪ] has also usually been preserved in Middle English borrowings from French: *peril*, *punish*, *service*. When *e* ([ə]) was final in Middle English—as it is in most of the above illustrations—it was eventually lost; hence the emergence of the modern monosyllables *ox*, *food*, *heart*, *sweet*, *love*,[51] and *son*. Certain endings in which [ə] was followed by a consonant—especially the possessive and plural *-es* and the preterit *-ed*—have regularly syncopated, so that here too [ə] is lost. The exceptions perhaps should be noted: a noun ending in a sibilant, such as [s], [z], [ʃ], or [tʃ], does not syncopate its ending (*busses, vases, rushes, ditches);* nor does a verb ending in the alveolar [t] or [d] (*wetted, wedded*). Equally important as the frequent loss of [ə] that has just been noticed is the tendency, beginning in the sixteenth century and

[50] In this pair and the next, the final *e* is in O. E. [ɛ], and in M. E. [ə].

[51] The fact that the spelling of this word (and many others) retained final *-e* did not, of course, affect its pronunciation.

universal in the pronunciation of present-day English, to level all vowels unprotected by accent to either [ə] or [ɪ]. The general rule may be stated thus: Every Modern English vowel occurring in a syllable that receives neither primary nor secondary stress approximates one or the other of the relaxed vowels [ə] and [ɪ]. This trend is combated by the conservatism of dictionaries, which has done something to perpetuate spelling-pronunciations; but in natural, colloquial speech, it has full sway. It will be our task in the following chapter to survey the extent of its victory.

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CHAPTER VII

Contemporary Pronunciation

WHEN we turn from a survey of English sounds as they have existed in the past to an attempt to state the pronunciation of the present, we are at once confronted by several difficult questions. Is present usage, all over the English-speaking world, sufficiently uniform to admit of satisfactory generalization? If there are important deviations, can any one brand of pronunciation claim a special place as "correct" or "standard" speech? If it cannot, is there any such thing as a single standard of pronunciation? Is it necessary to recognize several standards, and more than one standard within the United States? How valid, after all, is the assumption of standard pronunciation, in any sense of the term? These—and others like them—are questions that are inevitably and quite legitimately asked, and they are questions that the present chapter must cope with. It will be more convenient, however, to postpone any definite formulation of their possible answers until the end of the chapter, and in the meantime to set forth some of the facts on which these answers should be based. We shall be concerned, then, first to examine the status of contemporary pronunciation, and later to inquire what theory of pronunciation or attitude toward pronunciation is required by the facts as they exist. It must be recognized, however, that statement of facts and theoretical generalization from the existing facts

cannot be completely separated; nor does it seem desirable that they should be.

The logical way to begin a discussion of the contemporary pronunciation of English would seem to be to define what is often conceived of as its central focal point, the "Received Standard" of England. This conception of a peculiarly favored brand of pronunciation, to be heard in its purity from the lips of educated residents of Southern England, is one that is, quite naturally, set forth with special enthusiasm by scholars who are native to, or who have acquired, this type of speech; it must be admitted, moreover, that it is a conception that has a certain degree of reality. Professor Daniel Jones's definition of this brand of pronunciation has already been quoted.[1] It may be useful to repeat it here, in another and a fuller form:[2] "that most usually heard in everyday speech in the families of Southern English persons whose men-folk have been educated at the great public boarding schools." Professor Jones, that is to say, conceives of "Received Standard" as a geographical as well as a class dialect. Another eminent English phonetician, Professor H. C. Wyld—to whom, indeed, we owe the term "Received Standard"—formulates the idea somewhat differently: " . . . it is not confined to any locality, nor associated in any one's mind with any special geographical area . . . Received Standard is spoken, within certain social boundaries, with an extraordinary degree of uniformity, all over the country."[3] To Professor Wyld, then, the essence of

[1] P. 178.

[2] *English Pronouncing Dictionary* (1924), p. vii. In the 1937 revision, the last part is altered to "well educated families of the South of England."

[3] *History of Modern Colloquial English*, p. 2. In the latest (1934) edition of his *Outline of English Phonetics* and in the 1937 revision of his

"Received Standard" is that it is exclusively a class dialect—not, as those who follow Professor Jones believe, a class dialect spoken within a geographically limited territory. The two definitions cannot of course be completely reconciled, though it might be added that Wyld too believes that "perhaps the main factor in this singular degree of uniformity is the custom of sending youths from certain social strata to the great public schools. If we were to say that Received English at the present day is *Public School English*, we should not be far wrong."[4] Both definitions have been quoted in order to indicate two somewhat different (and almost equally influential) English conceptions of what is meant by "Standard English." To the present writer, it appears that, although the term is Wyld's, the definition of "Received Standard" as formulated by Professor Jones is the more useful and the more accurate—in other words, that the term serves best to describe a form of speech that is limited geographically as well as socially, and limited geographically almost entirely to London and what are known as the "Home Counties."

It is clear, at any rate, that American pronunciation has far more in common with the speech of Northern England than with that of Southern England. It has been more than once observed that it is Northern rather than Southern British pronunciation that corresponds with the General American brand,[5] and that it is

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Dictionary, Professor Jones has substituted the phrase "Received Pronunciation" for what was formerly "Standard English Pronunciation."

[4] *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

[5] For an illustration of this, see the three versions of the fable "Wind and Sun" as given in the pamphlet "The Principles of the International Phonetic Association," pp. 20–22 (a supplement to *Maître Phonétique*, Sept.–Oct., 1912). These are phonetic transcriptions of Southern

with Eastern (or New England) speech that the "Received Standard" has its affiliations. The former correspondence, it may be said, applies generally to the speech of Lowland Scotland as well as to that of the north of England. American radio audiences, for example, have observed that Ramsay MacDonald sounded very much more like an American than like a "typical," or Southern, Englishman. The most obvious connecting link between Northern British and General American pronunciation is undoubtedly their common preservation of both final *r* and *r* before a consonant; alike in "Received Standard" and New England speech, these *r*'s are vocalized or lost. The speech of the Northern Englishman further resembles that of the average American in its use of [æ] or [a] as the vowel of such words as *ask*, *laugh*, and *class;* the Londoner and the New Englander alike substitute [ɑ:].[6] In other points of difference[7] between London and Northern English—for example, the greater tendency in Southern English to make long vowels such as [e:] and [o:] into diphthongs—it is again very clear that the characteristic American pronunciation is considerably nearer to that of the north of England than to that of the metropolis.

Before proceeding to generalize about American pronunciation or to indicate its three main varieties, as

British English, Northern British English, and American English pronunciation. The transcriptions are also reproduced in Krapp, *Pronunciation of Standard English in America*, pp. 208–211, and in Ripman, *Sounds of Spoken English*, pp. 135–138.

[6] On the other hand, Southern British and American English sometimes agree on [æ] where Northern British uses [a] or [ɑ:]; this is true, for example, in the transcriptions cited above, for the words *traveler* and *wrapt*.

[7] Many of these are pointed to by R. E. Zachrisson in his paper "Northern English or London English as the Standard Pronunciation," *Anglia* (1914), Vol. XXXVIII, pp. 405–432.

they are now almost invariably recognized, it seems advisable to formulate a certain attitude with reference to its very existence. How does it come about that cultivated American pronunciation is at all different from cultivated British pronunciation? That it *is* different—for it seems impossible to avoid dogmatism here—must be uncompromisingly maintained. The Wyld theory of a "Received Standard" for all of England is carried to what seems to the present writer its logical and at the same time its fatal conclusion in Palmer, Martin, and Blandford's *Dictionary of English Pronunciation with American Variants*. These writers paraphrase Wyld's dicta thus, their additions being the parenthetical matter:[8]

It is not any more the English of London, as it is sometimes mistakenly maintained, than it is of York (or we might add: *New* York), or Exeter, or Cirencester, or Oxford, or Chester, or Leicester (we might add: Harvard, or Chicago, or New Orleans, or San Francisco). In each and all of these places, and in many others throughout the length and breadth of England (we might replace "England" by "the English-speaking world"), Received Standard is spoken among the same kind of people, and it is spoken everywhere, allowing for individual idiosyncrasies, to all intents and purposes, in precisely the same way.

Now this, to put it bluntly, is simply nonsense. What we are at present concerned with, however, is the attitude that seems to be implied, by such a view, toward "American variants." These are evidently to be deprecated as unfortunate strayings, wilful or unwitting, from a theoretical standard for the English-speaking world: the

[8] "Introductory," p. xvii. Reprinted by permission of the D. Appleton-Century Co.

"Received Standard" or "public school" English. Historically they are nothing of the sort. For one thing, at the time of the American Revolution, "Received Standard" was certainly both less influential and less uniform than it is now. Discarding, then, the idea that cultured American pronunciation is either a form of, or a departure from, the "Received Standard," our original question remains: What is it, and how does it come about that it differs from that of England? More specifically, since to most minds there are obvious and clear-cut differences—Are its characteristic marks of native development or are they survivals from older speech habits in the English language?

This query may be best answered in the words of the scholar most qualified to speak on such a point, Professor Krapp: "If one did not fear to affirm a universal positive, one might say that in every case the distinctive features of American pronunciation have been but survivals from older usages which were, and in some instances still are, to be found in some dialect or other of the speech of England."[9] These survivals of older usage are undoubtedly better preserved in the South than elsewhere, but there is every reason to suppose, as indeed Professor Krapp also indicates,[10] that the speech of the seventeenth-century Colonists of New England was much more like that of their Virginian contemporaries than the speech of their descendants today is like the present Southern speech. The Colonists of both New England and Virginia were chiefly from London and the adjoining Midland and Southern counties, and both groups

[9] *The English Language in America*, Vol. II, p. 28.
[10] P. 34.

unquestionably spoke some more or less dialectal variant of Southern English. New England, more subject to influences from both England and other parts of America, has retained fewer seventeenth- or eighteenth-century peculiarities than has Virginia; but in a number of ways—most conspicuously in its treatment of *r*—Southern American speech is still associated with that of New England in its resemblance to the speech of Southern England. Later colonizers of other parts of America, coming from other parts of the British Isles than London and the adjacent territory, have presumably been influential in transplanting a speech more like that of the North than that of the South of England. It remains, however, something of a paradox that the earlier colonization of America was accomplished by the speakers of Southern English, however dialectal, and that nevertheless the General American pronunciation is demonstrably closer to the Northern British standard.

It is necessary that such a term as "General American" be specifically defined. As has already been suggested, the convention of dividing American pronunciation into three great zones or areas is now well established. This does not, of course, imply that within any one zone there is absolute uniformity; in one sense, it is arguable that there are as many brands of pronunciation as there are individual speakers—a proposition advanced in Shaw's *Pygmalion*. Evidently, within the limits of a single state—Virginia is a notable example—there may be striking variations. At the same time, the concept of a threefold division among the speakers of American English is as familiar to the man in the street as to the phonetician; and as it is commonly accepted by both, it

would be superfluous to argue for it. It means in general that American speakers use either Southern English, the English of New England, or finally that which for lack of a better name has been called "Western" or "General." The more precise geographical limits of the three areas may conveniently be indicated, as a preliminary to inquiring what these three types of speech have in common and also wherein they differ.

The Southern type of American English is marked off with fair precision, though its limits are not precisely coterminous with those of the (politically) "Solid South." States on the borderlines do not always fall satisfactorily into one group or the other; but Maryland, Arkansas, southern Missouri, and eastern Texas would seem to belong linguistically to the South, while Delaware, West Virginia, and the remaining sections of Missouri and Texas fall within the General (or Western) zone. The Southern influence has also been observed to spread somewhat north of the Ohio River and to affect parts of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. New England, though markedly divided within itself, falls as a whole in a separate category, sometimes called the "Eastern"; and this category is often held to include a definite section (social rather than geographical) of New York City. The rest of the United States, comprising the Middle Atlantic states and the Middle and the Far West generally, uses the General or Western type of pronunciation. This linguistic "West" is often said to begin at the Hudson River, though the political boundary between New York and New England is probably a more realistic frontier.[11] In any case, to avoid the absurdity of

[11] *Cf.* Thomas, C. K., "Pronunciation in Upstate New York," *American Speech*, XII, 2 (April, 1937), p. 127.

calling the speech of New York and New Jersey "Western," it would seem both more convenient and more accurate to designate this great area, containing roughly two-thirds of the population of the Union, as that in which the "General" manner of speech is to be found. There is every reason to regard this pronunciation as the typical or characteristic American speech.

We have, then, to investigate the distinguishing features of American pronunciation, and especially that of the "General" type, as opposed to British pronunciation. It will be understood, of course, that the intention is to compare pronunciations on parallel cultural levels; that is, not to oppose the speech of the educated in one country to that of the uneducated in the other, but rather to contrast the pronunciation of British and American speakers of the educated class. First of all is the elusive matter of intonation. The general rule is unquestionably that American speech shows far less variation in musical pitch or timbre than British. Between the speech of the rural Middle-Westerner, however, and the speech of the British speaker of "Received Standard," this difference is very much more considerable than that between the speech of the urban resident of the Middle Atlantic states and the speech of the inhabitant of Northern England. Granting that in its cadences, as in other matters, General American speech is more similar to Northern than to Southern English, the average differences are still likely to be perceptible. Taken at the two extremes, even within the limits of the speech of the educated, they are very striking indeed. The English voice is more rapid, more vivacious, more excited —it may seem to an American listener—over nothing in

particular. A casual remark about the weather[12] is delivered with more apparent gusto than an American puts into the most heartfelt utterance. The words may be the same, but the tune is entirely different. On the other hand, the American voice is slow, less varied both in pitch and in rhythm, and consequently much more monotonously droning.

From the eighteenth century on, American speech (especially that of rural New England) has been labelled by both British and native observers as characterized by a "drawl" and a "twang." The "drawl," differing in degree, to some extent, in time and place, is evidently the extreme of what has just been described as a characteristic feature of General American utterance—its level, flat, and deliberate character. What is meant by "twang," in all probability, is the quality of nasality that often associates itself, again more frequently in the rural districts (both of New England and the Middle West) than in the cities, with the "drawl." "The word 'twang,'" Professor Krapp points out, "often means nothing more than merely 'flavor.'"[13] It is in fact, we may add, confused with "tang." Nevertheless, the term "nasal twang" undoubtedly has a real meaning, and describes an ingredient in American speech that once was more conspicuous and more general than it is now. Of course, the habit of nasalizing vowels is no more of indigenous growth in America than are other distinguishing features of American speech. It once flourished

[12] Professor F. N. Scott's little paper "The Father Tongue," *The Standard of American Speech*, New York (Allyn), 1926, pp. 16–18, illustrates this difference rather neatly.

[13] *The English Language in America*, Vol. II, p. 14.

in England (and to some extent still does), as Krapp indicates,[14] and was satirized as a Puritan failing in *Hudibras* and elsewhere.[15]

Connected with the "drawl" rather than the "twang" is a further conspicuous difference between American speech and British. It seems to the present writer to be going too far to say of American speech, as has recently been said,[16] "The stresses are levelled out and all syllables have almost the same value . . . ." But if this is exaggeration, it is the exaggeration of a real truth, and an important one for us if we are to distinguish between American and British habits of speech. The point is that British English has more and more tended to emphasize the heavy stress accent characteristic of the Teutonic languages in general; it has obscured. and often telescoped, unaccented vowels. American English has, in many classes of words, done this to a less degree, and has indeed preserved distinctive vowel qualities through a habit of secondary accent that has been discarded in British English. This is particularly noticeable in polysyllables ending in *-ary*, *-ery*, and *-ory*. These are Middle English borrowings, for the most part, of Old French words that are ultimately Latin. The main accent in Old French was ordinarily on what is now the penultimate syllable, but in Middle English it shifted to the fourth rather than the second syllable from the

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 23; and compare his reference to Ripman, *Sounds of Spoken English*, p. 14.

[15] For references to dramatic satire directed against the Puritans' habit of speaking "i' th' nose," see Myers, A. M., *Representation and Misrepresentation of the Puritan in Elizabethan Drama* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, 1931), pp. 20, 36, and 85.

[16] Larsen and Walker, *Pronunciation: A Practical Guide to American Standards*, New York (Oxford), 1930, p. 13.

end, as native words were commonly accented on the first syllable if this syllable was a root. However, a secondary accent remained on the penultimate syllable, and this secondary stress is preserved in General American practice though it has been lost, probably within the last century and a half, in British speech.[17] Our ultra-refined radio announcers who stress only the first syllable of words like *dictionary, ordinary, secretary, laboratory,* and *cemetery,* and telescope the rest are presumably either ignorant of this law or convinced of the plausibility of a "Received Standard" for the whole of the English-speaking world. It is to be regretted that the British habit is making headway in our schools as well.

If the "drawl" is to be accounted a vice of American pronunciation, surely the greater intelligibility that results from the secondary stress may fairly be reckoned a virtue that does something to compensate. The frequent testimony of foreigners, even those who have learned their English in England, that they can understand an American's English more easily than an Englishman's seems most plausibly explained through the slower tempo of American speech, and particularly, its habit of secondary accent. This habit, it may be added, affects certain other words besides those in *-ary, -ery,* and *-ory* already referred to. A footnote in Nicklin's *Standard English Pronunciation*[18] in regard to *circumstances* is somewhat amusing to an American: "Some speakers seem to have let themselves be influenced by Gilbert's rhyming

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[17] Kenyon, *American Pronunciation,* pp. 82–85, has a fuller account of the matter, with lists of words in which American and British practice vary.

[18] P. 72. Reprinted by permission of the Oxford University Press.

of this word with *chances* and *dances*, without observing that such rhymes no more pretend to guide us to the Standard pronunciation than the rhyme with *folly* suggests that we should remove the emphasis from the first syllable of *melancholy*." As to the latter point, it is interesting that the rhyme *folly* and *melancholy* that seemed good to Milton (*Il Penseroso*, ll. 61–62) is still equally good in American speech, though the Englishman prefers ['mɛlənkɔlɪ]. But to suggest that any British deviation from the practice of accenting *circumstances* on the first syllable only is due to a lyric in the *Mikado* is surely to exaggerate the influence of the rhymes of comic opera librettos. If Gilbert has contaminated British taste on this point, is he also responsible for *gal* (in place of *girl*), which, in an equally familiar lyric in *Iolanthe*, he rhymes with *liberal*?

Here, however, a word of caution may be in order. The statement that, in certain groups of words, American pronunciation retains a secondary stress that British pronunciation discards should not be interpreted as implying that American pronunciation fails to share the general trend of Modern English speech toward obscuring unaccented vowels. Indeed, with but minor qualifications, one who generalizes about American speech is quite justified in accepting for American pronunciation also the rule that Mr. Nicklin formulates on this point: "It is hardly too much to say that in nearly every word of more than one syllable all the vowels except those on which the principal stress accent falls are now sounded either as [ə] or as *i* in *fit*, and this however the word is spelt."[19] Failure to observe this principle, as we shall

[19] P. 71.

have occasion to note again, leads to many pedantic "spelling-pronunciations," not a few of them, alas, dignified by the authority of our dictionaries.

To return to the *differentiae* of General American speech. Apart from the distinctive trends that have already been noticed—the less varied pitch, the slower tempo, and the greater frequency of secondary stress—there are of course several particularly conspicuous differences in the treatment of individual vowels and consonants. Two of these have already been mentioned, in speaking of points of contact between General American and Northern British,[20] and conversely, points of difference between General American and "Received Standard": the sounding of the *r* finally and before consonants; and the low front [æ] (or [a]) in such words as *ask, bath, dance, half, pass,* and so forth. Others that may be added are the use of the simple vowel [u:] instead of the diphthong [ɪu] or [ju] in such words as *duke, duty, new, student, tube,* and so on; and the preference for the short unrounded [ɑ] rather than the slightly rounded short [ɔ] in words like *hot, not, rock,* and *possible.* Still another point that is usually mentioned in such a category as this is the following one: "In *white, wheat, whale,* etc., the *w* is always preceded by a voiceless fricative." [21] But the "always" surely exaggerates: in many urban areas, specifically in New York City and in Philadelphia, this use of [ʍ] rather than [w] (where the spelling is *wh*) is decidedly less common. The writer has asked many persons whether they pronounced the *wh* as [ʍ] in such words as those referred to. The answer has usually been,

[20] P. 217.

[21] Kurath, H., "American Pronunciation," S.P.E. Tract No. XXX, p. 284.

"I try to," or "I've been taught to"—pretty clear evidence that [ʌ] is *not* in natural, unforced use.

Before discussing further the general tendencies of contemporary American pronunciation, it may be worth while to point out the several leading differences that separate Southern and New England speech from General. Southern and New England pronunciation are in the main alike, and different from General, in their treatment of *r*. Both sections share the Southern British habit of obscuring or dropping the *r* unless it is protected by a following vowel. It is probably more common in New England than in the South, however, to find even educated speakers interpolating a final *r* before a word beginning with an initial vowel, as in "idear of" or "I sawr (h)im." The reason seems to be that the habit of using the final *r* when the next word begins with a vowel—"far off" and "far away" as spelled, but "fa(r) distant"—is sometimes carried over even to words that do not contain the final *r*, when these words are followed by an initial vowel. In both New England and the South, also, the [ɹ] of General American in such words as *bird, hurt, shirt,* and *worth,* is replaced, as in Southern British, by [ʌ:]; the tongue-point, that is to say, no longer rises in the direction of the gums, and *r* has lost even a semblance of consonantal quality.

As to the special marks of New England speech, most conspicuous, probably, is the natural use of the so-called broad *a* ([ɑ:]) in such words as *answer, dance, fast, half,* and so forth. Elsewhere in the United States, this [ɑ·] is likely to be due to affectation or Anglomania. The substitution of [ʊ] for [u:] in words like *proof, soon,* and *spoon* is likewise more marked in New England than in American pronunciation generally. A third distinc-

tive mark of New England speech—especially that of eastern New England—is the tendency to round partially the vowel of *hot, not, rock, spot,* and the like, in a way reminiscent of Southern British, rather than to use the perceptibly different unrounded [ɑ], as is the usual American practice. New Englanders, too, are likely to use this same short and slightly rounded [ɔ] sound rather than the prolonged and fully rounded [ɔ:], common to most American speech, in such words as *coffee, cost, long, lost,* and *song.*

Southern American speech is markedly uniform in its unaffected use of the diphthong [ɪu] or [ju] in *duke, new, tune,* and so on, rather than the [u:] characteristic of American speech generally. Words like *door* and *more* are also given sounds that are quite distinctive. The final *r* of course is lost, as it is in New England also, but the vowel sound is not [ɔ:]; rather, it varies from the more cultured combination of [o:] (somewhat lowered) plus an obscure following vowel—the sounds indicated by dialect writers as *doah* and *moah*—to the Negro and lower-class white [o:]—the sound indicated by *do'* and *mo'.* The latter pronunciation makes *door* and *dough,* and *more* and *mow,* indistinguishable. A third peculiarity, not universal in the South but noticeable in common and sometimes in cultured speech, is the employment of the broad [ɑ:] in words in which *r* is preceded by either of the diphthongs [ɑɪ] or [ɑʊ]; thus, *fire* and *hired* are given as [fɑ:, hɑ̈:d] (as well as [fɑɪə, hɑɪəd]) and *our* and *flowers* become [ɑ:, flɑ:z]. The same vowel, somewhat shortened, frequently takes the place of [ɑɪ] in other positions also, notably in [ɑ] and [mɑ] for *I* and *my,* when these pronouns are unemphatic. A prevalent misconception of Southern speech is that which

attributes its more extreme divergences from General American to the influence of the Negro. A little reflection serves to indicate that the chief influence must have been in the other direction. There are after all far fewer distinctively Negro traits than Northerners usually assume: probably the Negro's difficulty with the *th* sounds (leading to [d] for the voiced and [f] for the voiceless sound) is the only important one not paralleled in the speech of the "poor white." Professor Kurath's words sum up the situation: "The negro has his own cadences and his unmistakable voice, but in matters of pronunciation he has simply learned and preserved dialectal peculiarities of his former masters that have been levelled out among the educated Southerners."[22]

From this brief account of American speech and its three chief varieties, we may turn to a more specific discussion of the general trends it exhibits today, and to an inquiry into what one's attitude toward them may reasonably be. It will not always be necessary to separate American speech, or that most typical phase of it which has been designated General American, from the broader field of contemporary English pronunciation as a whole. Only a minor qualification, for example, is desirable when what suggests itself as the very first characteristic of the present-day pronunciation of English is mentioned. This is a tendency toward relaxed pronunciation, a tendency that has its roots in the heavy Teutonic stress accent and that has resulted in overemphasis on stressed, and underemphasis on unstressed, syllables. Obscuring and loss of formerly distinctive

[22] P. 296. Several of my illustrations of Southern speech have been taken from this summary of it.

vowel sounds, and dropping of consonants in phonetically difficult combinations (the second often a consequence of the first), are both to be found in Old English; but they have become more marked characteristics of Middle and Modern English. The degree to which these processes have occurred is often concealed by our archaic spelling. What is perhaps not so often perceived is that the wide extent of both is often concealed by our dictionaries as well. There will be occasion to return to this topic a little later. Here it seems essential to indicate that pronunciations that depart from the spelling in dropping or obscuring consonantal and vocalic sounds are not necessarily to be apologized for. They simply follow a well-established trend in our language that is but slightly more marked in present-day British practice than in American. If it were not so, we might still be saying *hlāfweard* (loaf-ward) for *lord*, and *daegesēage* (day's-eye) for *daisy*.

To some, however, it seems easy to perceive the fact of relaxed or obscured pronunciation (particularly that recorded in the spelling) for the past, but difficult to accept the continuing consequences of the same trend upon the language of the present. Such persons are behind even our dictionaries—in pronouncing a *p* in *raspberry*, for example, or a *t* in *Christmas*. Actually, these relaxed pronunciations are very common indeed, and in perfectly reputable practice: *towards* as a monosyllable, *forehead* as [fɑɪd], and *waistcoat* as [wɛskət] are a few random illustrations. The [ɪ] of the unaccented syllable of such a word as *forehead* is a sound of wide occurrence in contemporary pronunciation; it occurs in the best speech, for example, in *mountain*, *senate*, and *subject*, however the spelling varies and no matter whether

dictionaries may rule otherwise. Still more prevalent, of course, is the neutral [ə]; as has already been suggested, it is almost safe to assume that *every* unstressed vowel approximates [ə] or [ɪ]. To put it differently, it is almost a necessity to have either secondary accent or distributed stress, if other vowel sounds than [ə] or [ɪ] are to be preserved. Thus, in the more rapid British pronunciation of *registrar* and *bursar*, the [ɑ] sound is lost in the final syllables, which thus have the vowel of *sir;* but the usual American practice is to preserve the [ɑ] through secondary accent in the one case, and through distributed or hovering stress in the other. British pronunciation, as we have suggested, is in general somewhat more subject to the type of change under discussion than American. Thus, *medicine* and *venison* have lost their middle vowels in British practice but not in American; *business*, it may be added, seems to be going the same way, in both countries.

One further point about relaxed or obscured pronunciation may be made: It tends to occur even more thoroughly in phrases than in single words. This is strikingly true of the conventional formulas of speech that are used again and again. The principle evidently is that the more familiar the phrase, the less distinctly its separate sounds need to be pronounced. Hence, phrases become single words or single sounds. *Goodbye*, from *God be with you*, is a classical illustration. The evolution, in English, of the Latin *mea domina* is likewise noteworthy: in Middle English, it was *madame* (three syllables, the middle accented); but in Modern English, it has become successively *madam, ma'am,* and even *'m* (as in *Yes'm,* and the Southern American *No'm*). In the last, and surely the ultimate, simplification, the five vowels and four

consonants of the original phrase have been reduced to a single consonant. The process of course is not peculiar to English; to compare the pronunciation of the French *monsieur*[23] or *mademoiselle* with the spelling is to suggest the parallel way in which similar formulas have been simplified in another language. Again, however, the greater extent of relaxed pronunciation in English is fairly evident; and it is quite explicable in view of the more thorough changes in English pronunciation in general.

The distinctive peculiarities of General American in individual vowels or consonants may now be enlarged upon. Most characteristic of all, probably, is the all but universal use of the low flat [æ]—or sometimes the compromise [a]—in words which in the usual British pronunciation have [ɑ] or [ɑ:]. In many of these words, the sound precedes the combination of a nasal and a continuant;[24] *half*, *laugh*, *grass*, *bath*, *path*, *dance*, and *answer* are a few examples. It may be stated unequivocally that, except for eastern New England and tidewater Virginia, the normal American pronunciation makes the vowel of such words as these identical with that of *hat* and *man*. In spite of this, the notion still lingers in some American minds that the "flat" sound should be abandoned for the supposedly more elegant "Italian" *a*. The history of the sounds in question should do something to dispel this idea. The [ɑ:], in the first place, is not of very great antiquity in these words; Old English long *a* [ɑ:] of course did not remain unchanged, but developed into Modern English [o:]. Further, the usual

[23] Sometimes spelled, indeed, *m'sieur* or *m'sieu'*.

[24] For a full enumeration, see Kenyon, *American Pronunciation*, pp. 174–175.

evolution of Old English short *a* [ɑ] was, in open syllables, into Modern English [e:], and in closed syllables, into Modern English [æ]. The latter development has occurred in such words as *cat*, *man*, and so forth. In the early Modern English period, then, [ɑ] or [ɑ:] was not used in either English or American pronunciation, except dialectally. The first dictionary recognition of these sounds (in such combinations as those mentioned above) comes almost at the end of the eighteenth century; until about that time, [ɑ] was usually regarded as the vulgar and [æ] the polite sound.[25]

The story of [ɑ] and [æ] is further complicated by the attempt of early nineteenth-century grammarians and lexicographers, in both England and America, to introduce a compromise vowel [a]. It is curious to remember that this was at first advocated as an alternative to a more vulgar [ɑ], if one was not willing to go the whole way and say [æ]; in the later nineteenth century, [a] has been advocated in just the other way—as an alternative to a more vulgar [æ], if one was not willing to go the whole way and say [ɑ]. Opinions differ very widely as to the extent to which [a] has been adopted in American speech; and of course there is considerable difference in the interpretation of the symbol itself. If we take it to mean a sound that is very much nearer [ɑ] than [æ], there is every reason to feel that its use in General American is as artificial as that of [ɑ] itself. On the other hand, if we take it to mean a sound that is much nearer to [æ] than to [ɑ], there is much less reason to be certain of its arti-

[25] Professor H. M. Ayres points out that this distinction still persists in the English of Bermuda: [æ] is the polite, and [ɑ] the low-class pronunciation. See his article "Bermudian English," *American Speech*, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (February, 1933), pp. 3–10.

ficiality. It sometimes seems to be taken indeed to be what [æ] properly should stand for—the low front monophthong; and by "flat" *a*, a sound perhaps justly reprehended, is meant a diphthongized (and sometimes nasalized) combination that is not far away from [e: + ə]. The tendency seems to be growing to regard [a], in the sense of a strictly half-way compromise between [ɑ] and [æ], as thoroughly pedantic and unnatural.[26]

Discarding, then, the possibility of [a] (in the sense just defined), and confining the choice, in such words as *bath, calf, dance, past,* and the like, to [ɑ] and [æ], need there be any uncertainty as to present practice? That the question should be raised at all testifies to the strength of the New England tradition in our dictionaries and in our national life. For it is obviously the deference to the standard of New England (complicated, possibly, by a touch of Anglomania) that caused [ɑ] to be cultivated elsewhere in the United States, especially in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In New England itself, the rightness of [ɑ] for general American purposes is occasionally maintained even more recently. The following pronouncement is all too typical of this blatant sectionalism: "The broad *a* seems likely to come in. Some New Englanders, as we have seen, overdo it; but unquestionably, *aunt, laugh, last, past,* and *fast,* as pronounced in New England, have the weight of author-

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[26] Krapp observes of this sound (*Comprehensive Guide to Good English*, p. 203): "There is no word in the language in which it is unequivocally illustrated, and there is no region where it is naturally spoken." Kenyon (*op. cit.*, pp. 176–178), however, believes the [a] that was once merely artificial to be now in natural use, in the *ask* group of words, in parts of New England; and he thinks that another, historically distinct [a], characteristic of the Northern English and Scottish pronunciation of all the "short *a*" words, is to be found in local use in other parts of America.

ity so distinctly on their side that *laff* and *ant* are fast becoming provincial."[27]

Though the preference for [ɑ] lingers on in the very restricted territory already indicated—and occasionally in young ladies' seminaries and in schools of elocution outside—there is no longer any doubt that [æ] is the normal American sound. Even within New England, and in England itself, [ɑ] is losing ground. A very practical reason for not making the attempt to cultivate it may be given to any not to the manner born who seek to acquire it: It will surely be used in the wrong places. Even if they avoid the most grotesque error—that of dropping [æ] altogether, and making *hat* and *cat*, for example, almost if not quite identical with *hot* and *cot*—how can they possibly remember that *class*, *pass*, and *grass* have the [ɑ], but not *mass* and *gas;* that *dance* is different from *askance* and *entrance*, *example* and *sample* from *lamp* and *amble*, and *plastic* from *plaster?* They may recall that *vast* and *mass* have different vowels, but what will keep them from the all too revealing [væst] [mɑs], instead of the "correct" [vɑst] [mæs]? To put it on the lowest ground, that of expediency, it is an attempt that had better not be made.

When we turn from [æ] in certain groups of words, as a mark of American speech, to [u:] (rather than [ju])[28]

[27] Greenough and Hersey, *English Composition*, New York (Macmillan), 1917, pp. 354 and 355. But, alas for human hopes! In 1932, it evidently seems to the same writers less certain that the broad *a* will "come in"; for, in their revision of this book, now called *Writing Well*, they have reduced this statement to the innocuous (if meaningless) advice: "Care should be taken in pronouncing *have*, *aunt*, *laugh last past*, and *fast*." (P. 451.)

[28] To avoid complicating the point, in what is after all a highly controversial matter, I do not attempt to distinguish between the rising diphthong [ɪu] and the falling diphthong [ju]. For a careful treatme of this distinction in American speech, see Kenyon, pp. 210–216.

in another group, we are confronted by a somewhat similar state of affairs. Here again most Americans normally use the one sound, but they do so in spite of lexicographic prohibition and often (much more than in the other matter) with an uneasy feeling that they are falling short of the best standards. Words about which this question especially arises are those in which the vowel (or diphthong) is preceded by a pre-dental or alveolar consonant (except *l* and *r*). Words in which the preceding consonant is a labial (or [k] or [h]) give no difficulty: *pew, beauty, music, few, view, cute,* and *huge* are pronounced only with the [ju]. Normally *l* and *r* are followed by the simple vowel, in England as well as in America; *lucid, lure, grew, true,* and *rule* are typical instances. This is probably more generally true, however, in respect to British pronunciation, for *r* than for *l*. But Nicklin[29] observes that " . . . in *lute,* the more careful pronunciation is the rarer, and the majority of speakers confuse the word with *loot.*" To an American, the "more careful" actor's pronunciation of this line in the opening soliloquy of *Richard III:* "Capering to the lascivious lute" sounds decidedly stagey. It may be added that there is no doubt about the [u:] when *l* is preceded by another consonant: *blue, clue, flute,* and *glue* are examples. Words of the group in which British and General American usage are sharply divided are those in which the stressed vowel is preceded by *s, z, sh, t, d, th,* or *n*. Even here, however, a further discrimination may be made. After the first three consonants just mentioned, it would appear that [u:] is gaining ground, in England as well as in America. To quote Nicklin

[29] *Op. cit.,* p. 29.

again (page 29): "Thus, while the stage until quite lately persisted in speaking of *Syew' zən* (*Susan*), modern English has abandoned the painful attempt and says quite frankly *Soo'-zən.*" For *suit,* [sjut] was John Barrymore's pronunciation of the word in:

Nor customary suits of solemn black,

but it was, to an American ear, decidedly artificial. For these words as a group, American usage almost always favors [u:], and British usage may have begun to follow suit.

The real cleavage is in those words in which the stressed vowel follows *t, d, th,* or *n.* Typical words are *stew, tune, tube, due, duke, duty, enthusiasm, thews, new, nude,* and *nuisance.* British usage recognizes only [ju] for all these and similar words. This is also the usual prescription of dictionaries and schools in America. There can be no doubt, however, that [u:] is in far more general use in actual practice, and that it is gaining ground. This is so even in New England, where once [ju] was more prevalent—so very prevalent, indeed, that [ju] sometimes lingers on in rural New England even where [u:] is the only sound in cultivated speech; *to* and *two,* for example, are sometimes made [tju], and *do, due,* and *dew* given alike the pronunciation [dju]. Only in the South does [ju] remain in general natural use, alike in rude and in polished speech.

The fact that [u:] is the usual American pronunciation, in the words just indicated, and the additional circumstance that it is undoubtedly winning wider and wider acceptance in cultivated speech, would seem to be sufficient proof that it cannot be rejected as characteristic only of vulgar speakers. That a different practice

obtains in England should surely not be regarded as making it necessary for Americans to abandon [u:] and studiously cultivate [ju]. Some Americans do, of course —and frequently with as ludicrous results as when the same speakers substitute [ɑ] for their native [æ]. If the appeal to individual authority carries more weight with such people than does the force of general (including good) usage, let them consider that W. D. Whitney, the greatest student of language that America has yet produced, went on record with the observation that in his pronunciation the vowel of *tube, new,* and so forth, was "frankly and unmistakably" identical with that of *food.*

General American English is characterized further by the use it makes of [ɔ] and [ɔ:]. The tense [ɔ:] of *awe* and *law* is heard in many words in which British pronunciation favors a slack [ɔ] that approaches [ɑ]. Three interesting groups[30] of such words are these: (1) words in which the vowel is followed by the voiceless continuants [f], [s], and [θ]; (2) words in which it is followed by [n] or [ŋ]; and (3) words in which it is followed by the stops [k] and [g], and a few words in which it is followed by [d]. Examples of the words in question are: (1) *coffee, cough, office, soft, Boston, cost, lost, sausage, broth, cloth,* and *moth;* (2) *gone, long, song, strong, throng,* and *wrong;* and (3) *lock, mock, rock, stalk, bog, dog, fog, frog, hog, log, God, rod,* and *sod.* In the first two groups, [ɔ:] (sometimes relaxed to approximate [ɔ]) is the typical American pronunciation; the use of [ɑ], to many Americans, savors of affectation. For the third group, there is

[30] For an investigation of the [ɑ–ɔ] variation in these and other groups of words, as pronounced in New York State, see Thomas, C. K., *American Speech,* IX, 1 (Feb., 1936), pp. 68–77.

considerable variation in General American pronunciation. Only the words *stalk*, *dog*, and (perhaps) *God* commonly have [ɔ:] rather than [ɑ] in the pronunciation of the Middle Atlantic states; while farther west, [lɔ:g], [hɔ:g], and [mɔ:k] are familiar.

On the other hand, [ɔ] does not appear in General American, though it does in the speech of the South and of eastern New England (as in British pronunciation) in words in which the vowel appears before other voiceless stops than [k]. Such words are *fop*, *got*, *hot*, *not*, *spot*, *top*, and *watch*. For these, the General American value of the vowel is [ɑ]. This sound sometimes appears likewise, in General American use, in such miscellaneous words as *forest*, *on*, *continent*, *follow*, *proposition*, *pomp*, *orange*, *doll*, and *horrid*. Of these, it may be said that the [ɑ] changes to [ɔ] as one goes west from the Middle Atlantic seaboard, the alteration beginning in western Pennsylvania.

Another case of divided usage is the alternation of [u:] and [ʊ] in words spelled with the double *o*. The general tendency here is very clear: Old English *ō* [o:] quite uniformly became [u:], though the spelling absurdly retained the *oo* symbol, which thus came to take on another meaning. However, it is evident that the tense [u:] tends to shorten to the lax [ʊ], and sometimes to lower and go forward to [ʌ]. The four possibilities are illustrated in these words: (1) *brooch* (the exceptional survival of the original Old English value of the vowel, paralleled also in a few proper names like *Moore* and *Roosevelt*, in the latter of which the Dutch sound is the same as the Old English one), (2) *food*, (3) *good*, and (4) *blood*. The chief variation in present-day usage is between [u:] and [ʊ] in such words as *broom*, *Cooper*, *hoof*,

hoop, proof, roof, room, soon, soot, and *spoon.* Satisfactory generalization seems impossible here; one can see that the trend is from [u:] to [ʊ], but it is constantly held in check by the frequent presumption that [u:] is the "correct" sound. In British usage, for example, only [u:] seems to be sanctioned in *hoof, hoop, roof,* and perhaps *root* and *soot;* but in the United States, there is considerable sectional diversity in all these words.[31] Professor Krapp's opinion that for *broom, room,* and *spoon,* the [ʊ] sounds are "rare and the influence of spelling now seems to be decisive against them"[32] is both dogmatic and wide of the mark; for why should the "influence of the spelling" be any more decisive for *room* than for *book* or *good?* One may compare with this Nicklin's remark[33] that:

> . . . *room* . . . occurs so frequently in compounds such as *bath-room, bed-room,* and *dining-room,* where the stress accent on the first syllable tends to shorten the vowel in the second part of the compound, that by a reaction, apparently, the uncompounded word has come to have the short o͝o sound. Two other words are in danger, for whatever cause, of getting their vowel sound similarly shortened—viz., *soon* and *broom.*

To the present writer, it seems that [ʊ] in both *room* and *broom* is well established in General American, and the same sound in *soon* in New England.

To the foregoing list of individual sounds in which some question of present-day practice arises, two others

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[31] See Grandgent's article, *Modern Language Notes,* Vol. VI, pp. 458 *ff.* (1891). His results are summarized in Kenyon, pp. 189–190.

[32] *English Language in America,* Vol. II, p. 149.

[33] Pp. 29–30. Reprinted by permission of the Oxford University Press. And see the Appendix to Nicklin's book for an interesting list of words arrayed in three columns according to whether the pronunciation in the "Standard dialect" is [ʌ], [ʊ], or [u:] (pp. 100 and 101).

—this time consonants rather than vowels—might be added. These are the sounds represented, in the symbols of conventional spelling, by *wh* and *r*. The questions that both suggest have, however, already been discussed. In general, it may be repeated that the "Received Standard" deprecates both [ʍ] and [ɹ]; General American, on the other hand, at least theoretically goes in for [ʍ] and (with more misgiving) [ɹ]. Pride of course can be taken in either [ʍ] or [w]. Thus an adherent of Southern British finds with satisfaction that his speech retains the simplification of *hw* to *w* that was made in the South but not in the North, while the usual American tendency, as has been already suggested,[34] is to cultivate [ʍ] where it is often not the sound natural to the speaker. So too with *r*. Professor Wyld, for example, looks with distinct approval upon the "*r*-less" nature of contemporary Southern British, while a Northerner (like many an American) finds this very characteristic a sign of foppishness, if not downright effeminacy. "Devoid of the rasping sound of inverted *r* before consonants" is one of the points in Professor Wyld's catalog of the desirable qualities of his own brand of pronunciation;[35] but a Scotchman looks at this tendency with something like horror: "Abhor the practice of men who will not bring out the letter *r*."[36] Not a few Americans, on the other hand, are prone (another testimony to the strength of the New England tradition) to feel that to suppress the *r* is to speak in a more distinguished manner.

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[34] P. 227.

[35] *Historical Study of the Mother Tongue*, New York (Dutton), 1906, p. 23.

[36] Mair, William, *Speaking*, Edinburgh (Blackwood), 1908, p. 47. The writer attributes this advice to Spurgeon—"An Englishman [speaking] to Englishmen."

It may occur to some readers that all this discussion of variation in contemporary pronunciation has been conducted with very little reference indeed to an authority usually evoked when a dispute upon pronunciation arises —the dictionary. Why is it necessary to go elaborately into varying habits of speech in different places, when we have a court of highest appeal that will at once settle all questions of correct usage? In a word, to put the question in the form it usually takes in practice, why not "look it up in the dictionary"? To answer this question as specifically as possible, to point out why "the dictionary" is not completely satisfactory as the arbiter of pronunciation, must now be our task. If anything can be done to shake the blind faith with which many a consulter of "the dictionary" approaches that supposedly sacred book, something useful will, in the opinion of the writer, have been accomplished.

To "look it up in the dictionary," in the first place, implies either that there is only one dictionary or that the verdict of all dictionaries is one and the same. Actually, there are many dictionaries, of varying degrees of reliability and usefulness, and there is, further, a very considerable diversity in the matter we are just now concerned with—the pronunciations recorded. We may very easily, that is to say, "look it up" in the wrong dictionary. It comes as a shock to an American using the *Oxford*, for example, to find that the preferred pronunciation of *ate* is [ɛt]. The best of all dictionaries for such questions as etymology may thus be a most inadequate index to accepted American pronunciation.[37] The

[37] Of H. C. Wyld's new and excellent *Universal Dictionary* (New York, Dutton, 1932), Professor Kemp Malone remarks, *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 6 (June, 1933), p. 379: ". . . the American

Shorter Oxford (1933), indeed, specifically disclaims making allowance "as a rule, for dialectal, colonial, or American varieties [of pronunciation]."[38] Nor is this difficulty completely removed if we grant merely that differences in national standards do exist, and therefore confine our choice, for questions of pronunciation, to American dictionaries only. It is still a far from remote possibility that the pronunciation one finds will be a sectional rather than a truly national one.

The sectional bias of the leading American dictionaries, particularly Webster's, takes the form of frequently preferring the New England, rather than the General American, variant, in words that have no one nationally accepted pronunciation. The realistic method of dealing with such words would certainly seem to be to indicate three different pronunciations (General American, Southern, and New England) for those words in which differences do in fact exist in the cultivated speech of these three sections. Only in this way could the dictionary approach a real record of divided usage as it actually exists. Moreover, only in this way could the dictionary keep abreast of the present state of knowledge as to American pronunciation. If it be objected that this solution is a counsel of perfection, that to attempt it would be an impracticable extension of the present scope of our dictionaries, it is still possible to reply that the solution adopted—not to be sure in theory, but frequently in practice—is almost the worst conceivable

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reader must be on his guard, for Mr. Wyld makes a curious distinction between sounds and meanings: in dealing with the former he ignores American usage, whereas in dealing with the latter he is careful to record everything American that comes his way."

[38] Introduction, p. ix.

one. For if one of the three sections has a better right than another to be considered, in its speech, as approximating national status, it is obviously that which speaks General American. Though the second (1934) edition of the *New International* is less subject to criticism of this sort than its predecessors, it still gives *ȧ*—that is, [a]—as the vowel of such words as *ask, chance, grass, path,* in spite of the fact that *ă* [æ], in Professor Kenyon's excellent preface on pronunciation, is described as the vowel used in these words (in the United States and Canada) by "a large majority of speakers—probably not less than a hundred million." As we have seen, the real status of the sounds in question is that [a] is likely to be artificial or pedantic, that [ɑ] is virtually limited to Eastern New England and Eastern Virginia,[39] and that [æ] is in every other respect the one sound in national use. To the ordinary user of the dictionary, who does not trouble to investigate the careful qualifications of the preface, the recording of [a] for these words (and [ɑ] *or* [a] for *aunt, calf, half, laugh,* and so forth) surely implies that the "hundred million" who use the [æ] are vulgar speakers—in other words, that the General American practice is wrong.

This preference for New England usage, perhaps less marked in our other leading dictionaries than in Webster's but still all too generally familiar, can be explained only as the survival of a former deference, outmoded now in most other matters, to New England as the center of our national culture, and to Boston as the "hub of the universe." It is coupled perhaps with another and a

[39] Even here, it would seem that usage, among both cultured and uncultured speakers, is sharply divided between [æ] and [ɑ]. See Krapp, *English Language in America,* Vol. I, p. 39, and his reference to Primer, *Pronunciation of Fredericksburg, Va.*

more ancient survival: the Colonial attitude of subservience to English tradition and authority. Since, in matters of pronunciation, the usage of Eastern New England and that of Southern England are frequently at one, both influences affect our dictionaries in the same way, and both operate to disqualify them as reliable guides to American pronunciation. Professor Kurath has stated the result forcibly, but not extravagantly:[40]

> Why should the dictionaries deliberately ignore this divergence [that of the West, the East, and the South]? Why should they take it upon themselves to force the standard of one area on the entire country? How fruitless their efforts have been! If it be the aim of scientific investigation to find out the facts and to make them known, should we not expect our better dictionaries to record faithfully how the educated classes actually speak, instead of indulging in their make-believe?

The first cause of dissatisfaction with the result of "looking it up in the dictionary" is thus the very real possibility of discovering either an un-American or a sectional pronunciation. It might have been added too that the mere factor of time militates against the accuracy of dictionaries. Not only will an early edition of a standard dictionary occasionally, and quite inevitably, record a pronunciation that has been superseded in actual usage, but even the latest edition must necessarily be, to some slight degree, behind actual speech. Even were dictionaries less conservative than in truth they are, one might still argue that, in the very nature of the task, every dictionary is out of date as soon as it is issued. Living speech is an ever-flowing stream that is continually passing by the stationary and unchanging record of its

[40] *Op. cit.*, p. 281. Reprinted by permission.

course that the dictionaries preserve for us. The record is of great value, to be sure, but it must not be mistaken for the thing which it records.

A second general reason for feeling that dictionaries give but inadequate guidance on pronunciation is the fact, honorable as it is to dictionary-makers, that there is no consensus of dictionary opinion as to what is the best pronunciation of many words. There is of course no one dictionary that can lay unchallenged claim to the place of "Supreme Authority"—though one, in its advertising, *does* usurp that proud title—and there is, in point of fact, very considerable disagreement among the best of them as to the sounds of many words. Both Webster's *New International* and Funk and Wagnalls's *Standard* include, in their unabridged editions, long lists of words for which the leading dictionaries give differing pronunciations. Nor should it be supposed that differences of this sort occur only in unessential details or in uncommon words. One who has thought of the advice on pronunciation given by "the dictionary" as being available, unchanged, in any dictionary, will be astonished by the variety of the preferences exhibited in several different dictionaries. To test the matter (and limiting the search to a few familiar words beginning in *a*), let the reader investigate, in four or five of the best dictionaries, the pronunciation of *adult*, *advertisement*, *aerial*, *again*, *alkali*, *aristocrat*, *associate*, and *asthma*.

But this is by no means the whole of the case against our leading dictionaries. Not only do they disagree among themselves, but as a group they fail, in greater or less degree, to give the full record of the obscuring of unaccented vowels and the blurring of consonantal combinations that are phonetically difficult—both of

which, as we have seen, take place on a large scale in actual speech, cultured as well as uncultured. The dictionaries are all too ready, in a word, to recommend spelling-pronunciations, with the result that what the dictionaries present is not current usage, but rather the sounds of a former day that are embalmed in an archaic spelling. Richard Grant White observed that "it is in the delicate but firm utterance of the unaccented vowels with correct sound that the cultured person is most surely distinguished from the uncultured," and something very like this is the standard recommended today, at least by implication, by Dr. F. H. Vizetelly, editor-in-chief of the *Standard*, when he writes: "Unfortunately, we have with us a large class of persons who speak without thinking how our words are spelled, and who, therefore, squeeze all the juice out of our speech by refusing to enunciate carefully all the niceties of sound that the words contain." [41] As the necessary antidote to this, let the reader note the words of Professor Wyld condemning such an attitude " . . . a rigid appeal to the spelling—the very worst and most unreliable court for the purpose." [42]

The full consequences of connecting spelling and pronunciation, as most of our leading dictionaries do, have not yet been suggested. Almost inevitably, inaccurate or merely theoretical [43] pronunciations are constantly

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[41] Preface to *A Desk-Book of 25,000 Words Frequently Mispronounced*, New York (Funk and Wagnalls), 4th ed., 1929, p. viii.

[42] *A History of Modern Colloquial English*, 2nd ed., 1936, p. 18.

[43] Even the *Oxford* is not beyond reproach in this matter. In its latest form, the *Shorter Oxford* (3rd ed., 1937), there is an introductory explanation (p. ix) to the effect that twelve vowel sounds, which are given with a separate symbol for each, occur in certain words only as "primary or ideal" values, "as in rhetorical utterance, in singing, and in cases of deliberate or affected precision"; otherwise, and "in normal speech,"

being presented, especially when the effort is made to indicate pronunciation without respelling. The Websterian diacritical markings, which are, unfortunately, the one code at all generally familiar in our schools, continually suggest quite untrue relationships between the written aspect and the sound of the word. Their use can only be deplored. Would anyone suspect, for example, that the second vowels of *novĕl* and *finăl* (so marked) are in present practice actually one and the same—an [ə] so thoroughly obscured that it tends to be lost in [l]? The other vowel that prevails in unaccented syllables is of course [ɪ]; but in the Websterian code it appears as *ĕ* in *ĕvent* and has appeared as *ă* in *senăte*. The case of the last is particularly interesting, for until the revision of 1936 it appeared as a key word on every other page of Webster's *Collegiate*. Does not its use suggest that the pronunciation of *senate* is to be distinguished in some subtle fashion from that of *sennit* or of *Sennett*? In actual use, all three are identical.

One of the unfortunate results of the dictionaries' weakness for spelling-pronunciations is that teachers are likely to accept them and to insist that their pupils use them. Professor Kenyon[44] tells of a teacher who carefully drilled her pupils to pronounce the noun *subject* with the "full sound of *e* as in *let*," and then, passing to another topic, observed that she would change the

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the value of each one is [ə]. Yet these twelve variants, which are further described as occurring only in "the historical and ideal pronunciations" of the words in question, are the only ones that are given when these words are pronounced in their alphabetical order in the dictionary. Surely this is misleading: the average user of the dictionary, who in at least nine cases out of ten has not read the introduction, naturally assumes that he is being given pronunciations that are not "historical" or "ideal" but current and realistic.

[44] *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

['sʌbdʒɪkt]. This is, one may be sure, an all too typical consequence of depending on the spelling. Not, of course, that dictionaries are always to blame. Theoretically, they recognize that spelling follows pronunciation, not pronunciation spelling. They do not advocate, for example, that such words as *busy, colonel, debt, does, English, knife, said, two,* and *women* be pronounced as the spelling might suggest. That other teacher, referred to by Professor Fries,[45] who instructed her pupils to pronounce *laughter* like *slaughter* and *daughter* (i.e., ['lɔtəɹ]), because it was similarly spelled, could not blame the dictionary for her mistake. In a less extreme way, however, pronunciations suggested by the spelling rather than by usage are not uncommon in dictionaries. A few random illustrations are the unstressed syllables of these words: *carpet, engage, fidget, goodness, preface, mistress, necklace,* and *useless.* The usual dictionary tendency is to represent the unstressed vowel by a symbol—*ĕ* or *ă*, for example—adapted from the conventional spelling of the word, rather than to indicate the [ɪ] or the [ə] that is actually heard in speech.

It will be recognized that at least part of the remedy for this failure of the dictionary is plain. If the system of indicating pronunciation without respelling leads to inaccuracies, the obvious improvement is to employ a phonetic alphabet and respell all words phonetically. That this is what ought to be done is scarcely to be doubted, but there are more serious practical obstacles than perhaps appear at first sight. For Webster's *New International* in its next edition to change its entire system of indicating pronunciation would be, for one thing, an enormously expensive undertaking. Even

[45] *The Teaching of the English Language,* New York (Nelson), 1927, p 59

apart from considerations of this sort, there is grave doubt as to whether the great mass of the users of the dictionary would want their familiar, though unscientific, symbols done away with. Our leading American dictionaries are, after all, primarily commercial enterprises that cater to a public whose habits and prejudices must be considered. Webster's chief American rival, the *Standard*, while using a second and a phonetic alphabet—not, unfortunately, a very close approximation to the International Phonetic Alphabet—still retains the Websterian symbols, doubtless as a concession to the deeply rooted habits of its patrons.[46]

To return to our catalog of the shortcomings of "the dictionary." More can be said than that individual dictionaries fail as a guide to present-day, national pronunciation; that dictionaries as a group vary among themselves; and that they record inadequately the modern tendency to obscure unstressed vowels. Besides all this, the user of the dictionary should be aware that, in the very nature of the task, the record of the dictionary is that of individual, isolated words—not of words in their ordinary groupings. The pronunciation of the word does, in practice, vary with its setting in the phrase or the sentence. Spoken language is made up rather of phrase-groups than of separate words. It therefore follows that a single word may very well have two (or more) pronunciations, which vary with the amount of

[46] Wyld's recent *Universal Dictionary* has adopted a similar policy. I cannot forbear quoting Professor Malone's comment (*op. cit.*, p. 379) that this is ". . . a phonetic respelling for the literate, preceded by a makeshift Websterian respelling for the illiterate. . . . Although we may be sceptical of the value, commercial or otherwise, of the makeshift respellings, we must be grateful for the presence, alongside them, of phonetic spellings which the hapless editor can look at without shame, and the student can use with safety."

emphasis given to the word in different contexts. Dictionaries show differences of this kind only very rarely: to distinguish two *the*'s ([ðiː] and [ðə]), as most dictionaries do, is to apply this principle; but such an instance is very exceptional. Yet a parallel variation in the pronunciation of other words is very common indeed in natural, colloquial speech. Professor Kenyon lists[47] a group of very familiar words that have, in good pronunciation, two or more variants. These variations are sometimes the result of the stressed or unstressed character of the word in the phrase, but sometimes also the result of its immediate phonetic environment. Thus, *that* will be either [ðət] or [ðæt] according to whether it is the unstressed conjunction or the stressed demonstrative. Observe how the pronunciation varies in the phrase, "He said that that was correct." A contemporary novelist,[48] by the way, attempts to make the spelling record these pronunciations, by employing *that* for the conjunction and *thatt* for the demonstrative. The other type of variation, that caused by the immediate phonetic environment, is illustrated in Kenyon's citation of seven possible pronunciations for *and*: the stressed forms [ænd] and [æn] in, respectively, "and, indeed, I should" and "both Jane and James"; and the unstressed forms [ənd], [ən], [nd], [n], and [ŋ] in "snow and ice," "cup and saucer," "head and arm," "rod and gun," and "Jack and Kate." When variation exists to this extent in good usage, it is not difficult to understand that the comparatively rigid record of the dictionaries must necessarily fail to echo the real accents of speech.

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[47] *Op. cit.*, pp. 102–108.

[48] V. Sackville-West, in *Family History*, New York (Doubleday, Doran), 1932.

The point that the pronunciation given in the dictionaries is sometimes theoretical rather than realistic might be developed further. Dictionaries, in spite of their protestations to the contrary, not infrequently yield to the temptation to tell what the pronunciation of a word should be, rather than what it is. The spelling of the word, or its etymology, or an analogy which is suggested with other words—all of these are possible factors in the dictionaries' occasional recommendation of a pronunciation that is simply at variance not only with wide usage but even with good usage. There undoubtedly is such a thing, in other words, as a "dictionary pronunciation." In such terms one may perhaps describe the dictionaries' preference for the accent on the first syllable of *arbutus*, *frontier*, and *peremptory*, for the accent on the second of *abdomen*, for the sounding of the first *c* [k] in *Arctic*, for [e:] rather than [ɑ:] as the accented vowel in *armada*, for the [g] rather than the [dʒ] in *oleomargarine*, and for *oboe* as ['o:boɪ, 'o:boe:, or 'o:bɔɪ]. It is only fair to add, however, that the more popular pronunciation is sometimes grudgingly admitted—occasionally prefaced by "often *mispronounced* as." As a final illustration of this attitude of the lexicographer, with its implication that his dictum takes precedence over usage, let the reader ponder these words on *interesting:* "The word is never correctly pronounced as if consisting of three syllables. *No dictionary* or work on pronunciation *indicates any such pronunciation* as in'-tris-ting." [49]

A word of caution may fittingly be attached to the foregoing enumeration of reasons for feeling that "the

[49] The italics are mine. The quotation is from F. H. Vizetelly, *How to Use English*, New York (Funk and Wagnalls), 1932, p. 378.

dictionary" is an inadequate guide to good pronunciation. These pages will have been completely misinterpreted if they have been thought to advise against using dictionaries. It is not a less extensive, but a more intelligent use of dictionaries that is being advocated—and a recognition of what one can expect and what one should not expect to find in their pages. Dictionaries, it cannot too often be repeated, are not the lawmakers; they are merely the law-recorders. For the reasons that have been stated, their record may easily be fallible. To put it differently, they do not so much create as indicate the standard of pronunciation; and again, their interpretation of the standard may be in error.

Where, then, is the standard of pronunciation to be found? How may it be stated? It is easy to say that the standard is set by good usage; but what constitutes good usage? Who are the speakers whose habits of pronunciation may be felt to indicate what good pronunciation is? Are they sufficiently well recognized and is their speech sufficiently uniform so that one may say that the pronunciation used by this or that segment of the population of the English-speaking world is good pronunciation, and all else is bad?

It is evident that, among the possible answers to questions like the last, there are two that are opposite and mutually contradictory. One is the conception of a very definite standard, that known as Received Standard or Public School English. Definitions of this we have already quoted.[50] Those who hold this belief conceive of the standard of pronunciation as being set by a highly limited group of speakers (limited socially or limited both socially and geographically). It perhaps should be

[50] *Cf.* p. 215.

emphasized that faith in this particular brand of pronunciation as constituting a single standard, and a standard already adhered to in practice, is not confined to Southern Englishmen. A fervent—though, to the present writer, wholly mistaken—plea for it is made in Miss M. E. DeWitt's book significantly entitled *Euphon English and World-Standard English in America.*[51]

The other extreme view is that there is no such thing as a standard of pronunciation—that throughout the English-speaking world, speech is too varied to permit of any standard at all. This theory has, perhaps, been set forth most persuasively by Professor Lounsbury.[52] His formulation of it deserves to be quoted at some length:

> Where exists that perfect standard which all orthoëpists assert or imply that they have furnished, but in the representation of which in numerous particulars no two of them concur? From what quarter are we to look for the coming of this infallible guide for whose arrival we are all longing? It seems never to have occurred to any of the compilers of dictionaries, and to but few of those who consult them, that the simple solution of the whole difficulty is that in the matter of pronunciation there is no standard of authority at all. Nor, as things are, can there be. Pronunciation must and will vary widely among persons of equal intelligence and cultivation. A dictionary which sets out to establish on a solid base an authoritative standard is bound to take into account the practice of the whole body of educated men the world over who are entitled to consideration. How is that to be ascertained? The mere statement of the fact shows its physical impossibility. It is a task beyond the power of any one person or any number of persons to accomplish.

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[51] New York (Dutton), 1924. The same point of view is present in Margaret P. McLean, *Good American Speech*, New York (Dutton), rev. ed., 1935.

[52] T. R. Lounsbury, *The Standard of Pronunciation in English*, pp. 212–216. Reprinted by permission of Harper and Brothers.

> Even this is not the worst. If everybody worth consulting could be consulted, we should still be left in precisely the same state of uncertainty as before. . . .
>
> Still this belief in the existence of a standard authority is one that will die hard even with the educated class. With the semi-educated class it will never die at all. . . .

If one had to choose between the two opposite conceptions—a standard of pronunciation that is extremely limited, and no standard at all—the second would probably have more to commend it. Yet many feel that there is such a thing as a standard of pronunciation based upon good usage, though it is at once to be admitted that the standard must be elastic enough to allow for sectional and even individual variations, and that the standard is not one and the same for all occasions and purposes. As to the last point, it seems feasible to hold that good usage varies with the more or less formal character of the occasion. A greater number of "relaxed" pronunciations and of elisions and syncopations will naturally be admitted into ordinary conversation than would be appropriate for oratorical declamation. Just as there are certain differences to be observed between the spoken and the written language in general, just so both spoken and written language have separate planes and degrees, each with its own tone and atmosphere, that mark the gradual transition from the least to the most formal occasion for speaking or for writing. There is such a thing as good usage, however, for the less formal as well as for the more formal occasions. Much misunderstanding is possible here. For one thing, "colloquial" should not be taken as a term of contempt. The "colloquial" word or the "colloquial" pronunciation of the word is as much in place in familiar conversation

as the "formal" word or the "formal" pronunciation would be out of place.

It remains for us to discuss one or two somewhat different attempts to find a brand of pronunciation that may be considered as embodying good usage. There is, for example, the practice of our best actors and actresses. May not stage pronunciation be accepted as a practical model, as in Germany the *Bühnenaussprache* is felt to be? There are several reasons for deciding that this is at best a most dubious guide. For one thing, in the very nature of the case, stage pronunciation must be audible and intelligible at far greater distances than conversational English need be; it tends therefore to be too declamatory and oratorical to serve as an appropriate guide for ordinary purposes. Then too, our American actors are often decidedly under British influence in speech. There is a tradition here that is quite at variance with the trend of General American. A good part of our stage pronunciation is international in character, and far more British than American. Again, some of our leading actors are notoriously bad speakers, and some are given to types of pronunciations that are obviously ill-suited to imitation. One of our most distinguished actresses, who must be nameless here, has been cruelly but not altogether unjustly chided by critics for her "waterfront voice." And one of the most promising young actors, famous for his portrayal of wistful adolescents, is almost as well known for his flat and lifeless enunciation. All in all, there seems small reason to seek the embodiment of good usage on the American stage.

What of the radio? Here, very evidently, is a most potent instrumentality for putting a standard of pronunciation before millions of listeners. It is clear too that

radio pronunciation—the speech, that is to say, of the professional broadcaster—does tend more and more to be of uniform character. One can scarcely doubt, moreover, that it is widely influential. Indeed, it seems quite probable that to the broadcaster's following of British standards we owe the recent popularity of the single accent in *secretary*, *laboratory*, and so forth. But it is patently artificial, as was illustrated by the announcer who conscientiously strove to refer to the Kentucky Derby as the ['dɑrbi:], but occasionally relapsed to ['dɛrbi:]. Something like that is just the criticism. The broadcaster's pronunciation, far too often, is self-conscious, affected, and stilted[53] to such a degree as to disqualify it from affording a standard of good usage. It is not the speech of a man who naturally speaks well as much as that of one who is making every effort to enunciate elegantly.

For all that, the radio and its almost equally influential relative, the talking picture, are certainly worthy of attention if one is to speculate about the future of English pronunciation. That the talking picture has seriously alarmed English people by exposing them to the horrors of the "American accent" is too well known to need comment. Out of their indignation and out of the American producers' willingness to conciliate their prejudices, it seems altogether likely that a compromise between American and British habits of speech, for "talkies" intended for international circulation, will increasingly be effected. Perhaps it may justifiably be feared that in this compromise, partly by reason of the

[53] For an excellent treatment of this point, see the editorial, "Broadcasting English," *Saturday Review of Literature*, Vol. VII, No. 28 (Jan. 31, 1931).

British tradition in the pronunciation current on our stage, the prestige of Southern English speech will have an undue share. Certainly it would seem, as has just been indicated, that a similar fear for the pronunciation of American broadcasters is being more and more justified.

The standardization of radio pronunciation, and the standardization, in part at least, after Southern English models, is a most interesting phenomenon. In addition to the usual factors that give this brand of speech a special prestige even in America, there is to be noted something else: the more careful and more intelligent supervision that has been given to the development of radio programs in England, as compared to their haphazard growth in America. The English evidently take their radio more seriously. This is as true of the matter of the broadcasters' pronunciation as of other things. American as well as English readers will find of great interest the British Broadcasting Corporation's "Recommendation for Pronouncing Doubtful Words."[54] For our present purpose, it is pertinent to remark that this pamphlet specifically observes,[55] "Unfortunately speech is not capable of rigid measurement, and there is no standard of pronunciation." This assertion, however, is followed by the enunciation of other principles that qualify it in a vital way:

> Out of the broad band that comprises all district and class variants, there is emerging a considerably narrower band of variants that have a very great measure of similarity. This narrow band of types has more features in common with Southern English than with Northern English. Those who

[54] Reissued with criticisms, edited by Robert Bridges, as *Tract No. XXXII, Society for Pure English* (1931).

[55] P. 9. Reprinted by permission of the Oxford University Press.

speak any one variety of the narrow band are recognized as educated speakers throughout the country. They may broadcast without fear of adverse intelligent criticism.

A fairly close approach, after all, to the doctrine of the "Received Standard" of Southern English! It is only fair to add, however, that the introduction and the proposals themselves are conceived in a spirit that is free from any suspicion of the dogmatic. Americans will be interested to see that Sir Robert Bridges, the chairman of the committee[56] that made the recommendations, dissents rather frequently both from his committee and from the other critics whose opinions he has invited, and occasionally favors a pronunciation that is more commonly American than English.

Probably one is justified in seeing in the radio a force that must eventually make for a nearer approach to uniform pronunciation over the whole of the English-speaking world. We are living, however, too early in its development to be at all certain of just how complete this standardization will ever be. All that can be said at present is that so far we must look elsewhere for a formulation of the standard of pronunciation. And here we return to our question: Where is the standard of pronunciation at present to be found? It may be more a matter of instinctive faith than something that is susceptible of demonstration, but the answer that seems most satisfactory is the one that finds standard pronunciation to be determined by the practice of good speakers all over the English-speaking world. "Standard" in this sense is evidently not equivalent to "uniform"; for it is clear that there are not only divergences as between British and American usage, but also sectional diver-

[56] Consisting of Forbes-Robertson, Daniel Jones, A. Lloyd James, Bernard Shaw, and Logan Pearsall Smith.

gences within the United States. The point is that both types of divergence, and others like them for other parts of the English-speaking world, may exist within the boundaries of good pronunciation.

How then is the individual to determine what is prescribed as the pronunciation for individual words and phrases by this somewhat elastic international standard? In the last analysis, the method must be the individual's own observation of what constitutes good practice in his section of the English-speaking world. Clearly it will not do to restrict the application of "section" very narrowly: *sectional* must not be identified with *local.* The danger in that direction is that the sectional become the parochial or the provincial. Yet even this danger is to be preferred to that threatened by the opposite course, that of accepting a rigid and uniform and (from the General American point of view) alien standard. Here lies the way to artificiality, to affectation, and to pedantry.

One word more, to qualify and also to safeguard the position just set forth. Because the observation of the individual is necessarily circumscribed, he should avail himself of whatever help is afforded by reputable dictionaries and handbooks of usage. Only, as we have insisted perhaps to weariness, he should do this always with a full realization that the usefulness and the reliability of such guidance is limited. Direct observation of the spoken tongue as employed in good practice must ever be paramount. To supplement this observation is the proper function of the guides we have mentioned. If this version of good pronunciation and the method of arriving at it has any validity, it follows that the grossest possible error is to reverse the positions of the primary sanction and its supplement. A pronunciation is not "correct" because it may be found in a dictionary;

rather, it may (or should) be found in a dictionary because good usage has already determined that it is "correct."

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CHAPTER VIII

Spelling and Spelling Reform

THERE is something inevitable in the association of "spelling" and "spelling reform," a suggestion that the visible representation of speech is never quite adequate or quite satisfactory—that its more rigid substance is continually in fresh need of adjustment to the changing contours of the spoken tongue. Does this way of putting it, however, express the true and the sole relationship between pronunciation and spelling? Is writing, in other words, to be conceived as existing for no other purpose than to represent the sounds of language? This is frequently accepted as an axiom by the spelling reformer; but that it is in need of serious and even vital qualification can scarcely admit of doubt. One way of approaching afresh the problem of how spelling and pronunciation are related is to go back as far as possible into the early history of language, and summarize the evolution of the alphabet. To do this would seem justified not only by the light that the story throws upon the interrelations of the three primary aspects of language—the visible symbol, the sound, and the meaning—but also by the intrinsic interest of the story itself. Against the background of such an account, which must, for the present purpose, emphasize the development of the written symbols of our own language, we shall later be in a better position to discuss the sometimes puzzling problems that result from the very unsatisfactory

relationship at present existing between English pronunciation and English spelling.

Systems of writing, viewed in their chronological development, are thus summarized by Pedersen:[1]

Pre-alphabetical systems.
(1) Word- and syllable-script.
(2) Syllable-script.
Alphabetical systems.
(1) The Semitic alphabet (a syllable-script, which to us may seem a consonant-script).
(2) The Greek alphabet (vowel- and consonant-script).

Of the earliest type of pre-alphabetical systems it may be questioned whether in strictness it deserves the name "writing" at all. The ideographic stage is rather drawing than writing, inasmuch as the interpretation of narrative drawings can be put into a variety of words. Picture-writing, which was apparently developed independently by different peoples in widely separated parts of the world, came eventually into connection with the spoken tongue, though theoretically it might have grown up apart from it—as the sign language of the American Indians had an existence separate from the spoken dialects. Since it must be assumed, however, that spoken language preceded written language, it seems well-nigh inevitable that sooner or later the two would come into contact with each other. For it would be unthinkable that peoples possessing a somewhat fully developed set of auditory symbols would continue indefinitely to work out a new set of visual symbols in complete independence of the other. Drawing became writing when the picture ceased to stand for an idea and

[1] *Linguistic Science in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 142.

came to stand for a combination of sounds. The transition was undoubtedly gradual and came about, in all probability, "by means of the rebus method . . . by the same sort of process which we apply when we allow a picture of the sun to stand for the first syllable in *sundry*, or let the picture of an eye stand for the pronoun *I*."[2] But of course even after the written symbol came to represent the sounds of some one spoken word by which an idea could be expressed, it also directly signified the idea itself. It was not until the written sign stood only for a sequence of sounds (irrespective of its meaning) that the transition from word-script to syllable-script, or from ideogram to phonogram, was complete. This was the beginning of the true alphabet.

The full possibilities of the alphabet, however, were not disclosed until the clumsy device of using a symbol for a syllable (consisting perhaps of several consonants and a vowel) gave way to the use of a separate symbol for each individual sound. The Semitic alphabet was a syllable-script which represented the consonants definitely but left the vowels vague, so that it appears to consist of consonant-characters only. Characters were no longer so numerous as in the older scripts—the Egyptians bequeathed to a Western Semitic people a means of reducing their number—but the alphabet, as we understand the term, was not yet quite evolved. The final contribution was that of the Greeks: the resolution of syllables into their separate vowels and consonants, and the use of individual characters for the sounds thus analyzed. All known alphabets are descended from the Semitic, but only the Greeks revolutionized it in the way just indicated, by discarding its syllabic nature. Of the

[2] Pedersen, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

Mediterranean peoples who learned the Greek alphabet, one race alone—the Romans—continued its use from pre-Christian times through the entire Christian era. Through its inherited use in the Romance languages and through its borrowing by other Indo-European groups such as the Teutonic, the Latin alphabet has long since dominated the modern world.

Of the four stages in the evolution of writing just outlined—the pre-alphabetic word-script and syllable-script, and the Semitic and the Greek alphabets—it has been observed by Henry Bradley that "the penultimate stage . . . has a peculiar interest."[3] Bradley's acute analysis of the significance of the third stage, for the light it throws upon the general relations of spoken and written language, has very great interest. Arabic, he points out, is to this day usually written as a consonant-script, though vowel marks may be added. Yet it is evident that the consonantal outlines can be apprehended, by one familiar with the language, as readily as if the full phonetic indication of the word were given—perhaps more readily, because the eye takes in the simpler symbol (if sufficiently familiar) more quickly and just as completely. Just so, the modern stenographer can read the consonantal outline of familiar words, which have omitted the vowel-markings that the Pitman system provides, just as swiftly as the fuller ones. Medieval Latin manuscripts, as Bradley further suggests, were frequently written with nearly every word abbreviated, and yet were undoubtedly read, by one who had mastered the art, with greater rapidity than they would have been if the words had been written in full.

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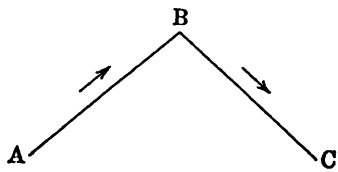
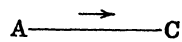
[3] *On the Relations between Spoken and Written Language*, p. 6.

Bradley's point is, of course, that it matters not a jot to the accomplished reader whether his native language is phonetically spelled or not; "what is important is that the group of letters before him shall be that which habit has led him to associate with a certain word." It might even be added that it is not necessary, always, to qualify this assertion by limiting it to one's *native* language. Certain Latin abbreviations that are commonly used in English have just as immediate meaning to the English reader as native English ones: *e. g.* does not require to be translated into "*exempli gratia*" and *then* "for example," or *i. e.* into "*id est*" and *then* "that is." In both instances, the eye conveys the meaning to the mind without even the suggestion of a phonetic middle stage. To put it more fully, there are two approaches from visual symbol to meaning: the one by way of the phonetic sign, the other direct. Graphically stated, the longer way is this (*A* standing for visual symbol, *B* for sound, and *C* for meaning):



The shorter route is, of course:



Just now often the second supersedes the first, it is probably impossible to say. Certainly in reading poetry and in reading such prose as that of Milton or Browne, DeQuincey or Coleridge, it may be assumed that the

middle stage exists; it would assuredly be deplorable if it did not. Probably even in the rapid reading of the less poetic types of prose there are some words that call up sound-pictures and are audible to the mental ear. But it seems equally probable that for many words there is no such association; many written or printed words, that is to say, would seem to symbolize their ideas directly.

This digression has been intended to attack the proposition, often regarded as axiomatic, that the sole function of writing is to represent the sounds of language. One might argue further, as Bradley does,[4] that not only do systems of writing that were originally phonetic tend to become ideographic with regard to their use or function, but in addition that English, together with other cultivated written European languages, has become partly ideographic with regard to structure: for example, in such matters as the capitalization of proper names, the use of quotation marks and of the apostrophe to denote possession, and (most strikingly) the ideographic employment of different spellings to discriminate between words once phonetically distinct but now homophones—*rain, rein,* and *reign; or, oar,* and *ore; so, sow,* and *sew,* and so forth. Some of these ideas we shall have occasion to refer to again when discussing the history of spelling reform. It is necessary now, however, to return to our summary of the evolution of the alphabet, which we left in order to comment on the permanent significance of the stage just preceding the creation of the Greek alphabet. We shall be concerned more particularly with the development of the symbols used in our language, and with the general trend of English spelling.

[4] P. 10.

The Latin adaptation was, as we have seen, the most important offshoot of the Greek alphabet. From the Latin alphabet descended the runic letters common to all the Teutonic peoples.[5] The Old Norse word *rún* meant "secret" as well as "letter"—a suggestion of the esoteric character of early writing and its exclusive possession by a priestly cult, as well as its supposedly magical properties. The West Germanic peoples are thought to have learned the art of writing from the Gauls and to have received from them the Latin letters, which, however, they greatly transformed. It is probable that the theory of a common indebtedness to the Gauls, rather than any direct association, explains whatever likeness exists between the Teutonic runic alphabet and the Ogham alphabet of the Irish, a much more complete transformation of the Latin letters.[6] Among the Teutonic peoples, the runes quickly gave way to the standard Latin alphabet, except in Scandinavia and Britain. In Britain—not as in Scandinavia, where the number of runic symbols was decreased—the original runes were added to. But after the Christianization of Britain—that is, beginning about 600—the runic characters were for the most part very rapidly superseded by the Latin alphabet. The Anglo-Saxons nevertheless retained, for some time, a few of the Teutonic characters, especially the symbol for the sound of *w* and one of the symbols for the sound of *th*. It is the usual custom of modern editors of Old English texts to retain only the latter,[7] substituting

[5] The alphabet used in the oldest Teutonic literary memorial is, however, an exception. For his Biblical translation into Gothic, Bishop Ulfilas created an alphabet compounded of both runic and Greek letters.

[6] Cf. Pedersen, pp. 229–239.

[7] Flom, in *Old English Grammar and Reader*, employs another letter strange to the modern alphabet. This is a character like 3, used for the

the modern form of *w* for the runic "wen." To the "thorn" letter, *þ*, used for both the voiceless and the voiced values of *th*, the crossed *d*, *ð*, was later added to signify the voiced *th* only. This distinction, however, was made but very rarely in the manuscripts; almost always, as in modern printings of Old English texts, *þ* and *ð* were used interchangeably. Two digraphs that have later been dropped were used for vowel sounds by the Anglo-Saxons: *æ*, for a sound familiar through the whole history of English and represented in modern phonetic alphabets by a similar symbol, though eventually discarded in conventional spelling in favor of simple *a*; and *œ*, for a sound like German *ö*, and soon discarded for *e*. The vowel *y* and the diphthongs *ea* and *eo* also corresponded to symbols of the runic alphabet.

The earliest spelling of English that has been preserved is thus seen to have been not very greatly different from that of Modern English in the symbols that it employed. Apart from the few preservations of runic characters, the principal differences are the absence of *j* and *q*, and the rare (usually very late) use of *k*, *v*, and *z*.[8] As has already been indicated, the spelling of Old English was far from being perfectly phonetic, though it represented a much nearer approach to correspondence between symbol and sound than does that of Modern English. The first cause of the lessening correspondence between spelling and pronunciation that has marked the general development of English is, of course, the radical change in

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palatal, as opposed to the velar, *g*. The Insular script, of the native documents in Old English, employed this symbol for all varieties of *g*, and made use as well of characters for *r* and *s* that differ from those used in Latin manuscripts.

[8] See also page 194.

pronunciation and the inability of spelling to keep up with it. English pronunciation has altered in such a revolutionary way that it has always been difficult for spelling to keep abreast. Sporadic attempts have been made in age after age to bring spelling abreast of pronunciation; but their always partial success has lagged far behind the necessities of the case. In considering the general trends of both conscious and unsystematic change in spelling, it will be necessary to specify some of the causes—in addition to the primary one just mentioned—that have brought about the present very unsatisfactory relationship between spelling and pronunciation.

The familiar assumption that Old English was entirely phonetic in its spelling is not quite in accordance with the facts. The Latin alphabet, for one thing, was a borrowing that did not entirely fit the need—for that matter, the Latin alphabet itself was not, from the angle of theory, ideal. Such modifications as were necessary in adapting the Latin letters to Old English words are perhaps to be regarded as the first in the long series of adjustments and compromises one encounters in the history of English spelling. Another cause of difficulty was the fact that important dialectal differences existed within the language and tended to prevent spelling from changing as pronunciation changed. Still, it is probably sufficiently near the truth to think of Old English as being as nearly phonetic as Latin was or as Italian or Spanish is. The innovation of *v* and *z*, appearing in late borrowed words, was a minor step in the direction of the phonetic goal, though failure to discriminate between *þ* and *ð* as symbols of the voiceless and voiced sounds must be reckoned a counterbalancing evil.

First in time among the larger factors that have wrought havoc in English spelling was the influence of Norman French. New letters (*j* and *q*) were introduced, or at any rate first given wide use; new phonetic values were attached to the old symbols, or the old symbols were used in new combinations; e.g., *c* was written for *s*, *o* for *u*, and *ou* for *ū*. French influence did not cease with the centuries following the Conquest. To it, to give only a few illustrations, we owe such spellings as *tongue* for what would more sensibly be *tung* (like *lung;* compare the German cognate, *Zunge*); *guess* for what Chaucer spelled *gesse;* and such other anomalies as *programme*, *catalogue*, and *quartette*.

But spelling was still, until late Middle English times, quite largely a field in which the individual might display whatever eccentricity he pleased. Orm, whose *Ormulum* appeared soon after 1200, is one of the first of spelling reformers; his contribution was to double the consonant after short vowels and thus, after a fashion, indicate pronunciation somewhat more accurately. The invention of the printing press, however, marks the second great event in the history of English spelling, and the remote beginning of modern standardization. It was a kind of standardization, curiously, that made whatever confusion existed before appear unimportant. In the bitter words of Professor Lounsbury, "Upon the introduction of printing, indeed, English orthography entered into that realm of Chaos and old Night in which it has ever since been floundering; it then began to put on the shape it at present bears, 'if shape it may be called that shape has none.'"[9]

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[9] *English Spelling and Spelling Reform*, p. 272.

Several reasons may be advanced to account for the unfortunate effect that the early printing press had upon spelling. One was the circumstance that most of the earliest printers came from Holland. These men followed certain Dutch analogies, and introduced absurdities like *ghost, gherkin; ghospel, ghossip; ghess, ghest.* The illustrations have been given in three groups, to suggest the three different lines of development that these *gh* words later took: the first pair retained the unnecessary *h*; the second pair dropped it and restored the Old English *g*; the third pair was later "Gallicized" by the substitution of *gu* for *gh*. Probably of more importance than such arbitrary respellings of individual words was the setting up, by different printing houses, of separate and inconsistent rules for spelling in general—a practice inherited in some measure by their modern successors. Moreover, the first printers were not only aliens, unfamiliar with English pronunciation; quite certainly, they were in general men of less education than their predecessors, the copyists of medieval manuscripts. Medieval authors sometimes complained of the incompetence and carelessness of their scribes—Chaucer's humorous exasperation with "Adam, his owne scriveyn" is a well-known instance—but undoubtedly these scribes were as a class far superior in knowledge and culture to the early printers. Spelling fell increasingly into the hands of semi-literate men; authors were frequently, as they have been ever since, misrepresented by the typesetter.

Through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, uniformity in spelling—however irrational as regards its relation to etymology or to pronunciation—was increasingly approached by the efforts of the printing

houses. At the same time, since dictionaries generally regarded as authoritative did not yet exist, there was no court of higher appeal to adjust the varying rules of separate printing houses. Diversity necessarily continued—not, however, the kind of diversity in spelling that represents variation in pronunciation so much as a diversity occasioned by the individual whims or theories of different "stylebooks." Spelling nevertheless tended to become more nearly uniform, as one printing establishment influenced another; but its uniformity consisted largely in agreement upon spellings that had long since ceased to represent pronunciation. Renaissance spellings, standing often for a still older pronunciation, were more often than not permanently fastened upon the language.

The important consequence of the situation just described is that, from early Modern English times, the gulf between spelling and pronunciation has rapidly widened. Pronunciation changed freely—it had often changed, in fact, before the more or less permanent spelling was established—while spelling remained, for the most part, static. Here are the seeds for the creation of two languages—spoken and written. Whatever may be thought of the result, it can scarcely be denied that something like this is the present state of affairs: We possess a language that appears, on the printed page, in a form so different from the way in which it is spoken that the only adequate way for the dictionary to indicate the pronunciation of Modern English words is to respell them in a phonetic alphabet. One should not let familiarity with this situation conceal its oddity.

One most important step in the evolution of our spelling has not yet been fully indicated. The spelling

itself, as we have seen, is much more the creation of printers than of authors. But the stamp of approval set upon it by the dictionaries of the middle and late eighteenth century was very far-reaching indeed. It was this that made the approximate uniformity that had been achieved by printers up to the eighteenth century very nearly absolute. The individual who figures most largely in this consummation is, naturally, the first really authoritative lexicographer—Samuel Johnson.

It was no part of Johnson's purpose to establish new and radical principles in English spelling. The almost contemporary dictionary of the French Academy (1762) reformed the spellings of something like five thousand words—more than a quarter of the whole number it included; but Johnson's dictionary of 1755 sets out, in more conservative fashion, to bring order out of the chaos of English spelling by ironing out existing inconsistencies rather than by innovations. It is significant of his attitude that he specifically asserted that he preferred, in the few changes he had made, to go back to old models:

> I have attempted few alterations, and among these few, perhaps the greater part is from the modern to the ancient practice; and I hope I may be allowed to recommend to those whose thoughts have been, perhaps, employed too anxiously in verbal singularities, not to disturb, upon narrow views, or for minute propriety, the orthography of their fathers.

Johnson's aim, then, as he set out to "ascertain" English spelling, was primarily to make it consistent and uniform, and preferably by conformity with long-established custom. As he sought to control irregularity by applying the principle of analogy, he was often forced to compromise with the latter purpose. That he was

very frequently unsuccessful even in the limited endeavor to be consistent is well known. It may be of interest to rehearse a few of the amusing inconsistencies he fell into, some of which unfortunately are fastened all but irrevocably upon the language. These may be shown by indicating pairs of words in which inconsistent spellings have been used: *moveable, immovable; downhil, uphill; distil, instill; sliness, slyly; deceit, receipt; deign, disdain; install, reinstal; anteriour, posterior; interiour, exterior.*

From the time of Johnson on, the dictionary has been a conservative and a standardizing agency for the spelling of the language as well as for its other aspects. Some of Johnson's mistakes and inconsistencies were corrected by later lexicographers, but many, such as *deign* (by the side of *disdain*) and *receipt* (by the side of *deceit*), were not. Though no single lexicographer of later times has enjoyed the prestige of Johnson in his era, there can be no doubt that dictionaries as a whole have, since his day, occupied a position of authority that gives unquestioned weight to their decisions on spelling. The belief that, with but the rarest exceptions, there can be but a single correct spelling for one word, and the premium placed on "correct" spelling as one of the readiest indications of the individual's education and culture, were both firmly established by the end of the eighteenth century. Spelling is no longer commonly regarded as a proper field for individuality or experimentation. This is not to imply that later lexicographers have been as ill-equipped for the task of regulating spelling as was Samuel Johnson, or that their attitudes necessarily resemble his in conservatism. On the contrary, dictionaries have often given aid and comfort to spelling reform; the early work

of Noah Webster and the whole policy of the *Standard* are striking instances. It remains true, nevertheless, that the public's (particularly the American public's) ready acceptance of the authority of dictionaries, in spelling as in other matters, is a force that on the whole works for both conservatism and standardization.

It is time to resurvey our subject, the history of English spelling, from the point of view of the efforts, individual or otherwise, that have been put forth at various times to reform it. "Reform" in this sense need not be taken as synonymous with "improvement"; it stands, rather, for deliberate attempts, whether wisely or foolishly conceived, to change the spelling of words or groups of words that have seemed to the "reformer" in need of renovation. The two motives that actuate such efforts are likely to be interest in pronunciation and interest in etymology. As a result, spellings are changed either to bring them into closer union with the sounds of the words in question, or to disclose more definitely their derivation (real or supposed). The duplicative Orm already referred to was an early advocate of phonetic reform. On the other hand, there arose in Renaissance times a movement to change the spellings of many English words for a very different reason: to make them conform to what was assumed to be their etymology.

It was one of the less fortunate by-products of the humanistic movement that scholars and writers should have deemed it good to respell English words in order to make them conform to Latin or Greek analogies. Often this was done with words that, though originally Latin, had been borrowed not from Latin but from French, with the changes in spelling and in pronunciation that had taken place in Vulgar Latin and Old French.

Thus *debt* was respelled to indicate its remote ancestor, the Latin *debitum*, and *doubt* was similarly treated to show a connection with Latin *dubitum;* the Middle and early Modern English spellings *dette*, *det*, *doute*, and *dout*, better both phonetically and etymologically, were discarded. In these words, the *b* has never been pronounced. The *p* in *receipt* has a similar history: Elizabethan scholars changed the earlier *receit* or *receyt*, as they did also *conceit* and *deceit* (though here with less permanent results). Sometimes, the changed spelling has in turn affected the pronunciation, as when *perfect* (for Chaucer's *parfit*) was made to look like its Latin grandfather rather than its French father. This zeal for etymology becomes amusing as well as deplorable when the etymology is utterly mistaken. A poor defense can be made, on the ground of remote relationship, for the *b* of *debt*, the *c* of *perfect*, and the *p* of *receipt;* but even this limited excuse does not serve to justify the *s* of *island* (not even remotely from Latin *insula* or French *isle*, but from an Old English *igland*, which became *iland* in Middle English and early Modern English), or the *g* in *foreign* or *sovereign*. The last two words are particularly instructive. *Sovereign* comes from Old French *sovrain*, in turn derived from the Latin *superanus* [<*super* (above)]. It was erroneously associated with *reign* [<Lat. *regnare* (rule)], and the mistaken analogy not only affected *sovran* (so spelled by Milton), but accounts for the spelling of *foreign* as well. *Foreign* is really from Old French *forein* [from Vulgar Lat. *foraneus*, eventually from Lat. *foras* (out of doors)].

It would be misleading to give the impression that all efforts to renovate English spelling in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were in the interests of classical

etymology. On the contrary, there were many noteworthy attempts to simplify spelling rather than complicate it, and to simplify it in the direction of a closer bond between spelling and pronunciation. One of the earliest to state the principle of purism in vocabulary was Sir John Cheke, the first Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge. Consistently enough, he advocated reform in spelling as well as in the choice of words,[10] giving preference, in both departments, to the Anglo-Saxon as opposed to the classical. Cheke's friend and Cambridge associate (like him, too, a secretary of state), Sir Thomas Smith, worked out a more systematic scheme of spelling reform, in the shape of a Latin treatise (1568) advocating the adoption of an alphabet with additional letters as well as the use of diacritical marks. John Hart (1569) and William Bullokar (1580) also published treatises on orthography—the latter a scheme, like Smith's, of a new alphabet, consisting of thirty-seven letters. In the seventeenth century, Doctor Gill (1619) and Bishop Wilkins (1633) put forth similar proposals for a reconstructed alphabet. None of these more ambitious proposals bore much practical fruit[11]; but simplifications, often widely adopted, in the spelling of individual words were sometimes made by writers and scholars. Such were many of the recommendations of James Howell's *Grammar* (1662), including the replacing

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[10] His best-known statement with regard to the English language (1557) is quoted in McKnight, *Modern English in the Making*, pp. 118 and 119.

[11] A nineteenth-century analog to such schemes is that of Isaac Pitman, the creator of phonographic shorthand. Pitman's proposal, worked out in its final form in 1843, was an alphabet of forty letters, including sixteen new symbols.

of *logique* with *logic*, *warre* with *war*, *sinne* with *sin*, *witt* with *wit*, and so on.

We have already glanced at Samuel Johnson's zeal for etymology. In his case, as so often in our own day, as well as in the eighteenth century, this meant more particularly the desire to make English spelling conform to Latin and Greek analogies. "Etymology" is almost equivalent to "classical etymology," for the scientific study of the Teutonic languages had yet to be born. When Johnson does recommend a "Saxon" spelling it is more than likely to be a mistaken one, historically. Thus, he insists on the final *k* in such words as *critick*, *historick*, *musick*, and *prosaick* on the ground that the truly English spelling should "always have the Saxon *k* added to the *c*." As Lounsbury remarks,[12] "The 'Saxon *k*' was the lexicographer's personal contribution to the original English alphabet." If such an elementary fact in the history of English orthography could be unfamiliar to him, it is no wonder that Johnson's enthusiasm for etymology should have had curious results upon the spellings he advocated. As has already been pointed out, he preferred to recommend spellings that had already been in vogue; in practice, this meant all too frequently throwing the weight of his authority upon the side of artificial respellings, based upon real or imaginary classical analogies, that had been perpetrated by Renaissance scholars.

The rigidity of English spelling from the eighteenth century on, and its general failure to record the many changes in pronunciation that have since occurred are thus in large measure to be laid at the door of Samuel

[12] *Op. cit.*, p. 292.

Johnson. Not that there has been an utter lack of individuals and groups of people who have felt that it is more important to have spelling indicate the sounds of words than their "etymology." An eighteenth-century protestant against the *status quo* in spelling was Benjamin Franklin, who found time among his multifarious activities to compile, in 1768, a "Scheme for a New Alphabet and Reformed Mode of Spelling." Franklin's purpose differed from that of his contemporaries who were publishing spelling and pronouncing dictionaries in that he proposed, not to make pronunciation follow spelling, but rather, by means of a phonetic alphabet, to alter the spelling to suit the prevailing pronunciation. This radical reform, however, proved abortive, for Franklin felt "too old to pursue the plan," and his proposals were never published. It was left for another American to make the first effective move against the system largely inherited from Johnson. This was Noah Webster, the most important lexicographer since Johnson. His advocacy of simplified spelling has been chiefly responsible for the accepted differences between British and American spelling. Some of his activities may repay more detailed attention.

In early life Webster was strongly influenced by Benjamin Franklin, though not to the extent of adopting the phonetic system which Franklin attempted to have him carry through. The extreme nationalism prevalent in many American circles in the last decades of the eighteenth century is voiced in Webster's *American Spelling Book*, 1783: "For America in her infancy to adopt the present maxims of the old world, would be to stamp the wrinkle of decrepit age upon the bloom of youth, and to plant the seed of decay in a vigorous

constitution." With increasing age, however, and—perhaps it may be added—with the increasing prospect of appealing to a British as well as an American public, Webster's patriotism became less flamboyant. Nevertheless, though in his great dictionary, the first edition of which came out in 1828, he recognized the fact that "the body of the language is the same as in England," he recommended many spellings that deviated from British practice. Later editions of the dictionary and later editions of the spelling book (the latter also an enormously influential work, for more than fifty million copies were sold) are alike much more conservative than the early ones. From a reformer *of* orthography Webster had become content to be a reformer *in* orthography.[13] Still, the milder type of reformation was sufficient to cause violent protests, and Webster (and his later editors) often receded before the storm. Some of the simplifications that were retained and that are now no longer questioned in American usage are the *-or* rather than the *-our* ending in such words as *honor*, *labor*, and the like; the *-er* rather than the *-re* in *center*, *meter*, and so forth; and the single *l* (or other consonant) in such words as *traveled*, *traveling*, and so on.

Webster's simplifications were not necessarily phonetic simplifications. Two other motives took precedence, indeed, over any attempt at phonetic shortening: the desire for etymological correctness, and the desire for uniformity. Distrusting the etymological lore of his predecessors as worthless, he evolved a new theory of the relationship of languages for himself and quite largely, in Sir James Murray's words, "out of his inner

[13] The terms are Lounsbury's (p. 240).

consciousness." The results, of course discarded in later editions of the dictionary that bears his name, were quite naturally devoid of value, and where, as was frequently the case, they affected the spellings recommended, they could only be deplored. Orthographic changes that he introduced with the idea of consistency and uniformity in mind (as opposed to etymological theory) must be somewhat differently regarded. Changes of this kind frequently removed such absurdities as those in which Doctor Johnson's dictionary abounded, and they have not seldom been approved by later usage.

On the whole, however, it must be said that the spelling reform achieved by Noah Webster was not on a great scale. Webster lacked, after all, the firmer basis for both phonetic and etymological simplification that the work of later generations of linguistic scholars was to supply. It was not until the last decades of the nineteenth century that the science of linguistics achieved anything like its present status. From scholars trained in this newer school, the recent and contemporary movements aiming at spelling reform have come. The activities of Isaac Pitman and A. J. Ellis just before the middle of the century[14] were a forerunner and a symptom of the temper of the scholarly world on spelling;[15] but the first concerted step was the action of the American Philological Association in 1875 in appointing a committee to consider the whole matter of spelling reform. From this, and similar action on the part of the Philological Society (of England), sprang the Spelling Reform Association and the British Spelling

[14] See *Handbook of Simplified Spelling*, Part I, pp. 9–12.

[15] W. D. Whitney published in 1867 several articles advocating a thorough reform in spelling.

Reform Association. In 1906, the Simplified Spelling Board was organized to conduct the more active propaganda financed by Andrew Carnegie, and in 1908 the Simplified Spelling Society was formed in England. Since all three of these societies—Spelling Reform Association, Simplified Spelling Board, and Simplified Spelling Society—are still (1939) in existence, it may be of interest to review briefly their aims and achievements.

The somewhat different tactics that underlie the proposals of the three organizations are succinctly stated in the periodical *Spelling*,[16] which is issued by them jointly. They may be still more briefly summarized here in the sentences that follow. The Simplified Spelling Board believes that progress may best be achieved by seeking, as the first step, the widest possible adoption of a very limited number of new spellings, on the theory that a campaign of gradual education is necessary before new spellings so numerous as to transform the appearance of the printed page can conceivably be accepted by the general public. The Simplified Spelling Society would go further: while keeping the present alphabet of twenty-six letters, it recommends for a teaching device in elementary schools an entirely new and consistent scheme of using the existing symbols, with no additional letters or diacritics. (It apparently recognizes a distinction between a revised spelling as a method in general education and a revised spelling for general use; for the latter, so far as the present is concerned, such comparatively small changes as the Simplified Spelling Board proposes are all that can hopefully be attempted.) The Spelling Reform Asso-

[16] Vol. 1, No. 1 (March, 1925), and Vol. 2, No. 5 (March, 1931).

ciation accepts no compromise with the ideal goal: it stands for thoroughgoing renovation, as opposed to merely partial simplification; accordingly it advocates a complete phonetic alphabet, with such new letters as a minimum-precision, one-sign-one-sound alphabet may require.[17] It is of course quite possible for one individual to sympathize with all three of these purposes —to accept the first as a practical initial stage, the second as an educational measure, and the third as the ultimate objective. In practice, it seems necessary to add, the three schools of thought on spelling reform are not so sharply divided into water-tight compartments as this account of the strategy of each might seem to imply.

Not only are the three principal organizations for spelling reform in England and America in large measure united for a common purpose; more than this, they have joined in welcoming the most recent recruit to the cause of English spelling reform. This is the Swedish project known as "Anglic," primarily a scheme to make English more adaptable for world-wide use by renovating its spelling. Anglic spelling is not phonetic, nor does it add new letters to the alphabet. It aims to bring order out of the general chaos of conventional spelling by "generalizing the most common or serviceable of the existing spelling variants, introducing at the same time a few new digraphs (*uu*, *dh*, and *zh*), which have to do

[17] In 1928, the Spelling Reform Association proposed a phonetic alphabet "for immediate use in the teaching of English, particularly in the elementary grades, and as a practical working basis for eventual phonetic spelling reform of English for general use." It was adopted also by the Simplified Spelling Board "for immediate use as a phonetic key alphabet for English wherever respelling to indicate pronunciation is required." (Pamphlet of May, 1928.)

the duty of new letters."[18] Though Anglic obviously runs counter in important particulars to the purposes of the older organizations, it was nevertheless endorsed by representatives of all three of them (and of the International Phonetic Association as well) at the World English conference held in London in June, 1930. The conferees agreed "to give the Anglic movement their full support and coöperation . . . both as an international auxiliary language and as a basis for reform of English spelling for the English-speaking world."[19] It should be added, however, that the Simplified Spelling Society, whose program is more directly in rivalry with that of Anglic, is perhaps less enthusiastic about Anglic than are the other two organizations. Sir G. B. Hunter, chairman of its committee, states that the committee "have considered, but do not advocate, Professor Zachrisson's Anglic as an improvement of our spelling; though some of the most eminent members of the committee approve and are willing to adopt Anglic."[20]

In summarizing the recent history of spelling reform, considerations of brevity make it necessary to limit our attention chiefly to the activities of one organization, the American Simplified Spelling Board. It has already been indicated that the parent society, the Spelling Reform Association, and the sister society in England, the Simplified Spelling Society, have not been quiescent.

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[18] Pamphlet published by the Anglic Fund, Uppsala, Sweden, 1931. For a fuller statement, see the larger booklet, *Anglic, a New Agreed Simplified English Spelling*, also published by the fund (1930). Discussions of Anglic are contained in the various numbers of *Spelling* for 1931; in *American Speech*, Vol. VI, No. 5 (June, 1931), pp. 378–380; and in the *Bookman*, February, 1931 ("Or Shall we go Anglic?" by Mrs. Aiken).

[19] *Spelling*, Vol. II, No. 5 (March, 1931), p. 7.

[20] *Spelling*, Vol. II, No. 6 (June, 1931), p. 19.

The recent memorial of the last named (June, 1932) to the British Board of Education is an evidence of its continued activity. This was a petition, bearing the signatures of some seven hundred members of the faculties of British universities, for an inquiry into the simplification of English spelling. The plea was based on the conviction that the increasing world-wide use of English is chiefly hindered by "its inconsistent and difficult spelling." But the most conspicuous activity in spelling reform during the present century undoubtedly has been that which followed the formation of the Simplified Spelling Board in 1906. To that activity we now return.

The very title of the new organization implied that the strategy of the campaign against the conventional spelling had been modified. It was no longer to be "reform," but "simplification"—obviously a concession to the strength of popular prejudice and conservatism. But even the policy of "cutting off the dog's tail an inch at a time instead of all at once"[21] did not disarm hostile criticism on the part of public and press. When President Theodore Roosevelt, with characteristic impetuosity, officially announced his conversion to the cause by ordering the Public Printer to use in Government documents the new spelling of certain words, a most amazing storm broke. Congress threatened to withhold the appropriation for the printing of executive department publications if the order was not countermanded.

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[21] *Handbook of Simplified Spelling*, Part II, p. 39. In this policy, all adherents of spelling reform, quite naturally, did not, and do not, concur. Sir G. B. Hunter has recently used this very phrase in a derogatory sense, *Spelling*, Vol. II, No. 4 (December, 1931), p. 59; he concludes, "Save us from trusting to gradual improvement."

The President was forced to limit his reform to White House correspondence. On the whole, the controversy that ensued probably did the cause of simplified spelling more harm than good. The movement had more publicity than it has had before or since, in the memory of those now alive, but it was publicity of an unfortunate kind.[22] Simplified spelling, if not exactly considered a mere foible of Roosevelt's, was all too generally regarded as the creation of a few misguided cranks. Newspapers ordinarily dealt with it only to misrepresent and ridicule it. An unusually witty reference to it was the famous single-word editorial of the New York *Sun* on the occasion of President Taft's inauguration in March, 1909; glancing not at the new but at the old president, the editor was able to cram an astonishing amount of malicious satisfaction into the four letters: "Thru."

In the years that have followed the first campaigns of the Simplified Spelling Board, progress has been, it must be confessed, disappointingly slow. Dictionaries, especially the *Standard*, have given aid; but the public acceptance of dictionary permission has been somewhat surprisingly hesitant. Newspapers, though some have lent partial sanction to the proposal of the Board, have on the whole maintained their original attitude of contemptuous, and frequently thoroughly ignorant, criticism. Only a few weekly or monthly periodicals—notably the *Literary Digest*—have adopted a real measure of simplification in their own columns. Many educators have given complete or partial assent to the program outlined by the Board, but many more are ultraconservative, to the extent of refusing to accept

[22] A lively account of the controversy will be found in Mark Sullivan's *Our Times*, Vol. III.

from their pupils even the milder deviations from spelling orthodoxy. The National Education Association in 1907 and again in 1916 adopted certain of the Board's recommendations, but in 1921 withdrew a large measure of this sanction. Last, but perhaps most important, the man on the street has in large measure inherited an attitude of complacent and ill-informed ridicule of the whole project, an attitude which the newspapers of the last quarter-century have done a great deal to foster. A dispassionate observer must be struck, in retrospect, with the spectacle of small results achieved by great and valiant efforts.

Turning from the history of spelling reform to the arguments for and against it, one's first impulse is to assert that almost everything can be said for it, and exceedingly little against it. Yet it is clear that the somewhat less tangible and certainly less logical objections that have commonly been urged against it are nevertheless very powerful. Only thus can its small measure of success be accounted for. To simplify our summary of the case for spelling reform and the case against it, it will be necessary to limit our attention chiefly to the program that has been outlined by the Simplified Spelling Board. As a preliminary step, the recommendations that the Board advocates for immediate adoption must now be summarized. They have been drawn up as the following four principles:[23]

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[23] *Handbook of Simplified Spelling*, Part I, pp. 18 and 19, with the omission of some of the examples. Here, as elsewhere in the chapter (when matter in reformed spelling has been quoted), I have altered the spelling to conform to that used in this book generally. It is, however, an indication of the small extent of the changes recommended for immediate adoption that, of seventy-eight words quoted, I have changed only three (*fonetic*, *thru*, and *ar*).

1. *When current usage offers a choice of spellings, to adopt the shortest and simplest.* EXAMPLES: *catalog*, not *catalogue; center*, not *centre; gage*, not *gauge; honor*, not *honour; maneuver*, not *manoeuvre; mold*, not *mould; quartet*, not *quartette; rime*, not *rhyme; tho*, not *though; traveler*, not *traveller.*

2. *Whenever practicable, to omit silent letters.* EXAMPLES: *activ*, not *active; anser*, not *answer; definit*, not *definite; det*, not *debt; frend*, not *friend; hart*, not *heart; scool*, not *school; shal*, not *shall; thru*, not *through; yu*, not *you.*

3. *To follow the simpler rather than the more complex of existing analogies.* EXAMPLES: *aker*, not *acre; buro*, not *bureau; deciet*, not *deceit; enuf*, not *enough; spritely*, not *sprightly; telefone*, not *telephone; wize*, not *wise.*

4. *Keeping in view that the logical goal of the movement is the eventual restoration of English spelling to the phonetic basis from which in the course of centuries and through various causes it has widely departed, to propose no changes that are inconsistent with that ideal.* [No examples of the last principle are given. It may, however, be illustrated through the fact that elsewhere in the *Handbook*[24] the Board deprecates such spellings as *fite, lite*, and *nite* (for *fight, light*, and *night*) on the ground that, though shortenings, they are unphonetic shortenings and would perpetuate a wrong principle of notation: the use of final silent *e* to indicate the quality of the preceding vowel. On the other hand, to restore *delite* and *spritely* is a somewhat different matter; these spellings are recommended not as innovations but as older and better spellings than the present ones.]

It is necessary to add that the arguments advanced by the Board refer not only to the minor changes recommended for immediate adoption, but also to the completely phonetic spellings that are sought as the eventual goal. Some of the chief claims made for simplified spelling, then, are as follows: it will save much time and expense in elementary education, and in writing,

[24] Part II, pp. 5 and 6.

typewriting, and printing; it will improve and tend to standardize pronunciation; it will remove the greatest barrier to the Americanization of our foreign population and to the use of English as an international language.[25] These three propositions will be considered separately and in the light of other arguments growing out of them.

The practical gain in time and money would doubtless be enormous. Dr. Godfrey Dewey, secretary of the Board, has computed that the present conventional spelling (as compared, in this instance, with a single one-sound-one-symbol phonetic alphabet) wastes at least a billion dollars a year,[26] and consumes a full year of the school life of every English-speaking child. As to the latter point, it is arguable that even worse than the loss in time is the needless distraction and "atrophy of logical faculties" experienced by the child. Many another father has echoed these sentiments of the great sociologist, W. G. Sumner:

I have two boys who are learning to spell. They often try to spell by analogy, thus using their brains and learning to think. Then I have to arrest them, turning them back from a rational procedure, and impose tradition and authority. They ask me, "Why?" I answer, "Because your father and others who have lived before you have never had the courage and energy to correct a ridiculous old abuse, and you are now inheriting it with all the intellectual injury, loss of

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[25] Most of the eight "reasons for simplified spelling" as advanced in the Board's pamphlet "Rules and Reasons" (1919) and elaborated in the *Handbook*, Part II, are here summarized.

[26] The unsympathetic may feel that the *reductio ad absurdum* of this type of argument is the statement of Professor Zachrisson that to English spelling are due "increased unemployment and the going down of trade not only in England and the United States but in the whole world" (*Anglic*, p. 18).

time, and wasted labor which it occasions. I am ashamed that it should be so."[27]

The new spelling, which would certainly be more easily learned than the old, would be an infinitely better index to pronunciation. If it be objected that spelling that followed pronunciation would vary as pronunciation varies, the retort is of course obvious: that the ideal of uniform "correct" spelling is an utterly false one. On the other hand, it is plausibly maintained that variation in pronunciation would be lessened as the corresponding variation in spelling made it more conspicuous. The effect of phonetic spelling would quite conceivably be to center attention on pronunciation in a new way, to promote discussion of the variants in current use, and to work toward a greater standardization after the pattern of the most approved models. Complete standardization of pronunciation would never take place, nor does it seem desirable that it should.

Finally, there seems no good reason to doubt that the spelling of English is the one great barrier in the way of its acceptance as the international auxiliary language, and that the same cause most effectively hinders the operation of the melting pot in the United States. On the subject of English as a world speech, it is perhaps worth recalling that long ago the great German linguist, Jacob Grimm, congratulated other Europeans that the English had not yet discovered that only one thing prevented the universality of English from being completely apparent: its "whimsical, antiquated orthography." Today, with the English language perceptibly nearer the indicated goal, the great majority of the students of language would certainly agree that it

[27] *Spelling*, Vol. I, No. 1 (May, 1887), p. 16.

is still the same handicap that prevents English from attaining it completely. It is of course with this in mind that the campaign for Anglic has been instituted.

If these arguments have any great measure of truth, what can possibly be said on the other side? What *is* most commonly urged is undoubtedly what the Board, perhaps justifiably, refers to as the "etymological bugaboo." This is the notion prevalent among amateur defenders of the *status quo* in spelling that to change it would be to "destroy etymology"; what they really mean is that it would obscure the derivation of words. No scholar of repute any longer holds this point of view. It is necessary, indeed, to go back to Archbishop Trench's *English Past and Present* (1855) to find a presentation of it by any competent writer; and Sir James Murray expressed, in 1880, the opinion that Doctor Trench himself "if leisure had been given him to keep pace with the progress of science, . . . would now have been second to no one as a spelling reformer." The belief voiced by Trench (and to quote it is to voice the argument in its most nearly respectable form) is that to retain the etymological spellings of words is to help a large class of readers—but neither the grossly ignorant nor the accomplished scholars—because to keep these spellings is to enable such readers "to recognize the words which they are using, whence they came, to what words in other languages they are nearly related, and what is their properest and strictest meaning." We cannot take the space that would be required to examine all the fallacies stated or implied in such a dictum, but, since the belief is still widely held, it may be worth while to indicate some of them.

The existing spelling, in the first place, is a most unreliable index to the derivation of the word. This has already been demonstrated, and it has likewise been suggested that to simplify the present spelling would very frequently restore an earlier and a more nearly etymological, as well as a more nearly phonetic, spelling. Further, the help afforded by the present spelling (even if *etymologically* defensible) is useful only to those acquainted with the languages from which the words are derived. Archbishop Trench was thinking of those readers—proportionately a much smaller group now—whose knowledge of Latin and Greek would be useful for their understanding of English. On this basis, spelling is to be kept safe for only a very limited fraction of our democracy. But if as further prerequisites for the full appreciation of our present spelling we add acquaintance with such other important studies as Old English and Old French, it is evident that the minority has dwindled very much more. Yet, how can anyone defend a spelling on the ground of its being etymologically correct and etymologically revealing unless he knows the etymology involved? The advertising slogan "Patronize your naborhood store" may be objected to on other grounds, but does *nabor* really *mean* less than *neighbor* unless one knows that *neighbor* literally is "nigh-dwell-er"? The chances are that a negligible fraction of objectors to this spelling have this information. The "etymological bugaboo," on the whole, has very little indeed to commend it. Professor Skeat, the editor of the best of etymological dictionaries, has appropriately disposed of it in the observation: "In the interest of etymology we ought to spell as we

pronounce. To spell words as they used to be pronounced is not etymological, but antiquarian."

More weight may justly be given to a second objection to spelling reform: the fact that many homophones would no longer be differentiated on the printed page. Doctor Bradley, by no means an opponent of spelling reform, has pointed out how very commonly "difference of spelling, once phonetically significant, has become a mere ideographic device."[28] The useful distinction (to the *eye*) between such pairs of words as *night, knight; son, sun;* and *bare, bear* would be lost. It is true that there would be a certain compensation for this in the visual differentiation of words now spelled alike but pronounced differently, such as the present and past tenses of *read; bow* meaning "knot" and "fore part of boat," *tear* meaning "to rend" and "water from the eye," and so on. At the same time, it is evident that this second list is far more difficult to extend than the other. The proponents of spelling reform are perhaps in general too prone to neglect the gulf, awkward as it is from more than one point of view, that simply must be recognized as existing between spoken and written English. As Bradley further points out, a great many words one encounters on the printed page are but rarely pronounced; the first, and almost the sole, function of their spellings is to convey meaning to the eye and mind of the reader. This they do without calling up the question of pronunciation at all. There is some reason, therefore, to feel that frequently more would be lost than gained if words now spelled differently, though pronounced alike, were made identical in appearance.

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[28] *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

A kindred objection is that the connection between words related in meaning would be obscured by a phonetic spelling. Vowel sounds are almost invariably altered when the accent shifts from one syllable to another: observe what happens to all three of the vowels of *photograph* when the word is made into *photographer*. Yet it is a practical convenience that the two words should *look* alike and be recorded together in dictionaries, as should also *history* and *historical*, *injury* and *injurious*, and so on. Sometimes the pronunciation is altered even by an ending that does not shift the primary stress of the word; *conspire* and *conspiracy*, *nature* and *natural*, and *zeal* and *zealous* afford instances. To use different symbols for the vowels in cases like these would confuse children and foreigners learning the language. There is a good deal to be said (apart from strictly "etymological" considerations) for a spelling that makes words that are alike in meaning *look* alike even though they have developed widely different sounds. So far as that goes, there is something even in the "etymological" argument of the anti-reformers—especially if it is limited to words that appear only on the printed page and that carry their meaning to the eye of the educated reader, who alone is concerned with such words. R. W. Chapman has well pointed out how much would be sacrificed by a phonetic spelling of such words as *adolescent*, *chryselephantine*, *hypotenuse*, and *ichthyophagous*.[29]

Still, there is danger that the plea for the retention of familiar spellings on the ground that they are familiar (and even, in one way or another, logical) may blend

[29] In his essay, "Thoughts on Spelling Reform," in *The Portrait of a Scholar*, pp 89–108. He reinforces many of Bradley's points, and is, like him, not unsympathetic with a certain measure of reform.

into the less defensible position that they should be retained because they are beautiful. One aspect of our prejudice in favor of things familiar is our conviction that there is a superior beauty and appropriateness in such labels as are already established. Professor George Saintsbury's well-known outburst of exasperation[30] takes dangerous ground when the writer remarks, "If the pestilent folk who call themselves Spelling Reformers or Simplifiers ever thought of the beauty of words—which, I believe, they honestly profess either to know nothing about or to disregard entirely—it would be worth while offering them a *crux* or two in the department of proper names." Yet, even in the department of proper names —which actually, be it said in passing, the spelling reformers leave severely alone—it is clear that many of Mr. Saintsbury's preferences are purely subjective. As he is quite aware, his dislike of "Ann" and admiration for "Anne" are not shared by everyone; and, as he himself admits, Thackeray liked "Anny," which Mr. Saintsbury thinks hideous (though he thinks "Annie" quite pretty). This finding of beauty and ugliness, particularly the former, in the mere outward forms (or even the sounds) of words is often a most curious delusion. As an antidote to Mr. Saintsbury, one should read Max Beerbohm's delightful essay on "The Naming of Streets."[31] No demonstration of the position that "what you take to be beauty or ugliness of sound is indeed nothing but beauty or ugliness of meaning" could possibly be more convincing than his calling attention to the "beauty" of *ermine, manor house.*

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[30] In his *Last Scrap Book*, New York (Macmillan), 1924.
[31] *Yet Again*, London (Heinemann), 1930, pp. 193–207.

gondola—and then exhibiting the "ugliness" of *vermin*, *warehouse*, *scrofula!* To be sure, in saying this Mr. Beerbohm is not primarily concerned with spelling, but many are undoubtedly convinced that the *appearance* of the first group is as beautiful as the *sound* is.

In considering the "esthetic" argument against spelling reform we have turned from the logical to the illogical form of objection. At the same time, this delusion that the familiar is appropriate and beautiful and the unfamiliar ugly (or at least comical) is clearly very deeply rooted and extremely influential. Many of those who dislike simplified spelling do so for no better reason than that it "looks queer" and is therefore distasteful to them. To the objection, "I don't like it," the Spelling Board admits inability to reply.[32] Frequently too, this type of opposition is reinforced by mere inertia. Some who might overcome their distaste for the queer appearance of reformed spelling are kept by both conventional and lazy habits of mind from doing so. After all, they reason, the benefits of the reform would be for the succeeding generations, not for ours. Why should we make matters smoother for our children than we have found them—particularly as it would entail our living in an era of readjustment and distracting change? To this unheroic but exceedingly human mental attitude would seem to be due a large part of the responsibility for the slow progress of spelling reform—precisely the same factor that prevents speedy progress in other fields. Perhaps it is not too pessimistic to say that this one cause chiefly accounts for what may be called the glacier-like speed of the movement, though

[32] *Handbook*, Part II, p. 38.

after all there may be some doubt as to whether that term is fully appropriate: a glacier is slow but eminently sure, and one may reasonably be uncertain as to whether, even eventually, spelling reform will attain a real measure of success.

To sum up. It has been contended that the logic of the case is chiefly (but not quite exclusively) on the side of the advocates of systematic spelling reform. Not, however, that they are altogether the children of light, and their opponents the children of darkness. There is a good deal of Samuel Johnson's characteristic common sense in his observation that, "Some have endeavored to accommodate orthography better to pronunciation, without considering that this is to measure it by a shadow, to take that for a model which is changing while they apply it." Amplified, this is a just and permanent argument against a thoroughly phonetic spelling. We have questioned, particularly, the reformers' assumption that spelling exists *solely* to indicate pronunciation; and we have found support for our contention in the temperate yet incisive comments of Henry Bradley and R. W. Chapman. Further, it seems fair to say that there has sometimes been an excess of zeal in the terms used by the reformers to describe the absurdities and anomalies of conventional spelling. Sir William Craigie points out in the preface to his *English Spelling, Its Rules and Reason* that the impression that "English spelling is a hopeless chaos" is one that can and should be corrected; yet the enthusiastic reformer would find that description of it unsatisfactory only because he thought it too mild. The late Professor Joseph Wright, successor to Max Müller in the chair of comparative philology at Oxford, has likewise observed that "our

English orthography . . . far from being devoid of law and order . . . is considerably more systematic than would appear at first sight," and that the "ordinary general reader" is mistaken in thinking of it as "a thing born of ignorance, grown up haphazard, and existing by pure convention without rhyme or reason for its being, or method in its madness."[33] These quotations have been included in order to indicate that at least some highly qualified students of the language have felt that the depreciation of our spelling familiar to the ordinary user of it (and still more to most scholars) is very frequently exaggerated. The final evidence that the orthodox spelling is not quite hopeless would seem to be the fact that Anglic, described as achieving "most of the practical advantages of complete and exact spelling reform," can still leave unchanged "sixty to seventy-five per cent of the words on an average printed page."[34]

The foregoing pages have been quite misinterpreted, however, if they have been understood to assert that in general the case for spelling reform is weaker than the case against it. On the contrary, what has been said to disqualify or modify the position of the spelling reformers and what has been said to reinforce *some* of the objections of their opponents has been said simply because the latter position so evidently is on the weaker side. Spelling reform—more specifically the program of the Simplified Spelling Board—the writer believes to be a cause amply fortified by reason; the fact that it has had only slight success he likewise believes to be due much more to ignorant prejudice and sheer inertia

[33] Preface to Wright, Joseph and E. M., *An Elementary Historical New English Grammar*, London (Oxford), 1924.

[34] Pamphlet published by the Anglic Fund, *op. cit.*

than to any serious weakness of its own. When every just deduction for overstatement on the part of the reformers has been made, the controversy still appears very largely that of reason against folly, and the account of it must be considered a melancholy narrative that reflects exceedingly little credit upon human intelligence. One more question remains: What can the individual writer who believes in the advantages promised by spelling reform do to promote its cause?

It is a curious commentary on the whole matter that some of the most zealous of spelling reformers have confined themselves to preaching, and have practiced what they preached not at all. Says Doctor Bradley,[35] " . . . even Professor Skeat, one of the most impassioned advocates of reformed spelling, seems never, in his published writings, to have ventured to spell any single word otherwise than in the conventional fashion, nor, if I may judge from his many letters to me, did he do so in his correspondence." Similarly, one of the most militant of our American reformers, Professor Lounsbury, accuses himself in these terms: "Were I not myself inconsistent and lazy and several other disreputable adjectives, I should write *fonetic* instead of *phonetic*. This I cheerfully admit."[36] If "impassioned advocates" of the cause thus hesitate to add practice to precept, even in the smallest and least questionable changes, need they be surprised that there is but small response to their exhortations? For it is clear that the man in the street has even more cause than the scholar to hesitate: from him "reformed" spellings would be interpreted (as they

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[35] *Op. cit.*, p. 33.
[36] *Op. cit.*, p. 287.

would not from Lounsbury or from Skeat) not as advanced, but merely as illiterate.

Granting that reform must come gradually, as the Simplified Spelling Board believes, how many and what sort of innovations can the individual use without subjecting himself to violent criticism? It is to be admitted at once that the principle of changing first what most needs changing will scarcely apply. Proper names are, from the point of view of the reformer, among the least satisfactory, orthographically, of all classes of words. Yet even the extreme proposals of the Simplified Spelling Society stop short of meddling with their spellings. Surnames like Jonson, Johnson, More, Moore, Spencer, and Spenser are (in this instance, in the history of English literature) identifying labels in their present spellings; to change these spellings would be to confuse the identities they represent. Geographical terms likewise have a traditional background that it seems, even to the reformer, inexpedient to disturb.[37] No, it is not the principle of first attacking what are phonetically the worst offenders that can be adopted; rather, it is the policy of making the initial changes those that are least conspicuous and hence least disturbing.

In practice it is admittedly not easy to follow this policy. Let us see how it applies to the four general proposals of the Board that have already been quoted. In doing this, we shall be outlining an attitude toward reformed spelling that compromises with the compromises of the Board. The first principle, to use the short-

[37] For a solution of the varied and complicated problems involved in the spelling of foreign geographical terms in an English context, see the excellent "First Report on Foreign Geographic Names," published by the United States Geographic Board (Washington, 1932) and available, for ten cents, from the Government Printing Office.

est and simplest of any variants sanctioned by current usage, is one that, in theory at least, can be questioned only by the confessedly reactionary. Even here, however, there is occasionally some doubt (which dictionaries, with varying policies toward simplified spelling, do not completely resolve) as to just what choice current usage does in fact permit. Still, it is clear that no one need hesitate to employ *center, check, gram, honor, license, maneuver, plow, quartet,* or *traveler.* To use any of these spellings is merely to adopt what has long since become, in American practice at least, the better orthography. One may sympathize, indeed, with the feeling that there is something suspiciously like Anglomania in an American's use of *centre, cheque* (or *checque*), *gramme, honour,*[38] *quartette,* and so forth. But it unfortunately does not follow that spellings that would seem to be completely analogous have actually that status: though the writer prefers the newer forms, he must admit that *theater* has not quite the standing of *center,* nor *cigaret* that of *quartet.* There is a widespread objection, too (which again the present writer does not share), to *catalog* rather than *catalogue,* and *rime* rather than *rhyme.* On the whole, however, the illustrations the Board provides for its first principle give few qualms even to the conservative-minded. It is no very bitter dose, after all, to swallow even *tho,* the least generally used, perhaps, of the spellings included in this group, but still one that is unquestionably sanctioned by the test of present usage.

When we turn to the second and third principles,[39] however, we realize that we are on different ground. If

[38] For a most elaborate discussion of the often misstated issues involved in words of this type, see Lounsbury's chapter "The Question of *Honor*" (*op. cit.*, pp. 194–237).

[39] See p. 290.

we use the spellings recommended under these heads, we are not merely progressive; we need to be pioneers, active crusaders. Perhaps only *thru*, of all the examples given in the two lists, will pass muster—in the sense of being sufficiently inconspicuous, by reason of a fairly widespread use, and therefore not unduly disturbing. To many, *thru* (like *tho*) is something of a shibboleth. It is theoretically better than *through*, and sufficiently sanctioned in practice; yet somehow one shies away from it. As to the other words, human inconsistency and the common lack of even a small measure of courageous enterprise are all too clearly exemplified in the general rejection of spellings that are both simpler and historically preferable like *det* and *tung* and those that involve such an apparently innocuous simplification as the dropping of the silent, and completely misleading, *e* of suffixes like *ite* and *ive* (*e.g.*, *definit*, *favorit*, *activ*, *positiv*).

Of the third principle, to follow the simpler rather than the more complex of existing analogies, perhaps a specific example should be commented on in some detail. Let us consider the recommendation to substitute *f* for *ph*. The words affected are all of ultimately Greek derivation and the "etymological" spelling would hence be *ph*. But this *ph* has been superseded by *f* in a few English spellings that are unquestionably standard, such as *fancy* and *fantasy* (from the same Greek source, which may be transliterated as *phantasia*). There is therefore good precedent for making the corresponding simplification in many other words of Graeco-Latin descent, as is done indeed in a more phonetic language like Italian, in which *filosofia* corresponds to English *philosophy*. Nevertheless the "simpler analogy" has been invoked in vain, save in rare instances. *Fantom*

has a certain vogue, and so, in scientific work especially, has *sulfur*, but that is about all. The same writer who uses *sulfur* would hesitate at *fosforous*, where the *f* appears twice and, through its use as initial symbol especially, is more conspicuous. Again it would appear that the *conspicuous* changes are the difficult ones. Lounsbury, as we have seen, was apologetic about his failure to write *fonetic* for *phonetic*. Small wonder, then, that a spelling that changes both initial and final symbols, like *fonograf* for *phonograph* or *fotograf* for *photograph*, appears to the ordinary writer quite unthinkable. One's comment on both the second and third proposals must take the form of expressing regret that so little has been accomplished, or seems likely to be accomplished, in either of these directions.

The fourth and last general recommendation of the Board is a negative one: in brief, the caution that new spellings should not be mere simplifications, but simplifications that are consistent with the eventual purpose of restoring spelling to a *phonetic* basis. It is a caution that is necessary and useful. Amateur enthusiasts for spelling reform frequently seem to prefer the unauthorized to the authorized innovations. They indulge, for example, in such questionable novelties as *lite* for *light*, *nite* for *night*, or (still worse) *thot* for *thought*. The common-sense warning is very evident: If you wish to be progressive in spelling, be sure that the new forms you use have a really authoritative basis. Look them up, for example, in the *Standard* dictionary, which includes the recommendations of the Simplified Spelling Board (sometimes as alternatives, equally recommended, to the conventional spellings), or study them in the *Handbook* of the Board. Even so, you will not be free from

criticism, nor will your motives, in all probability, be clear to every reader.

The last consideration brings us once more to one of the central difficulties, so far as the individual is concerned, in the whole problem of spelling reform. He may do successful battle with the inconsistency, conservatism, and laziness of his own nature, and conscientiously and consistently follow a definite program of reform, such as that recommended by the Board. This is much to grant; but even if he is successful so far, it is quite certain that he will not be applauded. His motives indeed will probably be labeled a desire to be conspicuous or, at least, "different." If he is writing for publication, he will be thwarted by the printer. In the end, it is quite likely that he will give up all but the most minor items in his program.

It is a melancholy note on which to end this account of the struggles for a more rational spelling. Greater optimism, however, is scarcely possible for even a sympathetic observer who sees, rather, in the more systematic attempts at reform during the last quarter-century, only a slight acceleration of the speed with which the written symbol, hopelessly outdistanced, has always pursued the spoken sound. The inequality of the race is due both to the unfair handicaps imposed upon the pursuer (so far as English is concerned) in its early stages, and to the greater suppleness of the quarry. Perhaps the last point further implies that the small success of systematic spelling reform in English is an illustration of the extreme difficulty, verging on impossibility, of bringing about changes in language from above and from without, rather than from below and from within. Better spelling, so far as the present outlook goes, seems likely to come about almost as slowly and painfully and

in almost the same small measure as it has in the past. It is to be hoped, however, that time will prove this view too dark, and that the portents are really more propitious than they appear to be. In the meantime, even the minor changes referred to above, which are, taken all together, not so inconsiderable after all—those that the individual can make in his own writing without exposing himself to very severe criticism—will be in some degree helpful. At the very least, the student of the language can—perhaps one may say, *should*—refrain from the criticism that is largely born of ignorance, and maintain an attitude of tolerance, if not of sympathy, as he regards the activities of more enterprising souls than himself.

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CHAPTER IX

Sources of the Vocabulary

IN the chapters just preceding, we have been concerned with words chiefly on the side of their sounds and their forms. The study of the vocabulary implies that primary attention will be given to a more vital aspect—their meanings. It may well be argued that to this aspect every other should properly be subsidiary. There can be little question, at any rate, that this is the most human and the most popular approach to the study of language. However, it is to be granted at once that the meaning of the word should not be isolated from its history. For anything like an adequate introduction to the study of vocabulary, we must consider also the origins of our word-stock and the various processes of word-formation. These two subjects would seem, indeed, to demand attention even before we approach the study of meaning (and change of meaning). With some overlappings, all the words in our dictionaries may be said to fall into one of two classes: they are either created or borrowed. The formation of the English vocabulary may thus be surveyed from two points of view. Here it will be convenient, though in some ways it is less logical, to discuss first the various sources of word-borrowing, together with the relation of the native and borrowed elements in the vocabulary, and to reserve for later treatment the subject of word-formation. Both

topics will pave the way for subsequent more detailed attention to the meaning, and especially the changing meaning, of words.

The core of the English vocabulary is of course Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic. Those words of Modern English that have prototypes in Middle English and Old English, and that trace their ultimate descent from the Indo-European parent tongue, are the very heart of the word-stock. Examples of such words are the lower numerals—*one*, *two*, and *three;* the most intimate of the family relationships—*father*, *mother*, and *brother;* and the common phenomena of nature—*night*, *dew*, and *star*. The relatively small place filled by such words in Modern English dictionaries is by no means an accurate index of their true importance—a point to which we must later return. Here it will be useful to emphasize the idea that resemblances between these English words and words in other languages that are like them in form, sound, and meaning are by no means to be explained as due to borrowing in either direction. The English (or the foreign) word is not a derivative of the other. Their relationship is rather that of cognates. When, however, one considers the Modern English vocabulary as a whole, it is quite evident that there are far more examples of another kind of relationship between English and foreign words. Borrowed words, to put it differently, are far more numerous in our modern dictionaries than native words. The policy of our language toward word-borrowing has on the whole been that of the open door. English words have their sources in foreign tongues that are, or have been, spoken in all corners of the world. It must now be our task to classify the major and some of the minor sources of borrowing.

Three languages have contributed such extensive shares to the English word-stock as to deserve more detailed attention than the others. These are Greek, Latin, and French. Together they account for so overwhelming a proportion of the whole borrowed element in our vocabulary that the rest of it seems insignificant. Practically, too, it is often difficult or impossible to determine the immediate source of the borrowings, for Greek words are likely to be Latinized in form before they are made English, and Latin words are likely to be Gallicized. Thus *texture,* known to be a borrowing direct from Latin, looks as though it came from the French *texture* rather than the Latin *textura; figure,* the immediate source of which is not clear, may just as well have come from the Latin *figura* as from the French *figure* which it more nearly resembles. So too, *telegraph,* actually a recent coinage in English direct from the Greek words τῆλε (far) and γράφω (write), might seem rather to have come from the French *télégraphe,* in turn apparently from a Latin **telegraphus.*[1] *Theater* is an example of a word that is ultimately Greek, but one that was borrowed from the Greeks by the Romans, and in turn taken from Latin into French and from French into English. The spelling *theatre* more definitely suggests the French word as the immediate source of our English one. In the following account of the Greek, Latin, and French elements in English, we shall confine ourselves as much as possible to *direct* borrowings.

[1] Greenough and Kittredge, pp. 95 and 96, and 49 and 50. Professor Bloomfield (*Language,* p. 494) neatly summarizes the factors that account for the English form of classical borrowings (even synthetic creations like *telegraph*): "Since the Romans borrowed words from Greek, we can do the same, altering the Greek word in accordance with the Roman's habit of Latinization, plus the Frenchman's habit of Gallicizing Latin book-words, plus the English habit of Anglicizing French learned words."

When this restriction is applied to the Greek element in Old English and in Middle English, there is almost nothing left. Three of the few very old loan-words from Greek are *church*, *devil*, and *angel*. It is almost certain, however, that each was borrowed through the medium of Latin—even *church*, a pre-Christian borrowing—ultimately a Greek word meaning "Lord's (house)"—and one that the English retained in preference to any derivative of the Latin *ecclesia*. *Devil* is likewise a Continental borrowing, far older than the migration of the Teutonic peoples to Britain, but presumably a borrowing directly from the Latin *diabolus* rather than from the Greek διάβολος (slanderer). *Angel* likewise comes from Latin *angelus* rather than Greek ἄγγελος (messenger); the Old English form, like the Modern German, was *engel*, the modern spelling and pronunciation being due to the later influence (amounting virtually to a re-borrowing) of the Old French *angele*. Among the Latin words introduced by the Roman (or by the Irish) missionaries into Old English are the following ecclesiastical terms that had been originally borrowed from Greek: *abbot*, *alms*, *clerk*, *monk*, *pope*, *priest*, and *synod*. Later medieval borrowings, also of course through the medium of Latin and usually French as well, are such words as *diet*, *geography*, *logic*, *physic*, *rhetoric*, *surgeon* (for "chirurgien"), and *theology*. Not until after the humanistic movement revived the study of Greek in western Europe did Greek words begin to enter the English vocabulary in great quantities, and even then they were likely to be Latinized in spelling and in their terminations—a convention that has usually been followed since. Thus, a Greek *k* is replaced with *c*, *u* with *y*, and the Greek suffix *-os* with *-ous*.

Even in the last three centuries, the great flood of Greek words that have been incorporated within the English vocabulary has not always implied *direct* borrowing from Greek. Much of the modern scientific vocabulary is international in character, and often the word has been created, from Greek words or roots, in French and then adopted in English; such words as *barometer* and *thermometer* are examples. Thus, we frequently have a curious kind of indirect indebtedness to Greek as well as an odd combination of word-borrowing and word-creation. The Greek language has been used for the creation of the new terms that the expansion of the various sciences has made necessary, primarily perhaps because it is particularly well suited for the making of compounds. Latin and the Romance languages have this quality in much less degree; and English, so far as the native vocabulary goes, has largely lost the disposition for it that it once possessed. It is of advantage, too, even for a language that, like German, indulges freely in compound-making, to use for scientific purposes the largely international vocabulary that has been formed from Greek words and roots.

How pervasive is the Greek element, direct or indirect, in the Modern English vocabulary may best be illustrated by noting how, in a single department of art or science, words of this type tend to accumulate. Not only do modern drama and dramatic criticism stem directly from the practice of the Greeks and the *Poetics* of Aristotle; their very terminology reminds one of this descent at every turn. Thus *drama* itself is Greek; so also is its place of performance, the *theater;* so likewise are its species, like *comedy*, *tragedy*, and *melodrama*, and its parts or elements, like *catastrophe*, *climax*, *dialog*,

episode, *epilog*, *peripety*, *prolog*, and *scene*. In the various natural sciences, the preponderance of Greek words is just as striking; it is perhaps sufficient to mention merely the names of such fields as *bacteriology*, *botany*, *histology*, *physiology*, *physics*, and *zoölogy* (all Greek labels) in order to suggest how the Greek language has permeated their various specialized vocabularies. This effect is quite as striking, perhaps even more so, in fields of science that have been recently developed. Terms used in modern medicine or allied subjects will serve to illustrate: *adenoids*, *osteopathy*, *pediatrics*, *psychiatry*, and *psychoanalysis* are a few of the hundreds of such words. The highly specialized terminology of recent research in electricity—what has been called "Schenectady Greek"—is a jargon that is often completely mysterious to the non-Greek layman: a group of typical examples, made up of words utilizing the same termination, includes *dynatron*, *kenotron*, *phanotron*, *pliotron*, *magnetron*, and *thyratron*.[2]

While borrowings, and particularly direct borrowings, from the Greek have been largely confined to Modern English, our language has been exposed to Latin influence throughout its whole history. We have already glanced at the Latin influence on the Old English vocabulary, an influence which began before the migrations of the Teutonic tribe to Britain and received its chief acceleration through the later Christianization of the island.[3] The actual number of Latin borrowings is far smaller than might have been expected, for the general policy of

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[2] These are suggested by an article "Boom Times in the Laboratory," *New Republic*, Vol. LXVII, No. 868 (July 22, 1931), pp. 253–256.

[3] P. 44.

Old English was clearly antagonistic to external influence. After the Conquest this policy toward Latin was gradually altered, largely through the established practice of borrowing from French; and when in the thirteenth century English reasserted itself as a literary language, Latin began to be freely levied upon to amplify and enrich its word-stock. Many of the pre-Renaissance borrowings from Latin are doubtless due to English translations of the Vulgate Bible, especially the fourteenth-century versions of Wyclif and Purvey. While Old English translators of the Bible had usually turned Latin words into native ones that rendered them almost literally—*mildheortnisse* (mildheartedness) for Latin *misericordia* (mercy), and *ðrynnes* (three-ness) for *trinitas* (trinity)—Wyclif introduced such Latinisms as *generation, persecution,* and *transmigration.*[4]

The revival of classical learning in the sixteenth century first swelled the numbers of English words borrowed from Latin to overwhelming proportions. Whereas the number of Middle English loan-words from Latin is difficult to estimate, because of the habit of treating even a word direct from Latin as if it came through the medium of French, there can be no doubt that the great mass of borrowings in early Modern English came directly from Latin, even though the convention of Gallicizing the form of the word persisted. Romanic borrowings in Middle English are on the whole much more likely to be from French than from Latin; in Modern English, they are much more likely to be from Latin than from French. Recent borrowings from

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[4] *Cf.* McKnight, G. H., *English Words and Their Background,* pp. 111–113.

French are of course frequent enough, and usually the word carries an unequivocally French appearance; but their number is far less than the number of borrowings direct from Latin. The habit of treating direct Latin borrowings as if they were French words has continued, but there is nevertheless a fair number of Latin loan-words in Modern English that have escaped this tendency and appear in English unchanged.[5] A few specimen words, illustrating also the great diversity in the parts of speech and the inflectional forms borrowed, are these: *affidavit, agendum, alibi, animal, bonus, deficit, exit, extra, fiat, item, maximum, memento, memorandum, omnibus, posse, propaganda, quorum, sponsor, terminus, verbatim, veto,* and *via.* Though it is perhaps impossible to get anything like an accurate estimate of the whole number of Latin words borrowed in English, an estimate of another kind that has been widely accepted is that of Professors Greenough and Kittredge,[6] who, through computing the proportion of words in *a* in Harper's *Latin Dictionary* that have been taken over into English, have arrived at the conclusion that English "has appropriated a full quarter of the Latin vocabulary, besides what it has gained by transferring Latin meanings to native words."

The enormous proportion of Latin loan-words in Modern English dictionaries of course betokens a reversal of the originally conservative attitude of the language toward word-borrowings. We have seen in general how the more liberal policy was developed in Middle English

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[5] E. L. Johnson, in *Latin Words of Common English* (pp. 63–87), gives many such examples.

[6] *Words and Their Ways*, p. 106.

times and became the more or less fixed practice of Modern English. A more detailed treatment of the history of the language from this point of view, however, would have to indicate many currents and eddies. There have always been two opinions as to the propriety of adding to the resources of the vocabulary by levying freely upon other languages. In the Old English period there must have been some inclination to borrow from without; otherwise the Old English vocabulary would have remained exclusively Teutonic. On the other hand, when the Renaissance habit of adorning the English page, or even English conversation, by a very liberal infusion of Latinisms began to assert itself, there were many voices raised in protest. Shakespeare's satire, in *Love's Labor's Lost*, of the "inkhorn" terms used by the Latinists is generally familiar. It is perhaps more surprising to find a writer so deeply indebted to Latin as Sir Thomas Browne making the same kind of protest when he remarks, "If elegancy still proceedeth, . . . we shall, within a few years, be fain to learn Latin to understand English."

In the era of the Renaissance, as has already been suggested,[7] the victory lay with the Latinist; at the same time such protests as those just mentioned were useful in tempering the extravagances of the policy of free borrowing. There were extravagances of the opposite sort too. Sir John Cheke's purely Anglo-Saxon version of a part of the New Testament affords a curious illustration of the diametrically opposed theory. In general, it is clear that the later compromise effected between the extremes of both positions has been one in which the

[7] P. 66.

Latinist has had the better of it. But the Saxonist has not been completely downed. He sometimes succeeds in getting an English word established, or reëstablished, in the face of a competing Latinism. Professor Jespersen has traced the curious history of *handbook*:[8] the Old English *handbōc* disappeared in the Middle English period, when its place was taken by the Latin-French *manual* and even (in the sixteenth century) by the Greek *enchiridion*. When *handbook* was re-introduced, in the nineteenth century, it was treated as an objectionable neologism, "so accustomed had the nation grown to preferring strange and exotic words." In spite of its superior intelligibility—*manual* after all merely *implies* the idea of "book"—*handbook* has only very recently won wide acceptance. A somewhat similar story is that of *foreword*. The scorn of the Latinist is voiced in Hilaire Belloc's dictum:[9] "what Anglo-Saxons call a *foreword*, but gentlemen a *preface*." There will be occasion later to return to the debatable ideal of "purity" in vocabulary.

To complete an enumeration of the major sources of word-borrowing, the French element must be added to the Greek and the Latin. The influence of Norman French began to operate even before the Conquest; but the great influx of French borrowings took place considerably later, after Parisian or Central French had become a more important source than the Norman dialect. There are certain doublets in English that testify to borrowing the same French word twice, once in its Norman (or Picard) form and once in its Central

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[8] *Growth and Structure*, pp. 49 and 50.
[9] *The Path to Rome*, New York (Putnam), 1915, p. ix.

form. Thus the pairs *cattle* and *chattel* and *catch* and *chase* illustrate the different treatment in the two French dialects of what was once the same initial consonant. Likewise, originally Teutonic words with initial *w* that had been borrowed in French passed into English in two forms: the Norman dialect retained the *w*, but in Central French this was transformed into *gu* (or *g*). English has sometimes borrowed both variants, so that we have such doublets as *warrant* and *guarantee*, *warden* and *guardian*, and *reward* and *regard*.

Variant English forms of the same borrowed root are not of course always to be explained in the way just mentioned. To digress a moment, it may be of interest to see some of the other possibilities, especially those connected with the Greek, the Latin, and the French sources. Double borrowings of words originally Greek are these pairs, in which the first member is the earlier borrowing and the second the later: *balm, balsam; blame, blaspheme; diamond, adamant; fancy, phantasy; priest, presbyter;* and *palsy, paralysis*. Some of these had variant forms in French—for example, *blâmer* and *blasphémer*—and English has borrowed both; in other cases—for example, *adamant*, *phantasy*, and *paralysis*—the second borrowing is a learned one, direct from the Greek. Again, *corpse* is a borrowing from Old French, while *corps* is a re-borrowing of the same word with the *s* silent, as the Modern French pronunciation has it. But the doublets *captive* and *caitiff* almost reverse this situation: for *caitiff* is a borrowing from Old French, while *captive*, much nearer the form and sound of the Latin original, is the second borrowing. On a larger scale, the possibilities of multiple borrowing are strikingly exemplified in the history of the Latin root that appears in *regem*

(king). The adjective form, *regalis*, gives English *regal*, a direct borrowing. But in the usual development of Old French from Latin, intervocalic consonants are lost; hence *real* is a Middle English borrowing from Old French. (Another *real* in English represents Latin *rem* (thing); the *real* here referred to, however, occurs as the name of the coin *real*, and in *real-m.*) Modern French *roi* has evolved, with the usual phonetic changes, from Latin *regem*, and again the corresponding adjective has been borrowed in English *royal*. Hence *regal*, *real*, and *royal* are triplets, as are also *legal*, *leal* (preserved in the Scotch song, "Land o' the Leal"), and *loyal*. The use to which Latin *discus* (itself a borrowing from Greek) has been put in English is even more extensive: the Old English direct borrowing is preserved in *dish*, a Middle English variant gives us *desk*, and a borrowing of the Old French form gives *dais;* seventeenth-century direct borrowings of the Latin word are *disk* (*disc*) and *discus*, the last popularized anew when the Greek sport of throwing the *discus* was revived. Duplication, together with the variation in sound and form that results from borrowing at different times and through different channels, may be further illustrated in *capital*, *chief*, and *chef;* *candelabra*, *chandler*, and *chandelier;* *gentile*, *gentle*, *genteel*, and *jaunty*.

A few examples of the kinds of words borrowed by Middle English from French were given in an earlier chapter. It would, however, be erroneous to assume that loan-words from this source are to be found only in particular categories like these. Actually the English vocabulary is permeated by French everywhere. Many —indeed, most—of the earlier borrowings are not felt to be alien in any sense. The common impression that

monosyllables in English are of native origin only is refuted by the long list that could easily be compiled of French loan-words of but one syllable. A very few typical illustrations, limited to words beginning with *c*, are the following ones, which probably the great majority of English speakers would consider to be as thoroughly "English" as any words that could be mentioned: *cage, calm, car, catch, cause, cell, chain, chair, chance, change, charge, chase, cheer, choice, claim, clear, close, coast, cost, course, crime, cry.*

At the same time, it is obvious that borrowings from French do tend particularly to accumulate in certain fields. The first large group of borrowings was made up of ideas associated with religion and the church. Importations of the eleventh century are these: *cell, chaplain, charity, evangelist, grace, mercy, miracle, nativity, paradise, passion, sacrament,* and *saint.* These words, in general standing for the more formal and outward aspect of Catholicism, have been suggestively contrasted[10] with borrowings of the thirteenth century that testify to a more inward and personal aspect of religious faith: *anguish, comfort, conscience, devotion, patience, pity, purity,* and *salvation* are witnesses to the religious revival on the Continent and the advent of the preaching friars in England. Other fields than religion in which borrowing from French was early active are of course law, government, military affairs, and the general usages and conventions of polite society. Legal terms of early date in addition to those already mentioned are *assets, bail, bailiff, embezzle, lease,* and *perjury.* Typical loan-words for ideas relating to national government are

[10] By L. P. Smith in *The English Language*, pp. 165 and 167.

chancellor, country, exchecquer, govern, minister, power, and *reign.* French borrowings that stand for ideas associated with war and things military are particularly interesting. *Army* had to compete with three Old English words: *here* (the *harrying* body) (the term applied by the Anglo-Saxons to the Danish force), *fierd* (the *traveling* body) [<*faran* (go)], and the neutral *werod* [(body) of *men*]; it was not until the fifteenth century that the older terms were completely displaced. But a great deal of the French military vocabulary was introduced very early. To illustrate the scope and variety of words of this class, a few specimens may suffice: *assault, company, enemy, hauberk, lance, lieutenant, mail, navy, sergeant, soldier,* and *troops.* It may perhaps be significant of the *fons et origo* of militarism that the practice of borrowing its terms from French has been by no means confined to Middle English. *Captain* and *colonel,* for example, are of considerably later date than *lieutenant* and *sergeant.* Other sixteenth- or seventeenth-century borrowings are *attack, barricade, campaign, cannonade, commandant, corps, cuirassier, dragoon, march,* and *massacre.* Some of these represent the renewed general activity in borrowing from the French which came about through the special French influence in the reigns of Charles I and Charles II. This influence upon the English language and English literature continued, of course, into the eighteenth century. In 1710, we find Jonathan Swift complaining that "the war has introduced abundance of polysyllables which will never be able to live many more campaigns."[11]

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[11] The *Tatler,* No. 230 (Sept. 28, 1710). Swift, however, is wrong about the date of some of these words: "the war" he refers to must be the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1713), but the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites earlier uses of all but the first three of the list.

The terms he cites are *speculations, operations, preliminaries, ambassadors, palisadoes, communication, circumvallation,* and *battalions.* A curious example of the folly of such confident prophesying about language! *None* of the words he gives has perished, and only one has been altered, very slightly, in form. Borrowing from the French military vocabulary has continued, of course, up to the present; accessions due to the World War are represented by words like *barrage* and *camouflage.*

One other general group of French borrowings has been mentioned, that composed of words standing for the usages and the conventions of polite society. Too much can easily be made of a contrast between "homely" Anglo-Saxon and "polished" French ideas in Middle (and Modern) English; nevertheless, to some extent this contrast does hold good. It has often been pointed out that vigor and sincerity rather than grace and finish are characteristic of the "Anglo-Saxon tradition"[12] in literature. In language, the words standing for courtly and graceful ideas are similarly more likely to be of French than of native origin. *Courtliness* and *grace* themselves belong here, as do such kindred terms as *chivalry* and *honor.* The French introduced more polished table manners, and words pertaining to eating, like *dinner, supper* (though the homelier *breakfast* remained), *table, fork, plate,* and *napkin;* also, various ways of preparing food for the table, like *boil, broil,* and *roast,* as well as the names of different kinds of food.[13] French, too, are the general names for clothes—*apparel, costume, dress,* and *garment*—as well as most of the more specific

[12] *Cf.* the eloquent chapter, of that title, in J. L. Lowes's *Convention and Revolt in Poetry,* Boston (Houghton Mifflin), 1919.

[13] *Cf.* p. 56.

ones dealing with the kinds of dress, their styles and materials: *brassière, décolleté, voile, chemise,* and *lingerie* are a few recent examples of such words. The earliest words relating to art are French—*art* itself, and *beauty, color, design, ornament,* and *paint*—and so are the more specialized terms of such a field as architecture (for example, *aisle, arch, chancel, column, pillar, porch, reredos,* and *transept*). Some of the humbler occupations, like those of the *baker, fisherman, miller, shepherd,* and *shoemaker* have kept their native names; but many others, especially the more skilled trades and those that brought their practitioners into contact with the upper classes, have French designations: the words *barber, butcher, carpenter, grocer, mason, painter,* and *tailor* are typical.

A final general aspect of the French borrowings in English remains to be discussed. In what way and to what extent have these words been naturalized? The general principle is obvious: the older the borrowing, the more thoroughly it tends to follow normal English habits of accentuation and pronunciation. Mere age, however, is not the sole factor; the extent to which the word is used in English is also of primary importance. Thus, the recent importation *camouflage* was very soon, in popular usage, strongly accented on the first syllable, and its final consonant changed from [ʒ] to [dʒ]. Curiously enough, however, *garage,* a word in still more general use, is not usually given the completely Anglicized pronunciation ['gærɪdʒ]. This is what might have been expected, on the analogy of dozens of words like *message, courage, cabbage,* and so forth. Mr. H. W. Fowler[14]

[14] *Dictionary of Modern English Usage,* London (Oxford), 1927. p. 211.

gives this, apparently, as both the common and the desirable treatment of the word; but in American use, at any rate, it is far less frequent than [gə'rɑʒ] and [gə'rɑdʒ], the latter compromise being the really popular version. The usual statement of American phoneticians that the ordinary pronunciation is ['gærɪdʒ] would seem to be based on the expectation that the word would follow the normal path, rather than on actual observation of the somewhat exceptional development that it has really undergone.

As has been indicated, the usual expectation is that both borrowings long in use and borrowings of recent date that are widely and popularly employed will be completely made over to conform to English patterns. Many Middle English importations, as we have already seen, are to all intents and purposes apprehended as native English words, so completely has the language assimilated them. This is truest, of course, of thoroughly popular, monosyllabic words, themselves borrowed from everyday, short French ones. But even borrowings that have taken over longer and somewhat less homely words of Old French, though they may sometimes be felt to be aliens, are completely naturalized so far as pronunciation goes. Thorough Anglicization is also the invariable rule for Modern English borrowings from Modern French until about the era of the Restoration. From this time on, however, a deliberate attempt was often made to preserve the original pronunciation; and although this has rarely met with complete success, it is a tendency that has kept the older trend toward thorough naturalization in check (except in the case of the most popular words, which would usually insist on becoming English). Quite recently, one may observe a counter-tendency in

cultivated as well as in popular speech: wider recognition of the desirability of making French loan-words that are to be in living use in English speech conform to English analogies. Thus *valet* is now almost as completely Anglicized as *varlet*; and *trait*, long a shibboleth of the difference between British and American pronunciation, tends to be pronounced with sounded final *t* in British pronunciation too.[15]

What seems the desirable procedure with the pronunciation of French borrowings in Modern English has already been suggested. The impossibility of attempting to keep them French has been set forth wittily and persuasively by Mr. Fowler:[16] "To say a French word in the middle of an English sentence exactly as it would be said by a Frenchman in a French sentence is a feat demanding an acrobatic mouth; . . . it is a feat that should not be attempted." But if they are not to be kept French, what is to be done with them? Completely Anglicized renderings of many comparatively recent borrowings have, of course, no standing at all. The un-English accentuation of such words as *ballet*, *cadet*, *caprice*, *grimace*, *prestige*, and so forth, must apparently be retained. Comfort may be given, however, to any tendency toward Anglicization that makes its way upward from popular to cultivated usage. The accent of even *prestige* may be changed, perhaps, and the final consonant made [dʒ] instead of [ʒ]. A similar

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[15] Fowler remarks (p. 660), "The final *t* is sounded in America but *still* usually silent in England." The committee advising the British Broadcasting Committee on pronunciation go further than this in *recommending* the "American" pronunciation for British use (*S. P. E. Tract No. XXXII.* Robert Bridges's comments are on pp. 380 and 381).

[16] P. 194.

change is evidently taking place in *sabotage*, and a somewhat different one when *technique* is respelled *technic*. *Foyer* is given by Fowler as ['fwɑje:], but ['fɔɪje:] is unpleasantly common. Surely ['fɔɪjəɹ] is preferable to the hybrid effect of the latter. In a word, a pedantry all too familiar in both the use and the pronunciation of French borrowings is one that should be combated.

Aside from Greek, Latin, and French, only Danish has made a really substantial contribution to the English vocabulary. So substantial is it, indeed, that could we be more certain of its precise extent, we might more justly reckon the Danish (or, to be more accurate, the Scandinavian) element the fourth of the major sources rather than the chief of the minor ones. The reader may be referred to Jespersen's chapter "The Scandinavians"[17] for an account, by one peculiarly qualified to deal with the subject, of this difficult matter. "Scandinavian" rather than "Danish" is to be preferred, for it has been shown that the so-called Danish invaders of England were often Norwegians. The resemblances between Old English and Old Norse (or Old Icelandic) were of course much closer than those that now exist between English and Danish. It is consequently often difficult to say whether a given word of Modern English has developed from Old English or from a Scandinavian cognate. Sometimes it happens that the same root appears twice in Modern English, once from Old English and once from Danish. Such doublets as *no* and *nay*, *rear* and *raise*, *from* and *fro*, and *shirt* and *skirt* illustrate this situation, the first of each pair being the native word and the second the Scandinavian. But in *whole*

[17] Chapter IV (pp. 59–86) of *Growth and Structure*.

(O. E. *hāl*) and *hale*, *church* and *kirk*, and *chest* and *kist*,[18] it is equally likely that the second word of each pair represents a native Northern dialect rather than a Scandinavian variant—an additional complication in the difficult task of sorting out the Scandinavian contribution to Modern English. Occasionally, while it is clear that the native *form* has survived, it is evident that the *meaning* is the Scandinavian rather than the native one: thus, *dream* comes in form directly from its Old English ancestor, but this meant "joy," whereas an Old Norse cognate had the meaning "vision"; and *ploh* meant "measure of land" in Old English, while the Old Norse *plógr* meant "plough."

The best indication of the peculiarly intimate relation between Old English and Danish is the fact that in all probability the pronominal forms with initial *th—they*, *their*, and *them*—are due to Scandinavian influence. This is the one case in which English has borrowed pronouns from another language. Indeed, "borrowing" seems scarcely the term for the process of gradual assimilation that we must imagine to have taken place. Two conditions evidently made it possible: the chance of ambiguity that would have resulted from the normal development of Old English *hīe*, *hiera*, and *him* (their likeness to *he*, *her*, and *him*); and the presence in the language already of other pronominal forms in *th—this*, *that*, and (later) *the*. But borrowing of pronouns even in these circumstances witnesses most vividly to the close interrelation of the Anglo-Saxon and Danish elements in early English.

Many Danish borrowings have, of course, been lost. A certain nautical vocabulary, particularly terms asso-

[18] Jespersen, pp. 66 and 67.

ciated with naval warfare, that the Anglo-Saxons, quite understandably, took over from their Viking invaders, has not descended from Old English to Modern English. To some extent this corresponds to a much later group of borrowings from Dutch, and for a similar reason: the English of the eighth and ninth centuries learned shipbuilding from the Danes, as their seventeenth-century descendants learned seamanship from the Dutch. Somewhat similarly, early borrowings of Scandinavian law terms have been chiefly lost, and their places taken by the much more numerous law terms from Norman French. *Law* itself, however, is one of the survivors, as are the compounds *outlaw* and *by-law*,[19] and a few terms like *hustings*, *riding* [originally *thriding* (third part)], and *wapentake* (the last two, names for the divisions of English counties).

A few miscellaneous illustrations of the Scandinavian element in English may be added. If we can be reasonably sure that a great many of our most familiar words, like *man*, *father*, *house*, *life*, *summer*, *come*, *bring*, *see*, *hear*, *think*, *sit*, *stand*, *wise*, *well*, *better*, *best*, and so forth, are strictly English, it is only, as Jespersen points out,[20] because the survival of a considerable body of early English literature has made it possible to label them as Old English. Many words were doubtless identical in Old English and Old Norse, and many more only slightly differentiated in sound or form. In addition to the numerous words that *may* be Scandinavian rather than

[19] This meant "town-law," the first element being that which appears also in place names like *Grimsby*, *Haddeby*, and *Rugby;* but popular etymology has distorted its meaning, through confusion with the more familiar sense of *by*, into "additional or supplementary regulation." Hence, probably, such new creations as *by-play* and *by-product*.

[20] Pp. 64 and 65.

Anglo-Saxon, there are many that are indubitably Scandinavian. These words stand, for the most part, for the everyday, commonplace things of life: there is no suggestion of a differentiation in culture or interests between Dane and Saxon, as to some extent there is between Saxon and Norman. Typical nouns are *fellow, gate, haven, husband, knife, root, skin,* and *window;* verbs include *bask, call, cast, die, drown, get, hit, scrape, scream, scowl, skulk, take,* and *want;* adjectives are such as *happy, ill, loose, low, meek, odd, rotten, seemly, ugly,* and *wrong.* Like the Celts, the Danes have left a conspicuous record of their occupation of parts of Britain in the shape of place names. According to Isaac Taylor,[21] more than six hundred towns in the east of England have names ending in *-by,* from the Danish word for "town." Place names in *-beck, -dale, -thorp, -thwaite,* and *-toft* are likewise of Scandinavian origin. Besides these marks of the original contact between Anglo-Saxon and Dane, there are rather numerous Scandinavian loan-words of later date: *batten, billow, blight, clumsy,* and *doze*—all probably of Scandinavian origin—made their way from the northern and eastern dialects into literary English in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; a few words—*equip, flounder* (the fish), and possibly the verb *sound*—are thought to have entered English through the circuitous route of Scandinavian elements retained in the speech of the Normans from their original northern tongue and later brought by them to England as part of their French dialect; several comparatively recent borrowings—*nag, scamp, fiord, floe, geyser, saga,* and *ski*—represent either later accretions from English dialects or fresh contacts with Scandinavian languages.

[21] *Words and Places,* New York (Dutton), 1909, p. 158.

Turning to the more specifically minor borrowed elements in the English vocabulary, it is natural to begin with what is chronologically the oldest: Celtic. The curiously small extent of the Celtic influence (apart from place names) upon the Old English word-stock has already been commented on.[22] Besides the words previously mentioned, only a very few others—*ass*, *bin*, *coomb*, *dim*, and *mattock*—may be assigned, with any show of probability, to this small handful. Of other words (and also of this group) often listed as Celtic, it is quite likely that some come, not from the Celts of Britain, but from the Irish missionaries to Northumbria, or even that they are Teutonic or Romanic words borrowed in Celtic and later absorbed into English. Later stages of the English language have, however, levied upon the more modern forms of the aboriginal tongues. But the loan-words from Welsh, which we might have expected to be rather numerous, are relatively few: perhaps only *flannel* and *flummery* are really common words; others, like *coracle*, *cromlech*, and *eisteddfod*, are distinctly more exotic. Both Scotch-Gaelic and Irish contribute a far greater number of words, which are usually characteristic: *clan*, *claymore*, *pibroch*, *slogan*, and *whisky* are typical of the one group, and *bog*, *colleen*, *pillion*, *shamrock*, and *spalpeen* of the other.

Aside from English, there are two important modern languages of the West Teutonic group: Dutch and German. Borrowings from both are on the whole so scanty that one need have little hesitation in terming each of these sources a minor one. It should be remembered, however, that the extremely close relationship between Dutch (and Flemish) and English makes it quite con-

[22] P. 43.

ceivable that some words that we label Anglo-Saxon may just as plausibly be explained as of Dutch or Flemish origin. As we have seen,[23] numerous English words are still nearly or quite identical with their cognates in the Low German languages; the right of such words to be considered "pure" Anglo-Saxon is, of course, highly dubious. One group that may safely be assigned to Dutch or Flemish influence on Middle English is made up of such trade terms as *pack*, from the wool trade; *hops*, *scum*, and *tub*, probably from the brewers of the Low Countries; and the following terms of the cloth-making industry (believed to date from the importation, in Chaucer's day, of Flemish weavers into England): *curl*, *scour*, *spool*, *stripe*, and *tuck*. Far the most important and homogeneous group of Low German—chiefly Dutch—loan-words are those that pertain to ships and the sea: medieval importations are *bowsprit*, *buoy*, *freight*, *keel*, *leak*, *lighter*, *marline*, and *pump;* more recent ones are such words as *avast*, *belay*, *boom*, *bow*, *commodore*, *cruise*, *dock*, *keelhaul*, *yacht*, *and yawl*.[24] Besides these nautical borrowings, there is a fair number of miscellaneous words that Modern English has taken from the Low German tongues; a few specimens are *foist*, *freebooter*, *groat*, *heyday*, *hoist*, *jeer*, *plunder*, *snap*, *switch*, *toy*, and *wagon*. Among the many words that may possibly be of Low German origin[25] are some very familiar ones, such as *boy*, *girl*, *bounce*, *luck*, *mud*, and *scoff*.

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[23] P. 36.

[24] Most of these illustrations are from Smith, L. P., *The English Language*, pp. 191–193.

[25] They are so assigned by Skeat in the appendix to his *Etymological Dictionary*. Here, as elsewhere in this chapter when they are utilized, Skeat's etymologies have been verified, wherever possible, by consulting the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

High German borrowings are considerably rarer than Low German ones. Bradley,[26] however, calls attention to one group of words in which the influence of Modern German is conspicuous: the science of *mineralogy* has retained in its English vocabulary, with slight modifications, a number of the terms employed in the land of its origin—*bismuth, cobalt, gneiss, quartz, shale,* and *zinc* are typical. Another group that is likewise noteworthy is that made up of terms used in eating and drinking; for example, *sauerkraut, stein,* and *lager beer.* Such words are, of course, far less numerous than French loan-words in the same field, and they are less completely assimilated in English. The same observations may be made of the occasional importations from German in other departments: such various borrowings as *carouse, hinterland, kindergarten, leitmotif, meerschaum, poodle, putsch, umlaut, waltz,* and *wanderlust,* though most of them are in common enough use in English, still bear, in some measure, the marks of their alien origin.

Even apart from French, the modern Romance languages, especially Italian and Spanish, have contributed far more to the English vocabulary than have the Teutonic languages that are the closer relatives in our family-tree. Borrowing from Italian naturally began to be active when the culture of the Italian Renaissance impressed itself upon sixteenth-century England. When the traveled Elizabethan Englishman, as Sir Thomas Overbury put it, spoke "his own language with shame and lisping," it was chiefly with Italian that he filled out the supposed deficiencies or improved upon the crudities of his native tongue. Most of these Elizabethan affecta-

[26] *Making of English,* p. 103.

tions, however, have not stuck, any more than have the Spanish importations that are based upon literary admiration of Góngora and Guevara. Of those that did establish themselves, *attitude*, *fiasco*, *isolate*, *motto*, *stanza*, and *umbrella* are typical Renaissance borrowings from Italian, and *desperado*, *grandee*, *negro*, *punctilio*, and *renegade* from Spanish.[27] As to Italian borrowings in general, it is well known that the chief indebtedness of English to this source is for its musical vocabulary. This extensive stock of words comprises both those in everyday use, such as *piano*, *alto*, *soprano*, *opera*, and *tempo*, and those that are more definitely specialized or technical, such as *legato*, *diminuendo*, *rallentando*, *pizzicato*, *allegretto*, *scherzo*, and *andante*. Words like these are chiefly of the eighteenth century, the period when Italian music was introduced into England. A somewhat similar, though smaller, group of Italian borrowings comprises terms used in the fine arts, like *chiaroscuro*, *dado*, *fresco*, *portico*, *replica*, *studio*, and *torso*. Perhaps half of all our Italian loan-words come to us through the medium of French; it is this indirect relationship that obtains, for example, in virtually all the oldest, or Middle English, borrowings: *alarm*, *brigand*, *ducat*, *florin*, *orange*, and *rebeck*[28] (the last two ultimately of Eastern origin) are typical. But words that are shown by their very aspect to be direct from Italy have frequently been borrowed throughout the Modern English period; a few random illustrations are *cameo*, *campanile*, *dilettante*, *extravaganza*, *lava*, *macaroni*, *rifacimento*, *spaghetti*, and *virtuoso*. Spanish borrowings are less com-

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[27] Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 103.
[28] Emerson, p. 168.

mon; but such loan-words as *armada, castanet, cigar, guerilla, hidalgo, matador, mosquito, quadroon,* and *vanilla* testify that this source has by no means been a negligible one. English-speaking peoples have had commercial (as well as occasional warlike) contacts not only with the Spanish but with the Portuguese, as is evidenced by such importations from the latter as *banana, cobra, cocoa, molasses,* and *pimento.*

It is of course evident that a good deal of history, both political and cultural, is implicit in the various groups of loan-words. This is just as true for the minor sources as for the major ones. The indebtedness of Western European civilization to the speakers of Arabic for the early development of chemistry, mathematics, and medicine is manifest in such borrowings from this source as the following: *alcohol, alchemy, alembic, algebra, alkali, attar, cipher, elixir, naphtha, sugar, syrup,* and *zero.* That the Arabic-speaking peoples were often the intermediaries through whom Greek culture reached Western Europe at a time when Greek itself was all but unknown is suggested by the history of several of these words—*alchemy, alembic,* and *elixir;* all are ultimately Greek, but all came through the medium of Arabic. The devious routes by which Arabic words have become English are illustrated in the history of the doublets *cipher* and *zero:* both come from the Arabic *sifr* (cipher), but the one via Spanish and French, and the other through Vulgar Latin and Italian. The exotic East, always fascinating to the Western traveler, is conjured up in such other characteristic borrowings from Arabic as *emir, bedouin, fakir, gazelle, giraffe, harem, houri, hookah, lute, minaret, mosque, myrrh, sheik, simoom, sirocco, sultan,* and *vizier.* Another Semitic language,

Hebrew, contributes similar pictures of the Orient in loan-words like *camel, cassia, cinnamon, ebony, hyssop,* and *sapphire.* A more important indebtedness to Hebrew, however, is to be observed in religious terminology. That many of these words come into English indirectly rather than directly is, of course, natural enough in view of the part that Greek and Latin have played in the tradition of Biblical translation; here too is the obvious explanation of why, in spite of the great influence of the Bible upon the English language, the total number of Hebrew borrowings is comparatively small. Typical words of this sort are *amen, cherub, Gehenna, hallelujah, manna, pharisee, rabbi, sabbath,* and *seraph.*

Another Oriental source is Persian, a nearer relative than Arabic or Hebrew, since Persian is not Semitic, but Indo-European. On the characteristic flavor of this group of loan-words, the following rhapsody of Logan Pearsall Smith may be quoted: "To me they glitter like jewels in our northern speech. *Magic* and *Paradise,* for instance; and the names of flowers and gems and rich fruits and tissues—*Tulip* and *Lilac* and *Jasmin* and *Peach* and *Lapis Lazuli* . . . and *Orange* and *Azure* and *Scarlet.*"[29]

Among other Asiatic countries, only India has contributed a considerable number of words. From its many languages, often very circuitously, we have taken over such terms as *bandanna, calico, bungalow, indigo,*

[29] *More Trivia,* New York (Harcourt), 1921, p. 85. (The etymologies are, apparently, in one sense sound enough, except of course that *lapis* is Latin—though *lazuli* is thought to go back to the same Persian origin as *azure.* Most of the words, however, are far from being *direct* borrowings from Persian; *magic* and *paradise,* for example are Middle English < Old French < Latin < Greek < Old Persian.)

jungle, loot, rajah, and *sandal.* Next most numerous are Malay words like *amuck, gingham, gong, gutta-percha,* and *lory.*[30] Chinese and Japanese have been levied upon infrequently: *mandarin, pongee, serge,* and *tea* represent the one source, and *hara-kiri, jiu-jitsu, kimono,* and *samurai* the other. From minor Asiatic or Polynesian languages have come such words as *atoll, bamboo, cheroot, junk, sago, taboo, tattoo,* and *teak.*

It is clear, on the whole, that from languages that have contributed but a few words to English we have taken only words for indigenous things. This is true, for example, of the borrowings even from a European language (and one of the Indo-European system) like Russian: *ikon, knout, pogrom, steppe, tsar,* and *vodka* can be said to be English only in a limited sense, for they would scarcely be used except with direct reference to things Russian. Perhaps, however, the future of the Russian experiment may determine whether other Russian loan-words in English will be more commonly used; certainly, more recent borrowings like *bolshevik, soviet,* and *intelligentsia* (the last of course not *ultimately* Russian) seem destined to a wider usefulness. The limited way in which English assimilates most of the minor sources upon which it levies is perhaps less doubtfully to be illustrated through its loans from Turkish: *bey, caftan, effendi, janissary, horde, kiosk, odalisque,* and *turquoise* remain, for the most part, exotic. Likewise limited in character are the loan-words from various African tongues: *chimpanzee, gnu, gorilla, kraal, oasis,* and *zebra* are representative. Even the languages of the American Indians, with which American English was so

[30] Bradley, p. 104.

long in direct contact, have contributed but a few words in everyday use, such as *potato* and *tobacco*—both altered from Spanish versions of the original native names. A very much longer list—of which *squaw*, *tepee*, *tomahawk*, and *wigwam* would be typical—could be compiled of borrowings confined to ideas or things peculiar to the Indians.

Enough has perhaps been said of the major and minor sources of borrowing that have been utilized by the English language in general. Clearly the general rule is that almost every vernacular, anywhere on the globe, with which the speakers of English have had any important contact at all, has been levied upon for at least a few words. Since American English has had its own contacts with other tongues, it is natural that it should have absorbed certain foreign words that it does not share with British English. The most distinctive of these contacts is of course that referred to above, its relation to the dialects of the Indian. *Canoe*, *chipmunk*, *hominy*, *mackinaw*, *moccasin*, *moose*, *opossum*, *paw-paw*, *persimmon*, *sagamore*, and *succotash* are typical loanwords from this source that have scarcely become part of the general English vocabulary. The two European languages that have contributed most to the distinctively American vocabulary are undoubtedly Spanish and French. Spanish borrowings are of course to be found most abundantly in the sectional speech of the Southwest;[31] some that are in comparatively general use in the United States are *adobe*, *broncho*, *cafeteria*, *cinch*, *corral*, *mustang*, *ranch*, *rodeo*, and *vamoose*. Loans from French are due chiefly to contacts with that lan-

[31] *Cf.* Mary Austin, "Geographical Terms from the Spanish," *American Speech*, Vol. VIII, No. 3 (October, 1933), pp. 7–10.

guage in two widely separated regions: Louisiana and the Canadian border. They include such words as *bayou, cache, chute, crevasse, lagniappe,*[32] *levee, portage,* and *prairie.*

On the whole, however, it is safe to say that peculiarly American borrowings from foreign languages are far fewer than might be expected. In general, American English has been surprisingly little affected by the speech of immigrants. A sense of social superiority seems to have kept the speakers of American English from borrowing, except very occasionally, from the many languages introduced into the United States in this way. Though the position of natives and newcomers is just reversed, it is evidently the same reason that kept the Anglo-Saxons from levying upon the language of the Celts. The children of immigrants too are likely to scorn as inferior the speech of their parents, and to achieve precisely the same brand of English as that of their contemporaries of old American stock. Jespersen[33] demonstrates how this has been the rule with the Scandinavian languages brought into the United States by immigrants. It may be pointed out, of course, that European languages have occasionally continued to exist for generations, always in a form made corrupt by association with English, in sectionally limited parts of America; "Pennsylvania Dutch" and Canadian French are the most conspicuous examples. Such cases are, however, different in that in these dialects the base is the foreign language and the admixture is American English.

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[32] For an appreciation of the usefulness of this word, see Mark Twain *Life on the Mississippi,* Chap. XLIV.

[33] *Growth and Structure,* pp. 77 *ff.*

Where English has been attempted by foreigners, the original speech of the immigrant is all but completely discarded in remarkably short order.

Not only has the speech of comparatively recent immigrants left almost no impression on the general body of American English; the marks of the languages spoken by non-English settlers of Colonial America have also been almost completely eradicated, except as they have been incorporated in the English language in general. Thus a few loan-words from the Dutch of New Netherlands—for example, *boss, snoop,* and *spook*—have won currency not only in American but in British English. But a far greater number of borrowings from this source have either disappeared altogether or, in a few instances, remained in an extremely restricted sectional use; in either case, they are not part of the general American vocabulary. It has been the author's observation, for example, that a few such words, still current in New York City, the Hudson Valley, or northern New Jersey, are quite unfamiliar in Philadelphia; in this category are *dominie* ("minister," dying out with an older generation), *kill* (the topographical term), *paas* ("Easter," perhaps only in the phrase *Paas dyes* or *Paas eggs*), *scup* (child's swing), and *stoop* ("porch," known but not used elsewhere).

On the other hand, as has already been suggested, it is not difficult to cite a number of words of German origin that are part of the general American vocabulary—words, that is to say, that are neither international nor sectional. German borrowings, especially terms relating to food, have been mentioned as far more common in the United States than in England. To those already given, others like *frankfurter, hamburger, pretzel, wiener-*

wurst, and *zwieback* [34] may be added. German ancestry is also attributed to such American slang or colloquialisms as *bower* (>Ger. *Bauer*, for the "jack" in cards, for which *knave* is preferred in England), *dumb* (stupid), *bum*, *loafer*, and *shyster*.[35] It is probable, likewise, that a case can be made for the position that the Irish element in the American population accounts for certain turns of expression,[36] as well as habits of pronunciation,[37] that American English does not share with the English of Southern England.[38] Here, however, there is a great deal less certainty than in the matter of German influence.

It might be expected, *a priori*, that American English would be powerfully affected by the speech of races far less akin than the Irish or the Germans to the Anglo-Saxon stock but also represented in great numbers in the American population. Has the speech of the Negroes, the Chinese, or the Jews contributed much to the American vocabulary? The answer clearly is in the negative. Krapp points out [39] that only five or six words of non-English origin (especially, *banjo*, *hoodoo*, *pickaninny*, *voodoo*, and—very dubiously—*jazz*) can be attributed to Negro influence, and that the list of English words that are especially associated with Negro life in America (like *cake-walk*, *coon*, *darkey*, and *mammy*) is not very much longer. Chinese immigration has made almost a

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[34] Of these, only *pretzel* (labeled "U. S.") appears in the *Shorter Oxford* (2nd ed., 1936).

[35] Mencken, *The American Language* (4th ed.), pp. 155–160, cites these and others.

[36] *Cf.* Mencken, pp. 160–162.

[37] On this side of the matter, *cf.* Krapp, *English Language in America*, Vol. II, pp. 96–97 and *passim*.

[38] *Cf.* also McKnight, *English Words and their Background*, pp. 26 and 27, and his reference to Joyce, P. W., *English as We Speak It in Ireland*.

[39] *Op.* cit., Vol. I, pp. 161–163.

negligible impression on American speech; of words from this channel, perhaps only *chop-suey* (which is questionable),[40] *fan-tan*, *joss*, *kowtow*, *tong*, and the slang *yen* (strong desire) are at all generally familiar. Clearly, the social barrier has operated most strongly in both instances to keep linguistic influence at the minimum. One cannot put the case of the third group, the Jews, on quite the same level; but it is still true that the influence of Hebrew or of Yiddish upon American English seems unexpectedly small. Yiddish of course is simply a dialect of German, and it is quite possible that some Americanisms attributed to the direct influence of German should really be ascribed to that of Yiddish; *poker* (the game), for example, has been explained in both these ways, as well as in several others.[41] Among the unquestioned loan-words from the speech of Jews in the United States are *kibitzer*, *kosher*, and *mazuma*. It is altogether likely, however, that Jewish influence on American speech is considerably greater than the number of loans definitely traced to it would indicate; it would be strange indeed if the Jewish population of New York City had made no considerable impression upon the English spoken there. Like the Irish immigrants of an earlier epoch, the German, Polish, and Russian Jews who have come over more recently have probably influenced American idiom and word-formation to a greater extent than is usually realized. Mr. Mencken, at any rate, has no doubt of it; he closes his chapter "Tendencies in

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[40] One or two of the others are likewise dubious: *kowtow* is not peculiar to American English, while *joss* is explained by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as probably from Portuguese *deos* (god), and as Pidgin English rather than Chinese.

[41] Mencken, 3rd ed., pp. 112–113, details six theories of its etymology.

American" with the assertion[42]: "Many characteristic Americanisms of the sort to stagger lexicographers—for example, *near-silk*—have come from the Jews, whose progress in business is a good deal faster than their progress in English."

To return to the subject of word-borrowing in the English language as a whole. One rather special aspect of the matter has as yet been merely glanced at—the treatment of foreign proper names. Places in which English-speaking settlers have replaced earlier ones that spoke another language have frequently been allowed to retain the earlier names (or some development of them). Thus, as we have seen, there are very many more Celtic place names in Great Britain and Indian place names in the United States than there are common nouns of Celtic or Indian ancestry in the language concerned as a whole. Another angle of the question is the treatment of place names for parts of the world that are not English-speaking. The earlier practice was either to translate them completely, as was possible in such names as *Black Forest* for *Schwarzwald*,[43] *Netherlands* for *Nederlanden*, or to make them as English as possible by recasting their pronunciation and spelling along more familiar lines. Thus, in calling the Italian cities *Firenze*, *Venezia*, and *Napoli* by the names *Florence*, *Venice*, and *Naples* (all suggested by the general European use of French revisions of the native names), the English proceeded in a way not altogether unlike that in which the Germans proceeded when they called the same cities *Florenz*,

[42] P. 212, 3rd ed.

[43] As might be expected, German has indulged in this practice much more extensively than English ever has; e.g., the German turning of *Salt Lake City* into *Salzsecstadt*, or *Tierra del Fuego* into *Feuerland*.

Venedig, and *Neapel*. But although other languages are likely to persist in the practice of naturalizing foreign place names, the present trend of English is to abandon it. The treatment of French geographical terms will serve to illustrate. Only the most frequently used of such words have well-established Anglicizations; the usual pronunciation of *Paris*, in an English setting, is the most familiar instance. For most French place names no such equivalents exist. The English or American speaker really does not *borrow* them at all; rather he makes a valiant, though usually inadequate, attempt to keep the word French. Foreign place names, that is to say, are usually no longer conceived to be susceptible of borrowing at all.

It may be useful to sum up certain impressions of the borrowed element in our vocabulary, especially in contrast to the native element. Such an enumeration of the foreign sources of the English word-stock as the present chapter contains may very easily be misinterpreted. So much has been borrowed that perhaps the impression may be created that almost nothing is left. If it is true that the foreign words in our dictionaries very greatly outnumber the native ones, is it still reasonable to hold that the small Anglo-Saxon core is of considerable importance? To be in a position to deal with this question, a preliminary inquiry into the actual proportions of foreign and native elements must be made.

It should be pointed out, in the first place, that to base a count upon words as they appear in the pages of the dictionary is not the only (and not the most useful) method of computing these proportions. Such a calculation would doubtless reduce the native element to almost negligible dimensions; but it is equally probable that the result would have very little significance, for many of the

words in the dictionary are rarely used. A more realistic test is to limit the count to a part of the dictionary that is in active use. A count of this kind, based on 20,000 words in common, present use,[44] makes the Anglo-Saxon element less than one-fifth, and the Graeco-Latin (including the French) element more than three-fifths. The larger the number of words selected, the greater would be the preponderance of borrowed words, especially those from Latin and Greek. Individual vocabularies obviously vary, in a somewhat similar fashion, with the interests and the education of the person in question.

Another method of calculating the proportion of native and borrowed elements has often been referred to.[45] This is the plan of counting, not different words only (in the dictionary, as a whole or in part, or in a literary work), but rather counting every word every time it is used (in a piece of writing or in a bit of conversation). If this is done, the proportions are almost reversed. The reason is plain: almost all prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, and auxiliary verbs—exactly the words most often repeated—are of native origin, as are also the greater number of familiar nouns, adjectives, and verbs. In general, one-fourth of the task of expression in English is accomplished, so it is said,[46] by just nine words—*and*,

[44] Reported by R. G. Kent in *Language and Philology*, pp. 5 and 6.

[45] *Cf.* Krapp, *Modern English*, pp. 267 *ff.*, and Emerson, *History of the English Language*, pp. 125 *ff.*

[46] *Cf.* McKnight, *English Words and their Background*, p. 158. A study by Godfrey Dewey, "Relative Frequency of English Speech Sounds," *Harvard Studies in Education*, Vol. IV (1923), gives the first nine words used in written matter as *the*, *of*, *and*, *to*, *a*, *in*, *that*, *it*, and *is*. Another calculation, based on spoken English—French, Carter, and Koenig's *Words and Sounds of Telephone Conversations* (Bell Telephone System Technical Publications, June, 1930)—gives them as *I*, *you*, *the*, *a*, *on*, *to*, *that*, *it*, and *is*. In all three lists, *all* of the words are of native origin.

be, *have*, *it*, *of*, *the*, *to*, *will*, and *you*—and one-half of the task by these and thirty-four others, likewise exclusively of native origin. No wonder, then, if counting every word every time it occurs in a passage of literature reveals that the writer of the most highly Latinized style still employs many more native than borrowed words. The exact proportion will of course vary both with the individual writer and with the subject on which he writes. Professor Kent[47] shows that while poets of the last hundred years have employed only from 10 to 20 per cent of classical words, the percentage in recent technical writing sometimes runs as high as 40. Shakespeare[48] is given credit for using 90 per cent of native words and only 10 per cent of foreign ones, while in the King James Bible (on the basis of three gospels) the proportion is 94 and 6. In contrast with these proportions are those for writers of a notoriously Latinized vocabulary: Samuel Johnson's figures are 72 and 28, and Gibbon's 70 and 30. Midway between the extremes stand such writers as Milton with 81 and 19, Pope with 80 and 20, Addison with 82 and 18, and Tennyson (who prided himself on his "Saxon" English) with 88 and 12.

The English vocabulary, then, as it has been used by different writers and for different purposes, exhibits considerable diversity in the elements of which it is composed. The difference between the six per cent of borrowed words in the King James Bible and the thirty per cent in Gibbon is really very great—enough, certainly, to give the two styles quite divergent colorings and tendencies. This is the more evident when one

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[47] Pp. 55–57.

[48] *Cf.* Emerson, *op. cit.*, and Krapp.

considers that the native words include almost all the necessary machinery of the sentence, the words that are vital to grammatical structure but relatively colorless in meaning. The borrowed words, on the other hand, are almost always essential to meaning. It can easily be demonstrated[49] that while to remove the borrowed words from a random passage of English prose or verse may leave the sentence structure intact, it will almost inevitably rob the passage of many of the words that carry the essential meaning. By the exercise of a little ingenuity, it would doubtless be possible to construct sentences of Anglo-Saxon words only (as it would not be possible to construct them of borrowed words); but surely one could not go far in the realm of ideas with such sentences.

This consideration brings us to the disputed question of profit and loss in word-borrowing, and to that of "pure" English as an ideal to be striven for. To the present writer it seems clear that, as in the parallel case of inflectional leveling, it is a matter of balancing greater gains against smaller losses; that if we believe that the language, through its policy of the open door, has on the whole won more than it has lost, we may also believe that this advantage has been gained at a certain cost. A word, then, as to what has been lost.

Perhaps the most obvious disadvantage of the twofold word-stock is that a great many pairs of words that are alike in meaning are totally unlike in appearance and sound. This is particularly the case with nouns and their corresponding (in meaning) adjectives. *Eye—ocular; house—domestic; land—agrarian; moon—lunar;*

[49] *Cf.* Professor Kent's specimens of "Latinless English," pp. 156–158.

mouth—oral; son—filial; sun—solar; and *sea—marine* are a few of the many pairs of this kind that might be mentioned. Virtually the same state of affairs exists with other pairs in which the noun is a familiar, homely word, though not a native one, and the adjective is decidedly more learned: *city—urban; country—rural; letter—epistolary;* and *sound—phonetic* are typical. There is something undeniably awkward in this situation.

It can scarcely be doubted, moreover, that the practice of borrowing has weakened the resources of the native vocabulary in certain definite ways. As will be pointed out again, the earlier capacity of the language for forming compounds has been seriously curtailed. Not infrequently, too, a borrowed compound has driven out a native one, as when the French borrowing *despair* replaced Old English *wanhope*, with the result that *hope* was left without a formal equivalent for the contrasting idea. Even here, however, it may be argued that there is still the possibility of effective literary contrast in words that are opposite in meaning and unlike, rather than similar, in form; Lamb's phrase "in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever . . . " (in "Dream Children") illustrates this.

What has just been said is perhaps indicative of how even what seems disadvantageous about the composite vocabulary of English may still be turned to good effect. On the whole, there seems to be no good reason to combat the common belief that English has profited, far more than it has suffered, from the practice of extensive word-borrowing. Its great wealth of synonyms is usually, and surely with justice, reckoned as one of the noteworthy assets of Modern English. Finely discriminated shades of meaning are made possible by the existence of hundreds

of pairs of words that are almost, but not quite, exact synonyms. One need consider only paired adjectives like the following (of which, in each pair, the first is native and the second borrowed) to be impressed by the point: *hearty, cordial; deadly, mortal; bloody, sanguinary; motherly, maternal; lively, vivacious; watery, aqueous.* Often, there are more than two words among which to choose the one that is exactly right in connotation as well as in denotation. Groups of words like *manly, male, masculine, virile; womanly, feminine, female; kingly, royal, regal;* and *earthly, earthy, earthen, terrestrial* will illustrate this situation. It is not contended that the necessity of a choice like this makes English an easy language to handle well; what is contended is that the possibilities of precise and complete expression in English are very great indeed.

A point closely allied to one made above may be developed further. One implication of pairs of adjectives like *deadly, mortal; bloody, sanguinary;* and *fatherly, paternal* is that there exist in the English vocabulary two planes—one made up of everyday, familiar words, and the other of rarer, more learned ones. This is not, of course, the same distinction as that between native and borrowed, though it tends to run parallel with that distinction; by and large, that is to say, the native words are the familiar words, and the borrowed words the learned. On the whole, too, it is clear that the native words are the shorter and the borrowed words the longer. As we have already remarked, the native vocabulary is largely monosyllabic, and the borrowed vocabulary more commonly (though not inevitably) polysyllabic. Since the several divergencies that have been enumerated tend largely to overlap, the general situation may be summed

up as follows: There are two general *types* or *styles* of English expression, one colored by short, familiar, native words and the other by longer, learned, borrowed ones. The first style is characterized by directness, brevity, and plainness, the second by eloquence, grandeur, and sonority. There is every reason to be grateful that the English language is not an instrument of one string; that, on the contrary, two styles exist—for somewhat different purposes and certainly achieving very different effects—and together offer infinite possibilities of effective contrast. Perhaps it will not take us too far afield to illustrate the more extreme use of each of these styles under skilful hands.

Ornate, Latinized, polysyllabic diction is represented at its best in the prose of Sir Thomas Browne. Here is a typical paragraph from the famous concluding chapter of *Urn-burial*, which Saintsbury has called "the longest piece, perhaps, of absolutely sublime rhetoric to be found in the prose literature of the world"[50]:

> Pyramids, arches, obelisks, were but the irregularities of vainglory, and wild enormities of ancient magnanimity. But the most magnanimous resolution rests in the Christian religion, which trampleth upon pride, and sits on the neck of ambition, humbly pursuing that infallible perpetuity, unto which all others must diminish their diameters, and be poorly seen in angles of contingency.

Let us set alongside this another passage of seventeenth-century prose, one distinctly in the other tradition of style. John Bunyan had, of course, no theory of prose style; his diction is monosyllabic and Anglo-Saxon because he knew the King James Bible so fully and

[50] *Cambridge History of English Literature*, Vol. VII, p. 275.

because he strove to present his ideas most simply and directly. Here are the opening sentences of *Pilgrim's Progress:*

> As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den, and I laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back.

Analysis of only a single aspect of the two styles represented here—the length of the words employed—reveals one explanation of the totally different impressions they create. The fifty-seven words of the passage from Browne include twenty-six polysyllables, divided into ten words of two syllables, seven of three, six of four, two of five, and one word of six. On the other hand, the seventy-two words of the passage from Bunyan include only eight that are not monosyllables; and of these, seven are words of two syllables and only one word contains as many as three syllables.

There is no need whatever to assert that the one type of diction is superior to the other. What is evident, rather, is that the two styles are equally superb in their utterly divergent ways. As Lytton Strachey observes of a somewhat similar comparison he offers[51] of the Latinized diction of Sir Thomas Browne as opposed to "Saxon" English: "It would be foolish to claim a superiority for either one of the two styles; it would be still more foolish to suppose that the effects of one might be produced by means of the other."

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[51] In his essay, "Sir Thomas Browne," *Books and Characters*, New York (Harcourt), 1922, p. 41.

Both the ornate and the simple styles have the defects of their qualities. The one may tend toward obscurity or an inflated emptiness of content; the other may be plain to the extent of a poverty-stricken and childlike bareness. What perhaps is most in need of being pointed out is that the more monosyllabic type of English diction has its own beauty and eloquence, and may be and has been used for the finest effects of poetry as well as prose.[52] Laments such as those of Jonathan Swift on the barren poverty and flatness that have come to the English language as a consequence of the shortening of words are easily refuted by an appeal to the great poets. To confine ourselves to a single illustration, let us observe the almost completely monosyllabic diction of a famous scene in Shakespeare, called by the finest of modern Shakespearean critics "perhaps the most tear-compelling passage in literature"[53]—the scene from *King Lear* in which Lear wakes from sleep to find Cordelia bending over him (Act IV, scene vii). Here are Lear's first words and Cordelia's replies:

Lear. You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave.
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.
Cordelia. Sir, do you know me?
Lear. You are a spirit, I know; when did you die?
Cordelia. Still, still, far wide! (ll. 45–50)

Three dissyllables in fifty-four words!—and much the same proportion holds in this later excerpt from the same dialog:

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[52] E.g., the line from Milton quoted on p. 159.

[53] Bradley, A. C., *Shakespearean Tragedy*, New York (Macmillan), 1930, p. 61.

Lear. . . . nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me;
For as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.
Cor. And so I am, I am.
Lear. Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray, weep not.
If you have poison for me, I will drink it.
I know you do not love me; for your sisters
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong:
You have some cause, they have not.
Cor. No cause, no cause.
(ll. 68–75)

Much the same observation might be made of two great speeches in the last scene: Lear's words (Act V, scene iii, ll. 8–19) beginning

No, no, no, no! Come let's away to prison;
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage . . .

and his dying utterance (ll. 306–312):

And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life!
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
And thou no breath at all? . . .
Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
Look there, look there

This last speech—according to Bradley, "the most pathetic speech ever written"[54]—is utterly different, in the monosyllabic simplicity of its diction, from the last words of Hamlet or of Othello (as the same critic points out); but it is surely at least equally moving.

The attempt has been made to demonstrate that both the longer, borrowed words and the shorter, native ones have their own kinds of usefulness and effectiveness. In a similar way one might show further that the lan-

[54] *Op. cit.*, p. 292.

guage is the gainer through the possession of both instruments, largely by reason of the possibilities of contrasting one with the other. The classical illustration of this contrast is the passage in *Macbeth* (Act II, scene 2, ll. 60–63):

> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clear from my hand? No; this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine
> Making the green one red.

in the last two lines of which the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon diction seem deliberately set off in opposition to each other. It is of course the same contrast, in less striking fashion, that is always to be found in the English language in actual practice.

Need any preference be given to the native word over the borrowed or the borrowed word over the native? As we have seen, the history of the English vocabulary discloses the fact that different eras, as well as different individuals, have answered this question variously. Roughly speaking, Old English clung to the native word, Middle English often preferred the borrowed one, while in the Renaissance the question was hotly debated, and "Latinist" and "Saxonist" ranged themselves into opposing camps. But on the whole, the more liberal attitude toward word-borrowing prevailed in the Renaissance and, after the conservative interlude of the eighteenth century, has prevailed in general through the Modern English period. Not that it is quite satisfactory to generalize to this extent. If the eighteenth century on the whole leans to a simpler and more native diction, it is to be remembered that its prose literature contains, in addition to the more Anglo-Saxon style of a

Swift, an Addison, or a Goldsmith, the more elaborate manner of a Johnson, a Gibbon, and a Burke.

The Renaissance debate between Latinist and Saxonist has its occasional echoes in our own day. The advice is frequently given to the student of English composition that "other things being equal, the native word is the better word." This is probably sound enough, if one could be sure when other things are equal. Better advice, quite certainly, is that of William Hazlitt, who maintained[55] that in the choice of words, the principle should be "the best word in common use." Words should be chosen, that is to say, not on the score of etymology but on that of familiarity and the accuracy with which they convey meaning. It will often happen that the accurate and the familiar word is also the native word. So much the better; but the basis of the choice is still not the etymology. *Begin* is a better word than *commence* not because it is the native word and the other the borrowed one, but because, in addition to having precisely the same meaning, it is the more homely and the more familiar. So much faith one may reasonably put in the theory of preferring native to borrowed words. Fortunately it is true, as we have indicated, that the native word, the shorter word, and the familiar word are often one and the same. But this is obviously a very different matter from the policy of seeking out the "Saxon" word as such and substituting it for the borrowed word that is now in more common use. That way lie folly and a pedantry quite as bad as that of the writer of the most inflated academic style. The language is and has long been so thoroughly committed to a com-

[55] In "On Familiar Style."

posite word-stock that it can never be restored to the standard of "purity." To substitute *folkwain* for *omnibus* or *steadholder* for *lieutenant* is eccentricity that borders on lunacy.[56]

One word more as to the implications of the composite vocabulary to which Modern English is permanently committed. While it is true that the native and the borrowed word-stocks have to some extent their separate excellences, and even more certain that their combined resources may be skilfully exploited, it must be admitted also that there is something unattractive in the picture of a vocabulary often sharply divided into two parts. The extent of the gulf may easily be exaggerated. For one thing, not all borrowed words are on the same basis. Indeed, in speaking of "native words" it is often customary, and certainly justifiable enough, to include with them Teutonic words of long standing even though not Anglo-Saxon—especially Danish and Dutch words. Furthermore, many French borrowings like *aunt*, *beef*, and *car* are quite obviously not to be compared with Greek or Latin loan-words like *euhemerism*, *ratiocination*, or *hyperesthesia*. Nevertheless, it still remains true that there are in general two groups of English words that have little in common, and that they are made up of the native words on the one hand and the borrowed ones on the other. As a result, there is something "undemocratic," as Jespersen has well maintained,[57] in a large portion of the vocabulary, especially the literary vocabulary, of English. Both Jespersen and Bradley have

[56] For a statement of the issues that are involved in "Saxonism," see the article of that title (pp. 514 and 515) in Fowler's *Modern English Usage*.

[57] *Growth and Structure*, p. 146. And *cf.* Bradley's *Spoken and Written English*, p. 26.

pointed out that some of these are merely eye-words, existing solely on the printed page and without fixed pronunciation. There are many that have a well-established pronunciation but that after all are intelligible only to those with some knowledge of Greek and Latin. Such words can never compete on an equal basis with words that are firmly rooted in an English soil and that strike an immediate response in the hearts as well as the minds of English-speaking peoples. Probably in no other language is it so necessary as it is in English to take definite precautions against using "big" words—words that require some sort of translation in order to be completely understood. It can scarcely be thought of as a source of strength that the danger of "overwriting" and pretentiousness is an ever-present one to him who deals in English words. This is not to deny the variety and the richness that the enormous composite vocabulary of English presumes; it is merely to affirm that even in words, there is such a thing as the embarrassment of riches. There are superfluities and ugly excrescences in our dictionaries that could well be pruned away. Be it repeated, however, that the disadvantages of the situation are of less moment than the advantages. If in English the danger of failing to strike the right note is particularly great, it may still be argued that to the real master of the instrument, the more complicated mechanism offers an opportunity for both rich and clear expression that is quite unequalled elsewhere.

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CHAPTER X

The Making of Words

BORROWING from without is, as has been said, one of the two general methods of building the vocabulary. The other method is creation of new words by utilizing material that already exists in the language, whether its ultimate source is native or foreign. In the present chapter, we shall be concerned with the various types of word-formation or word-creation. Creation in the strictest sense of the term, be it said at once, is exceedingly rare; it is difficult indeed to find examples of words that are called into being from the void. This is not, of course, equivalent to asserting that there are only a few words of unknown etymology. Actually there are many; but for the great majority of such words, what is meant by this description is merely that the clue to their history has been lost. In all probability these words "of unknown etymology" have either been borrowed from foreign sources, or developed, by one of the recognized processes of word-formation, from native or even from foreign material. Pure root-creation is, for the most part, to be associated with the primitive stages of language, of which no record has been preserved. The stock example of a word "created" out of whole cloth in comparatively modern times is *gas*, a word devised by the Dutch chemist Van Helmont in the seventeenth century and adopted for international use. But it is known that the word was suggested to its creator by the Greek χάος

(chaos), so that it can scarcely be said to be absolutely without etymology.

According to Mark Twain, Eve gave the name *do-do* to the bird in question for the excellent reason that, to her, it "*looked* like a *do-do*." Better authenticated examples of such virtuosity in root-creation are unfortunately all but non-existent. When the need for a new word arises, it almost never occurs to the person who requires a label for a new thing or a new idea that sounds already existing in the language might be arbitrarily arranged into a new pattern. Yet it is evident that there are hundreds and indeed thousands (even if we limit our speculation to monosyllables made up of no more than three component sounds) of words that might be created,[1] in the true sense of the term, to fill new needs. Except for the somewhat dubious case of *gas*, the only English word commonly cited as a pure root-creation is *kodak*, a trade name that has won complete dictionary recognition.

There are, of course, many other trade names, with or without dictionary recognition, that have established themselves in wide present-day use. Usually, however, the method of coinage is not the arbitrary selection of sounds, but the combination of the syllables or initial letters of easily identifiable phrases. Such are *Uneeda* ("You need a"), *Odorono*, *Asco* ("American Stores Co."), *Nabisco* ("National Biscuit Co."), *Socony* ("Standard Oil

[1] The number of *possible* monosyllables in English was actually calculated by Herbert Spencer; his figure was 108,264. Jespersen, who refers to this, *Monosyllabism in English*, New York (Oxford), 1929, pp. 8 and 9, finds the total too small, and estimates, as his own calculation, "rather more than 158,000 monosyllables"; " . . . only a small part . . . occur as actual words in the language" (p. 13).

Co. of New York"), and so forth. Sometimes, the method is simply to reverse the letters of a word related in meaning, as has been done in *Klim* (from *milk*), the name for a brand of lactic powder; in *Peredixo*, the name of a facial cream, the first syllable of *peroxide* is kept and the letters of the others reversed. Again, a less radical change in an existing word or phrase may be brought about by respelling it, either more simply (if not more phonetically) or more fantastically. What difficulties in spelling may ensue for a younger generation constantly confronted with advertisements bearing these distortions it is not pleasant to contemplate! Examples of this kind of novelty are *Hom-aid* (with a pun to complicate matters further) for bread; *Shurtred* and *Phiteesi* for shoes, and the like. Ingenuity of this kind has "made its masterpiece" in the punning labels of Ford cars—*Tudor* (two door) and *Fordor* (four door).[2]

So far we have been dealing chiefly with recent, and usually conscious and sophisticated, types of word-creation. There is another general species of root-creation that extends so far back into the earlier stages of language that it was formerly taken[3] to be the only kind of primitive speech and hence to explain the very origin of language. This group of words is made up of the "onomatopoetic" terms—words, that is to say, that "make their own names." If it were literally true that certain natural, human, or animal noises *make* the names by which they are known in language, one would be justified in calling this type of formation, in a very strict

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[2] Louise Pound, in "Word Coinage and Modern Trade Names," *Dialect Notes*, January, 1914, gives many additional illustrations.

[3] *Cf.* p. 8.

sense, pure creation. In point of fact, however, no word of any language ever *exactly* reproduced the sound which it described. Hence, it seems more accurate, as well as less cumbersome, to label this method of word-making "echoism" (Sir James Murray's term) rather than "onomatopoeia," and to admit that there is an element of conventional symbolism in the echoic words as a group. Yet there is evidently a very real degree of root-creation in these words. Certainly, for *whiz, hiss, fizz, sizzle, twitter*, and *titter*, we need look up no "etymology" in the usual sense of the term; the combination of a sibilant or an explosive consonant with the short front [ɪ] is admirably adapted to convey the noise the word embodies, and the word has obviously come into being in order to *echo* an already existing sound. Not that all echoic words are so nearly accurate. Heavier noises seem less adequately conveyed by such terms as *bang, crash*, and *whack;* but the difference is one of degree rather than kind, [æ] having evidently been taken to stand for a somewhat more solid and resounding noise than [ɪ]. In a similar way, *cuckoo* may pass for a satisfactory rendering of the cry made by the bird, and hence for the name of the bird itself; but *bob-white* employs a more far-fetched echoism. Likewise, *miaow* serves more felicitously for the cat than *bow-wow* for the dog.

A great deal more might be said on the use of imitation —echoic or symbolic—in the creation of words. If it has not been proved, and it seems altogether unlikely to be proved, that imitation made the first beginnings of human speech, it is evident that it still runs through all human language. Words like *mama, papa*, and *baby* are found in almost all tongues, and the usual explanations of a cognate relationship or of borrowing will

scarcely apply.[4] What is almost certain is that the labials *m* (the sucking sound), *p*, and *b* are almost the first sounds any child acquires, and that their repetition, with the vowel [ɑ:] interspersed, gives the words in question. Imitation, then, on the part of the parents perpetuates their use and conventionalizes their meanings—meanings that are thereupon gradually acquired by the child, also through imitation. There is an obvious use of imitation in such echoic words as have been cited in the preceding paragraph, whether the particular interpretation of the sound that forms the word is peculiar to English (as in *fizz*, *hiss*, and *titter*) or whether it is a borrowing from another language. In point of fact, the imitations that different languages provide for the noises made by animals do vary widely; compare English *tweet-tweet* for the bird's chirp with Russian *tsif-tsif*, or, for the rooster's crowing, English *cock-a-doodledoo*, German *kikeriki*, French *coquerico*.

When we proceed from echoic imitation to more remote symbolism we are perhaps on more dubious ground. Yet, it seems quite certain that sound symbolism is a factor very much more frequently present in the creation of words than is commonly appreciated.[5] It is not of course confined to our own language, though it is convenient to take our illustrations chiefly from Middle and Modern English, which have been particularly rich

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[4] Jespersen, for example, denies that *papa* and *mama* in English, German, Danish, Italian, and so on are *borrowed* from the same words in French, though it is conceivable that a French fashion may have dictated their continued use beyond the age of the nursery (*Language*, p. 159).

[5] One of the few adequate treatments of it is Chapter XX of Jespersen's *Language* (pp. 396–411); for briefer accounts, see Bradley, *Making of English*, pp. 156–159, and L. P. Smith, *English Language*, pp. 101–104. I have taken some of my illustrations from all three sources.

in it. A few of the clearer cases of a generally accepted symbolism in sounds are appended. The thin vowel [ɪ] is used again and again to stand for small size or slightness: *little, kid, slim, chit, imp, slip, pigmy.* Sometimes, it is raised and prolonged to [i:]—a further degree of smallness. Thus, *teeny* is a child's word for *tiny* (*teeny-weeny* means something still more minute), and *leetle* is, in provincial speech, a more intense kind of *little; child* (O. E. *cild*, with the [i:] vowel), *wee*, and the very common diminutive endings spelled *-y* and *-ie* and pronounced [i:] are further illustrations. Consonants have their symbolic associations as well as vowels. The use of the breath with some force is suggested by *bl*[6]*—blow, blast, blub, blab, bubble, bluster;* an awkward kind of movement by *fl—fling, flounce, flounder, flop, flump, flurry;* and the abrupt cessation of sound or movement by the final voiceless stops *p, t,* and *k—pop, clip, snip, rap, pat, crack.* Smith[7] points out the neat differentiation between the type of noise or action just mentioned and that symbolized by a final *sh*, in which the sound or movement "does not end abruptly, but is broken down into a mingled mass of smashing or rustling sounds, as in *dash, splash, smash,* etc."

Before leaving the subject, it may be well to voice the warning that symbolism should not be looked for everywhere. To do that would be to repeat the erroneous conception of the Greeks as to the *etymology* or the "true meaning" of the word, the doctrine that there is a

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[6] Perhaps the violent expulsion of breath stands symbolically for the idea of a disgusted rejection in another group of *bl* words: *blasted, blamed, bloody, blessed* (ironically used), *blowed, blighted, blooming, blistering, blithering,* and so forth.

[7] *Op. cit.*, p. 103.

natural correspondence between sound and sense. It is easy to be deceived here. The words that we are familiar with are apt to strike us as having an inherent appropriateness, in their very sounds, to the ideas for which they stand. So too the words that evidently *are* in some degree echoic or symbolic are likely to seem the inevitable and perfect combination of sounds for the designated purpose. What seems to the native speaker an obvious bit of appropriate symbolism may, however, leave the foreigner cold; he is likely to prefer the rendering of his own language as more accurately descriptive—as, in fact, in every way a "better" word. The German will prefer *flüstern* to the English *whisper*, while to the Frenchman both will seem inferior to *chuchoter*. Such considerations should lead one to go cautiously both in finding symbolism and in deeming even unquestioned examples of it to be the perfect fitting of sound to sense.

In the illustrations that have been cited, it will be observed how echoism, in the stricter sense, shades into a more conventional symbolism. Echoism and symbolism (together with the rare case of arbitrary re-combination of sounds) between them evidently account for a surprisingly large number of words. Words, however, are still more commonly added to the vocabulary not by any sort of new creation but by a new use that is made of words or word-elements already existing in the language. The general line of demarcation, that is to say, for the two great types of word-making is that between root-creation on the one hand and what has been called "adaptation," or differentiation, on the other.

A type of adaptation no longer active in English, but in former times responsible for the similarity in form and sound of a number of groups of words related in meaning

is that known as gradation. In Old English, the so-called ablaut series of the strong verbs are instances of this kind of variation in form with corresponding variation in meaning. Verbs of the modern language like *ring, rang, rung* and *drive, drove, driven* perpetuate these gradations, though the number of variants in each series has been reduced from four to three through the loss of one of the two distinctive preterit forms, and often to two, through the falling together of preterit and past participle. But gradation is not confined to the variations of verbs. The principle is rather this: A consonantal framework, like *r-d, s-ng,* or *b-r,* stood for a certain generalized root-idea, and was given specific application by the variation in form of the medial vowel. Thus, one gradation-group included the noun *song,* as well as the verbal forms *sing, sang, sung;* another included not only *ride, rode, ridden,* but also *road* and *raid* (for the *road* was the place of riding, and the *raid* an all too frequent objective—in Old English, "to ride a raid" was an idiom parallel to "to sing a song"). The third, represented by the framework *b-r,* is one of the oldest Indo-European roots; in English, it appears not only in *bear, bore, born* and *borne,* but also in the nouns *bairn, birth, bier, barrow,* and *burden.* However, fruitful as this means of building new words was in older stages of the language, it is evident that gradation has long since ceased to be an active principle in word-formation.

Much more common in word-making than gradation, and abundantly active in every stage of the language, is the phenomenon known as "composition." A compound of course is formed by the act of joining two or more words into a single one, with the result of creating

a new unit of expression. The simplest type is that known as the "full-word compound," in which separate and independent elements are still distinguishable. Almost any conceivable combination of the parts of speech may thus be used to form a new word.[8] To give a few examples, we have the joining of noun and noun, as in *housetop*, *weekend*, and *railroad;* noun and adjective, as in *land-poor*, *coal-black*, and *airtight;* adjective and noun, as in *blackberry*, *hothouse*, and *sweetmeat*; adverb and noun, as in *upshot*, *overhead*, and *downfall;* adverb and verb, as in *overthrow*, *upturn*, and *inset;* and so forth. The part of speech formed may be different from that of either of the component elements: the adjective *shipshape* is made up of noun and noun (or verb), the noun *upset* of adverb and verb, the noun *lean-to* of verb and adverb. Finally, it is not at all uncommon to find three words forming a compound, as in *nevertheless*, *notwithstanding*, *hand-to-mouth*, and *brother-in-law*.

One may observe, incidentally, in the compounds cited in the foregoing paragraph, how exceedingly inconsistent is the use that modern practice makes of the hyphen, which occasionally, but by no means always, proclaims the word as a compound. Indeed, there is frequently no real difference between the status of two words printed separately and that of two words printed as one; as Krapp points out,[9] the "out of" and "into" of the phrase "out of the frying-pan into the fire" might more logically be treated in the same way. Similarly,

[8] For fuller illustration, see Bradley, pp. 113–115; or Krapp, *Modern English*, pp. 187–189. Bradley's entire treatment of the theory of composition, pp. 111–128, is particularly valuable.

[9] P. 189.

different usage with regard to "none the less" and "nevertheless" is merely capricious. The hyphen may be retained in *lean-to* for the good reason that to do so avoids a difficulty in interpretation; but who can justify the practice of keeping the hyphen (as most dictionaries do) where the *to* comes first, as in the immediately intelligible and everyday compounds *today* and *tomorrow*? The only worse thing is to discriminate between "*to-day*" and "*tomorrow*."

Frequent as compounds are in Modern English, it is nevertheless the fact that the language has lost much of the ability it once possessed of forming compounds with absolute freedom. It is evident that in this respect as in so many others, German is nearer than Modern English to the state of affairs in Old English. Our native compounds have often been replaced with Latin or French borrowings that are not compounds, as when *treasure* replaced *gold-hoard* and when *medicine* superseded *leechcraft*. The very fact that Latin and French lack the compound-making ability of Greek and German helps to account for the decline of the compound in English, for the first two languages have been levied upon much more extensively for the English vocabulary than have the latter two. Something may be said of the types of compounds, from the point of view of the parts of speech making them up, that are obsolete or obsolescent in Modern English. We no longer make free use of the combination of adverb and verb (or, sometimes, a participle or gerund)—the type involved in *output*, *income*, *uprising*, and *downtrodden*. New formations on the model of *downsitting* and *forthcoming* would probably strike us as excessively Teutonic, though their equivalents would have been quite acceptable in

Old English. Bradley notes[10] that the Scotch dialect has used this type of formation more actively than standard English, and recent examples of it have come in through this source; such are *uptake*, *upkeep* (more favored in American than British use), and *outcome* (introduced into literary use by Carlyle and long objected to). The reverse of this formation, however—that is, the combining of verb and adverb to make a noun—is not uncommon in recent English, though it is more frequent in colloquial than in formal speech, as in *dug-out*, *lay-off*, *step-in*, *tie-up*, and *walk-over*. The parallel case of noun of agency plus adverb, decidedly more rare, is also likely to be found only in less literary language (for example, *hanger-on*, *listener-in*, *runner-up*); Shakespeare's "snapper-up of unconsidered trifles" has probably suffered a loss of dignity. This mode of formation, unlike the preceding one, has enjoyed what vogue it has had, chiefly within the modern period.

There is no doubt that a compound obviously made up of two distinct elements is often felt to be clumsy and unwieldy. Not infrequently, a compound is taken apart and only one of its elements used, though the sense of the fuller word is retained; thus, "to get a person on the *'phone*" is certainly the more common way of putting the idea, and to "go by *rail*" more frequent though less elegant than "to go by *railroad*." The general fondness of English for clipped economy of expression operates here, as it does when *taxi* is substituted for *taxicab* (*cab* itself is a shortening of *cabriolet*, and *taxi* of *taximeter*) and *bus* for *omnibus*. English, incidentally, has no monopoly on this type of shortening, for *bus* is

[10] P. 124.

used in other languages as well; *automobile* is similarly clipped to *auto* in French and in German, and to *bil* in the Scandinavian languages.[11] Habits of pronunciation also contribute to lessen the number of words apprehended as compounds. To accent both syllables of a two-syllable word, as is done in *weekend* (compare *weakened*, which illustrates the more common procedure) and *bookcase*, is exceptional rather than normal. Even words that are felt to consist of two separate parts, like *hothouse* and *railroad*, are usually given only one heavy stress, in conformity with the general principles of English accentuation. In many instances, the heavy stress has resulted in the obscuring of the unaccented syllable. The consequence is that we have many obscured compounds that are not generally apprehended as compounds at all. It takes the etymologist to see a compound in *lord* [O. E. *hlāf* + *weard* (bread-keeper)], *barn* [O. E. *bere* + *ærn* (barley-place)], and *world* [*wer* + *eld* (age of man)]; and even less extreme cases, like *hussy* (from O. E. words for "house" and "wife"), *daisy* (for "day's eye"), and *don* (for "do on") afford words that seem to be single rather than double. Indeed, it is plausible to suppose that a still less radical change in the pronunciation of one or both parts of the compound takes away, for most users of it, the feeling that it is a compound: *holiday* no longer seems akin to *holy day*, or *bonfire* to *bone fire*, merely because the first vowel has slightly altered its quality.

Another general type of word-making, closely akin to composition, if indeed it is not to be considered a

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[11] Jespersen, *Mankind, Nation, and Individual from a Linguistic Point of View*, p. 160.

special aspect of that process, is that which builds a word not of two independent words but of a single full word and a word-element (prefix or suffix). It is conceivable that at least a few of the prefixes or suffixes have had an independent existence in earlier stages of the language than are known about, in which case there would really be no difference at all between the general process called composition and that special aspect of it which we are about to discuss, to which the term *derivation* has sometimes been applied. Furthermore, there is no hard and fast distinction between derivation (in this sense) and inflection: to form a past tense in Modern English by adding an *-ed* to a newly created verb (e.g., *telegraphed, boycotted*), or to add an *-er* to make a new noun of agency (e.g. *telegrapher, broadcaster*), is to do something that could be done, and has been done, in all stages of the language; the line separating these two processes, so that one is called grammatical inflection and the other derivation, is an exceedingly nebulous one. But not all prefixes and suffixes remain both so vital and so unchanged in their use as *-er*. There was, for example, in Old English a feminine suffix for nouns of agency, *-estre*. This, as *-ster*, lingers on in *spinster* (originally "spinning woman"), *tapster*, and the proper names *Webster* and *Baxter*.[12] The last two meant, of course, "weaving woman" and "baking woman";

[12] The *Oxford English Dictionary* explains that O. E. *bæcestre* is one of the few instances in which the suffix was used also as masculine; this was so because it was a rendering of a Latin designation (*pistor*) of men exercising a function which among the English was peculiar to women. (It should be added that Jespersen has attacked this, and indeed the usual explanation of the *-ster* suffix as a whole. His opinion, which has been widely accepted, is that it was from the first used for both sexes. See his *Linguistica*, Copenhagen, 1933, pp. 420–429.)

variant forms of the masculine gave *Baker* for the one and *Webb*, *Weber*, and *Weaver* for the other. (*Hunt* and *Hunter* are somewhat similar doublets, representing O. E. *hunta* and *huntere*—both "hunter.") The feminine suffix *-stere* was fairly common in Middle English: Chaucer uses *beggestere*, *tombestere*, *frutestere*, and *hoppestere*.[13] In Modern English, apparently, *-ster* has so far lost its sense of feminine suffix of agency that it is necessary to supplement it with a borrowed suffix of the same significance, *-ess*, as is done in *seamstress* and *songstress*. Perhaps confusion with the same final sounds in a borrowed word like *minister* or *register* has helped to obscure the original significance; at any rate, *gangster*, *huckster*, *teamster*, and *youngster* illustrate a new use of *-ster* that owes nothing to the basic meaning of Old English *-estre*.

Many prefixes and suffixes can be used freely in forming new words, and the sense given to the new formation is precisely what the prefix or suffix has always had. Thus, the *-ly* (originally meaning "like") can be freely attached to nouns to manufacture new adjectives, like *manly*, *womanly*, and *gentlemanly*. The native negative prefix *un-*—though in rivalry with the Latin *in-*, so that it is not always easy to say which is appropriate in a given case—can be used very often indeed to make an adjective take an opposite meaning. Another *un-*, though of separate origin, has a similar effect upon the meaning of a verb to which it is attached, so that *undress* and *unfold* are the opposites of the simple verbs. Curiously, however, *un-* seems to have no effect on the

[13] I.e., "dancing woman." As Chaucer uses it, in the phrase *shippes hoppesteres* ("Knightes Tale," l. 1059), it is a curious mistranslation of his source, Boccaccio's *Teseide*, for *navi bellatrici* (warlike ships) has apparently been misread *navi ballatrici*.

meaning of a few verbs already indicating something negative or destructive: *ravel* and *unravel*, *loosen* and *unloosen* (like *annul* and *disannul*), mean much the same thing.

Other native affixes that are still freely used in making new words are *after-*, *be-*, *mis-*, *-ness*, *-less*, *-ful*, *-y*, and *-ish*. A few of them, however, have taken on a connotation that is not at all implied in their earlier use. The use of *be-* in older formations like *beset*, *bespeak*, and *bestir* seems to be without the derogatory suggestion that it has acquired in such words as *befog*, *bemuddle*, *bemuse*, *bedizen*, and so forth. Even more clearly, *-ish* has changed both from its original use of merely forming an adjective from a noun [as in O. E. *folcisc* (folkish), corresponding to the later borrowing, *popular*] and from its later use after an adjective to limit its quality (especially in adjectives of color, like *reddish* and *brownish*). The present implication of the suffix *-ish* is decidedly uncomplimentary: we can no longer use Chaucer's word *heavenish*, but we *can* use *hellish*—and *devilish*, *knavish*, *fiendish*, *foolish*, and *thievish*. *Boyish* and *girlish* will perhaps still pass muster as terms that need not be malicious; but *mannish* is far from the equivalent of *virile* or *manly*, and *womanish* is akin to *effeminate* rather than *womanly*. Borrowed suffixes, incidentally, are quite as likely as native ones to take on connotations that limit their use for new formations. The suffix *-ard*, immediately French but ultimately German, has gone in this way: its use is limited to such contemptuous terms as *dullard*, *coward*, *sluggard*, *bastard*, and *drunkard*.

The mention of a borrowed affix introduces another consideration. Derivation in Middle and Modern Eng-

lish has made a very extensive use of foreign prefixes and suffixes as well as native ones. Most speakers of English probably are conscious of no difference in quality between the affixes enumerated above that we have inherited from Old English and the very numerous ones that we have borrowed. A few examples of the latter class are these: Latin *pro-*, *post-*, *pre-*, *ante-*, *super-*, *-ation*, and *-ative;* French *dis-*, *en-*, *-al*, *-ment*, *-able*, *-ous*, and *-ary* (all, of course, ultimately Latin); Spanish or Italian (through French) *-ade;* Greek *a-*, *hyper-*, *-ist*, *-ize*, *-ism*, *-ic*, *-itis*, and so forth. Almost all of these would be used with considerable freedom in building new words. The purist's sense of shock at the sight of a new word consisting of borrowed affix and native root (or conversely) is not experienced by the man in the street. Granted that hybrid combinations of this sort are often needlessly indulged in, it is still evident that to rule them out as a class would be to rob the language of some of its finest and best-established words. To take a single type, consider only how the native suffix *-ful* has been combined with foreign words: a very few are *useful*, *graceful*, *merciful*, *beautiful*, *grateful*, and *plentiful*. If the word is sufficiently established as English, it can be joined with any native affix that is really living, no matter what its own ultimate origin may have been. Thus, *class* and *cry* are French borrowings, but their status is far from that of aliens; their union with the native prefix *out-* in *outclass* and *outcry* can occasion uneasiness only to the pedant. Our illustrations have been of foreign root and native affix; but the opposite combination is just as familiar, as is evident when one considers how easy it is to multiply words of the type of *amazement*, *rebuild*, *goddess*, *co-worker*, *dishearten*, and *anteroom*.

One reason for what is, from one point of view, the incongruity of such compounds as those cited above is of course very obvious. Not all affixes remain in living use. Sometimes a foreign affix has to be used to supply a deficiency in the supply of native prefixes and suffixes, or a native one has to be used much more widely. Thus *-th*, once used in forming such indispensable nouns as *wealth*, *health*, *filth*, *youth*, *growth*, *warmth*, *strength*, and *breadth*, has fallen into disfavor. *Growth* appears to be the latest of this group, dating from the Elizabethan period; but Francis Bacon's *lowth*[14] has not stuck, nor have more recent attempts to use the suffix *-th*—like *greenth* (Horace Walpole), *illth* (Ruskin), and *coolth* (H. G. Wells).[15] The *-th* has been forced to defer to *-ness*, which is not only one of the oldest, but still the most active, of native suffixes; we have not only *greenness*, *illness*, and *coolness*, but even *warmness* and *broadness* by the side of *warmth* and *breadth*, and *youthfulness* and *mirthfulness* in addition to *youth* and *mirth*. Words that once had the suffixes *-ship*, *-head*, and *-dom* have likewise conformed to the modern preference for *-ness;* and only very exceptionally do new formations (*chairmanship, boredom*) use these suffixes. Only *-ness*, incidentally, seems to have withstood the remarkable progress of *-ism*, a suffix that English borrowed through French and Latin from Greek. The very mention of it, with its suggestion of the prevalence of "*ism*'s"

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[14] Apparently, on the analogy of *highth*, the older and still a popular form of *height*.

[15] These are cited by Smith, pp. 91 and 92, and by McKnight, *English Words and Their Background*, pp. 173 and 174. (But the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates *coolth* from 1594; Wells's use of it, then, is either a re-creation or a revival.)

in our time, is perhaps enough to indicate how our native affixes have often yielded ground to borrowed ones.

Without completely sharing the purist's distaste for foreign affixes in combination with native roots, one may still regret that many of our native affixes are no longer active—in the sense that derivation has ceased to make use of them. One such, the loss of which is particularly to be regretted, is the old prefix *for-* that was once widely used with an intensive or privative sense. It is still found, of course, in a number of words like *forbid, forgive, forgo,* and *forlorn*[16]; but others, like *forspent* and *fordone,* have become archaic, and still others are completely gone. A line in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* (l. 126),

And she, *forweped* and *forwaked,*

("wept out" and "watched out"—i.e., "worn out with weeping and watching") illustrates the fine expressiveness of these old compounds. That the sense of the prefix has been quite lost is illustrated by the fact that the meaning of *forlorn* has changed from the etymological one of "completely lost" to the vaguer one of "wretched": a *forlorn hope* (lost band) is no longer in a "lost" but rather in a "desperate" case; and though the participle *forlorn* survives, the other parts of the verb *forlose* are gone. *Forgo,* too, is used with so little apprehension of the force of its prefix that it has been

[16] *Cf.* the similar force of German *ver-* in words like *verboten* and *verloren.* This *ver-* is, of course, cognate with English *for-,* but it has remained active, as *for-* has not. For another interpretation of some of the *for-* compounds, disagreeing with that in the *Oxford English Dictionary,* see a note (pp. 780 and 781) in Professor F. N. Robinson's edition of Chaucer (Houghton Mifflin, 1933).

possible to confuse it with *forego* (go before, precede), now familiar only in *foregoing* and in the (Shakespearean) phrase "foregone conclusion." Indeed, the spelling *forego* is quite frequently used (and accepted by dictionaries) for the meaning "do without," evidently because *fore-* is in living use and *for-* is not.

The objection of the purist to the hybrid compound has sometimes been successful in recasting the word—more frequently where the objection was to native affix plus foreign root; for foreign affixes, rather anomalously, display more vitality than native ones. Even the most vigorous of native suffixes, *-ness*, has often given way in the interest of harmonious compounding, as when *morbidness* yielded to *morbidity* and *simpleness* to *simplicity*. No satisfactory distinction between the rival negative prefixes, native *un-* and borrowed *in-* (or *im-*, *il-*, or *ir-*), has been worked out; but the tendency has been for *in-* to supersede *un-* as the prefix for many compounds in which the root is a borrowing. Thus, *unglorious*, *unpossible*, *unpatient*, *unfirm*, and *unexperienced* were quite reputable words in Middle or early Modern English; but only *inglorious*, *impossible*, *impatient*, *infirm*, and *inexperienced* will pass muster now. On the other hand, *unpleasant*, *undesirable*, *unprogressive*, and many others witness the retention of *un-* before a borrowed root. Occasionally both foreign and native affixes may be used, and the meanings of the resulting variants are then differentiated. Thus *unbelief* and *disbelief*, *mistrust* and *distrust*, are by no means synonymous; nor have *uninterested* and *disinterested* been so regarded in the past, though a present tendency, even in fairly careful use, seems to disregard this useful discrimination in meaning.

Something further may appropriately be said on the topic of hybrid formations, whether by composition or by derivation. The extreme puristic position would be that not only words that join native and borrowed parts, but also words that bring together constituents from more than one foreign language, should alike be ruled out. Even this position, it may be remarked in passing, is something of a compromise for the "Saxonist," who would discard all foreign elements from the English language; but there is of course no need to take this last point of view very seriously. The objection to the hybrid compound, however, is less fanatical in character, and deserves at least a hearing. Many have voiced the opinion that *automobile* is an objectionable formation because the first part is Greek and the second Latin. It is true that the word has come to be less and less commonly used; in American English, *machine* (or the shortened *auto*) was the popular substitute a generation ago, and *car*—both interesting specializations of meaning—is the present favorite. But this is obviously rather because *automobile* is an awkwardly long compound than because it is a hybrid. Likewise, when *plane* is substituted for *airplane* or *aëroplane*, it is scarcely likely that the substitution is dictated by a realization that the two latter forms are hybrids. Is there any general realization, further, that *aquaplane* is a "good" compound and *hydroplane* a "bad" one? The two words of course are equally acceptable, and usefully differentiated in meaning. Actually, hybrids are to be found in all periods of the language, even in the "purer" and more conservative vocabulary of Old English; *priesthood* (O. E. *prēosthād*) is typical of a fruitful species of hybrid formation established very

early. In Middle English, not only this kind of compound[17] but also the opposite variety (native root plus foreign affix) is very common indeed—a state of affairs that evidently could be possible only when the language was thoroughly saturated with foreign borrowings. The history of the vocabulary would appear to have established ample precedent for hybrid formations in general. And in point of fact, the present-day objector is likely to limit his complaint to a few groups that have been singled out, not always for the best reasons, as peculiarly vicious. Professor Krapp,[18] writing twenty-five years ago, notes the purist's objection to *racial* on the ground that, in the words of the authors of *The King's English*, "the termination *-al* has no business at the end of a word that is not obviously Latin"; today this objection seems something of a curiosity, for *racial* has found its way into excellent and general use. One wonders whether such critics would object not only to *tidal* (English and Latin) and to *postal* (French and Latin) but also to *phenomenal* (Greek and Latin). In the interests of consistency of course they should, but, perhaps happily, consistency has never been attained in such matters.

Another termination that the purist would seek to restrict in use is the Greek suffix *-ist*. Clearly, *-ist* is even more active than the Latin *-al*, and it seems utterly futile to attempt to limit its use to words in which it is joined with a Greek stem. It is evident, of course, that the objection breaks down in practice,

[17] Jespersen (*Growth and Structure*, p. 106) observes that most other languages frequently indulge in this too, but much more rarely in the other type than does English.

[18] *Modern English*, p. 273.

for Latin-Greek formations like *socialist*, *florist*, *jurist*, and *nihilist* are quite as well established as consistently Greek ones like *economist* and *atheist*. *Scientist*, as perhaps not every American knows, was long objected to as a reprehensible American innovation.[19] The true principle would seem to be that each word should be considered on its individual merits; the necessity for the word and the utility of the word should surely outweigh any considerations of "linguistic harmony." *Deist* proved to be a useful companion to *theist*, though one was "correctly" formed and the other not. Since *physician* meant "practicioner of medicine," there was room for *physicist* ("correctly" formed, by the way). A word that has recently gained currency (used regularly in the *Bulletin* of the American Association of University Professors) is *educationist*. This is perhaps a fair example of the kind of formation that, from one point of view, would have "made Quintilian stare and gasp." But has it not a *raison d'être*? *Educator* was too general and *educationalist* too lengthy, as well as outmoded. What was wanted was an agent-noun that would correspond to the specialized meaning that *education* has acquired in the present curriculum of the American college. *Pedagogy* has fallen into disfavor and *Education* (often the capital *e* distinguishes it from the general *education*) has replaced it. Hence, while an *educator* is concerned with *education*, it is an *educationist* who is concerned with *Education*. If it be objected that there

[19] Nevertheless, it is not of American origin. Actually, it was a creation of William Whewell, who in his *Philosophy of Inductive Sciences* (1840) writes, "We need very much a name to describe a cultivator of science in general. I should incline to call him a Scientist." Smith, L. P., "Needed Words," *S.P.E. Tract No. XXXI* (1928).

is a slight flavor of contempt about the word as it is used in the publications of the society referred to above, it may be replied that possibly that is not unintentional. A word in *-ist* frequently seems to be used by those to whom the idea for which it stands is repellent, in a way that is distinctly derogatory; such is a common connotation for words like *nudist, Fascist, nihilist, communist, plagiarist, tourist, publicist, elocutionist, purist, alarmist, militarist, pacifist, defeatist,* and *extremist* (and even *chemist* is described by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as perhaps contemptuous in origin).

What has been said on the hybrid compound is not a plea for unrestricted freedom in introducing new words the parts of which are taken from various languages. There is no apparent reason why consistency of the kind indicated should not have been followed in the coining of new scientific terms. *Univalent* and *unimolecular*, for example, may well be preferred to the competing terms *monovalent* and *monomolecular*. Likewise, it would seem to be only sensible to use the Greek prefix *hyper-* rather than the Latin *super-* to intensify the meaning of an obviously Greek formation. *Superheterodyne* is a quite unnecessary monstrosity, and *superheterodyne-plus* makes matters just a little worse. But the English language is altogether too much of a hybrid in general for the principle of purity in word-formation (as well as in vocabulary on the whole) to have wide application. Consider, to take a stock illustration, the implication of such a form as *re-mac-adamized*. Here is a word that will not strike most of its users as in any way objectionable or eccentric. But *re-* is Latin, *mac* is Celtic, *adam* is Hebrew, *-ize* is French (originally Greek), and *-d* is English. This of course

is an extreme case; but on a smaller scale, such diversity of origin is by no means exceptional in English compounds. In the light of this, "purity" in word-formation must seem an impossible objective.

Among the types of word-making we have so far emphasized only two—composition and derivation. The process underlying both is of course simply that of putting together old words (or parts of words) to form new ones. Words, however, can be made in other ways. They can be made, for example, by subtraction as well as by addition. An interesting phase of *shortening* in word-making is the phenomenon called by Sir James Murray "back-formation." Its most typical variety is this: From a noun ending in *-er*, *-ar*, or *-or*, a new verb is created, on the assumption that what precedes the apparent suffix of agency is a verbal stem.[20] Thus, the new verb *edit* has been formed by back-formation from the noun *editor*, though the *-or* is an integral part of the word. The probable etymology of *beggar* is that it comes from the French *Beghard*, the name of a mendicant order. If this is correct, the verb *beg* is a back-formation, and a very early one; the assumption was, of course, that the *-ar* of the word borrowed in Middle English in the form *beggar* was a suffix like the *-er* of *baker*. Similarly, the noun *pedlar* is a great deal older than the verb *peddle*. This kind of formation is indulged in popularly much more freely than in more elevated speech. Thus *burgle*, from the noun *burglar*, said to have been created by W. S. Gilbert for the line (in a song in *The Pirates of Penzance*),

When the enterprising burglar isn't burgling

[20] For the theory, and numerous illustrations, of this type, see Jespersen, "A Few Back-Formations," *Englische Studien*, LXX (1935), pp. 117–122.

is not yet quite acceptable for formal use; and the status of *buttle* (from *butler*), *sculp*[21] (from *sculptor*), and *ush* (from *usher*) is even more dubious. Often, of course, such creations are humorous nonce-words, as is *bish* for "officiate as bishop" in a question quite naturally asked concerning a bishop whose activities had appeared to be more largely financial and political than ecclesiastical: "When does the bishop bish?"[22]

Back-formation, however, has not been active in creating words of dubious standing only. The verbs *diagnose* (from *diagnosis*), *rove* (from *rover*), and *grovel* (from *groveling*, quite naturally misunderstood as a present participle, while it is, historically, an adverb employing the old termination *-ling*—like *darkling* and *sidling*, from which also the new verbs *darkle* and *sidle* have been formed) are quite reputable, as are also the nouns *greed* (from the adjective *greedy*) and *gloom*[23] (from *gloomy*). But it is incontestable that there are many more words of this kind that remain jocose, slangy, or colloquial. A few examples are the verbs *jell* (from the noun *jelly*), *enthuse* (to be enthusiastic), *reminisce* (to indulge in reminiscences), *emote* (to express emotion), *orate* (from *oration*), *peeve* (from *peevish*), *resurrect*, *frivol*, and *vamp*. The English commentator would doubtless add to the list of back-formations of questionable standing the verb *donate*, a back-formation

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[21] The appearance of this newspaper headline (referring to an interview with Mrs. Clare Sheridan on her return from Russia) is a little startling: "Trotsky Described by Woman Who Sculped Him."

[22] Quoted by Robert Withington in *American Speech*, Vol. VI, No. 4 (April, 1931), p. 279.

[23] This seems to be true of the word at least in its modern sense of "darkness," a sense which apparently we owe to Milton; for a fuller statement, see Bradley, *Making of English*, pp. 233 and 234.

from *donation* that the *Oxford English Dictionary* terms not only "chiefly U. S." but (in the sense of "grant," "give") "vulgar" as well.

Another aspect of back-formation is found not infrequently. This is the dropping of a final *-s* that has been misunderstood as a plural ending though it actually belongs to the stem of the word in question. Thus *pease* (preserved in *peaseporridge*) is historically a singular. Middle English *pese* (O. E. *pise* <Lat. *pisum*) singular had *pesen* as its plural; *peas* singular and *peasen* plural were still in use in the seventeenth century, but *pea* has long since become the accepted singular, and *peas* is forced to do service as a plural. *Shay* (*chay*) is a seventeenth-century shortening of *chaise*, through the same process; but in this instance the omission of the final *-s* has never become standard. *Skate*, *riddle*, *burial*, *cherry* (*cf.* Fr. *cerise*) are further illustrations of the loss of an original final *-s* that has become reputable. The popular tendency to create a new singular for apparent plurals in *-s* is seen in vulgarisms like *Chinee* and *Portuguee*. British and American English differ in their treatment of *innings:* in cricket it is an *innings*, but in baseball an *inning*.

Shortenings, not necessarily to be associated with back-formations, have occurred in many other kinds of words than those that have been mentioned. One type may be described in the words of Jonathan Swift, from an unfavorable comment on processes active in the English of his day that appeared in the *Tatler* for September 28, 1710 (No. 230): "the next refinement, which consists in pronouncing the first syllable in a word that has many, and dismissing the rest; such as *phizz*, *hipps* [for *hypochondriacs*], *mobb*, *pozz* [for *positive*],

rep [for *reputation*] and many more, when we are already overloaded with monosyllables, which are the disgrace of our language." It happens that, of these shortenings, only *mob* (from *mobile vulgus*) is standard English; it was on the way to becoming so, in fact, in Swift's own day, for he observes elsewhere in this essay: "I have done my utmost for some years past to stop the progress of *mobb* and *banter*, but have been plainly borne down by numbers, and betrayed by those who promised to assist me." *Phiz*, *rep*, and the variant form *hypo*, however, are still recognizable as colloquialisms; and the general process of shortening by clipping off a final syllable or final syllables is one that has created many abbreviations that have, often in standard use as well, superseded the fuller words. *Piano* (for *pianoforte*), *gin*[24] (for *Geneva*), *miss* (for *mistress*), *wag* (for *wag-halter;* i.e., "one fit to be hanged," a "rascal"—the sense of "wit" is comparatively recent), *curio* (for *curiosity*), *hobby* (for *hobby horse*), *gas* (for *gasoline*), *brig* (for *brigantine*), and *fad* (for *fadaise*) are typical.

Jespersen makes the interesting suggestion[25] that "stump-words," as he labels them, are really of two classes: those abbreviated by the adult and those abbreviated by the child and later adopted by adults. According to this theory, the adult omits the latter part (or parts) of the word, and the child the first. The shortenings so far alluded to would then be adult shortenings only, the abbreviation being dictated by the feeling of the speaker or writer that the word might be

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[24] Likewise, *brandy* (for *brandywine*), *grog* (for *grogram*), *hock* (for *Hockheimer*), *rum* (for *rumbullion*), and *whiskey* (for *usquebaugh*).

[25] *Language*, pp. 169–171.

clipped off as soon as enough of it had been given to make it intelligible. *Photo* conveys the meaning as fully as *photograph*, and *auto* as fully as *automobile*. It is certainly true that school abbreviations like *prof* for *professor*, *gym* for *gymnasium*, and *trig* for *trigonometry* are conscious and un-childlike shortenings in that the part retained is not the part most clearly heard. In support of Jespersen's idea, the observation may be advanced that *professor* as pronounced by a little girl of five became not *prof* but *'fessor*, just as *expression* became *'spression*, and *remember* became *'member*. The process is clearly different, since the child was evidently attempting to repeat as much of the word as she had remembered. Plausible as the theory is, it cannot of course be regarded as proved that all of the many stump-words that omit the beginning of the word originated in childish mispronunciation. A few examples of shortenings of this type that have become standard are *wig* (*perwig*), *drawing-room* (*withdrawing-room*), *still* (*distillery*), *sport* (*disport*), *spite* (*despite*), *mend* (*amend*), *tend* (*attend*), *lone* (*alone*), *fend* (*defend*), and *fence* (*defence*). It will be observed that the process has sometimes enriched the vocabulary by adding a shorter word which neither supersedes the longer one nor is synonymous with it: there is a useful differentiation in meaning or use between *tend* and *attend*, *mend* and *amend*, and *lone* and *alone*.

Still another process in the making of the vocabulary may be commented on here. This is a development that neither lengthens nor shortens a word, but that transforms its application by making it possible to use it as another part of speech. It may be objected that this is scarcely a type of word-building, since the outward

form of the word is left intact. However, whether it is convenient for lexicographers to refer to a noun, an adjective, and a verb that have the same form as one word or as three, it would seem that from the present point of view, the common and highly typical phenomenon (of English in general, but especially of Modern English) known as "functional change" or "shift of part of speech" deserves to be reckoned as one of the most significant processes in the development of the vocabulary. Though interchangeableness of parts of speech is not peculiar to English—being visible very early in the development of the Indo-European family—it is natural that the sweeping extent of inflectional loss in English, together with the marked phonetic changes that have accompanied the loss, should have brought it about that parts of speech are, in the more recent aspects of English in particular, much less fixed quantities than they are in most languages. When, through the loss of inflectional endings, it is no longer possible to distinguish a noun from a verb, or an adjective from a noun, it is not to be wondered at that verbs should be used freely as nouns, nouns as verbs, and adjectives as nouns. A recent development of the language of the movies will serve to illustrate. The word *feature* may be used alone, as a noun; it may be used in the modifying position, in *feature picture* (in both cases with the sense of "principal item on the program"); or it may be used as a verb, in the phrase "to *feature* (a certain player)."

Such a free interchange of parts of speech is a marked characteristic of Modern English, Elizabethan as well as contemporary. The variety of it that perhaps meets us most commonly is the use of noun as verb. *Bell, bridge, color, ditch, ink, paper,* and *stone* are a few random

examples of the numerous nouns, native and borrowed, that may be used as verbs. Jespersen lists twenty-three nouns for various parts of the body[26] all of which have been used in Modern English also as verbs. A few of these, like *to chin* and *to jaw* are not in elevated use; a few others, like *to lip* (kiss), *to tongue*, *to fist*, and *to knee* (kneel) are Shakespearean rather than contemporary (briefly illustrating the point suggested above as to Renaissance virtuosity in this kind); but most of the list, like *to eye*, *to elbow*, *to shoulder*, *to hand*, *to skin*, *to stomach*, and so forth, are in both reputable and present-day use.

A striking contemporary aspect of the shift under consideration is the tendency to make technical or trade verbs out of nouns that are often awkwardly lengthy. There are the commercial verbs *to requisition* and *to recondition*, the librarian's verb *to accession*, the publisher's verb *to remainder* [to dispose cheaply of an oversupply (of a certain book)], and the electrician's (or aviator's?) verb *to contact*, which seems also to be winning favor in the newspapers to describe the opening of negotiations with kidnappers. It is not contended that these are beautiful or admirable extensions of the nouns in question—just the reverse, indeed, so far as the esthetics of the matter is concerned. The recent specialization of meaning in the new verb *to service* is a case in point. As a verb, *service* seems to have acquired quite lately, in American use at any rate, the curious significance of "supply with oil and grease." ("A badly serviced truck will make five times as much clamor . . . "—Stuart Chase, in "The Future of the

[26] *Growth and Structure*, p. 167.

Great City," *Harper's*, December, 1929.) *Service*, even as a noun, had fallen from a once lofty place. The American business-man's prating of an ostensibly disinterested *service* ("*service* with a smile," "*service* charge," and so on) to patrons who paid lavishly for it was a far cry from the older signification of the word, with its religious associations and its suggestion of the virtues of self-sacrifice and abnegation. But this last transformation into a verb is surely the ultimate degradation of the word.

Incidentally, a noun does not need to be long in the language before it can be turned into a verb. The history of a recent French borrowing is illuminating as to more than one aspect of the fluid state of English in our day. *Sabotage* tends just now not only to be completely Anglicized in pronunciation (['sæbətɪdʒ])—though this is scarcely as yet recognized by dictionaries—but also to be used as a verb as well as a noun (= "to jettison"). These phrases occur in successive pages of the editorial columns of the *New Republic* for June 7, 1933: "The natural result is to sabotage the income tax on principle, and turn sentiment toward the sales tax." . . . "state officials proceeded to sabotage the case by refusing to offer any evidence."

Verbs can be turned into nouns with somewhat less facility than nouns into verbs, but the process is one that is perhaps even more a distinguishing peculiarity of Modern English. The way was fully open for it, as for the reverse process, when the final *-e*, the last remnant of the former varied inflectional endings of verbs, disappeared in the late Middle English period. Nouns of course can be formed from verbs by the addition of suffixes like *-tion* and *-ment*, or by the use of

the gerund in *-ing;* the availability of these other methods somewhat lessens the number of nouns that might otherwise be made, quite without change of form, from verbs. There is also the alternative of employing a borrowed noun to correspond in meaning, though not in root, to a native verb: thus, we have pairs like *to win, victory; to climb, ascent; to break, fracture*—though, to be sure, *win, climb,* and *break* can themselves be used as nouns. Similarly, the use of nominal suffixes like *-tion* and *-ment* and of the gerund in *-ing* does not throw out the possibility of turning the simple verb directly into a noun: one may speak of *a combine* as well as *a combination, a visit* as well as *a visitation, a move* as well as *a movement, a kill* as well as *a killing,* and *a meet* as well as *a meeting.* It will be noticed that nouns made directly from verbs have rather frequently a somewhat colloquial or slangy character: *a show, a sell, a hit, an assist* (the baseball term), *a catch, a spin, a kick, a read, a shave, a smoke, a say, a think, a bathe,* and *a find* are scarcely possible in elevated diction. Not that the verb made into the noun *must* bear any such stigma. There is perhaps no suggestion of this kind about most of the numerous verbs of motion that are commonly used as nouns[27]—a group that will also serve as well as any other to illustrate once more the easy interchangeability of verb and noun: *walk, run, leap, jump, hop, limp, stumble, stroll, saunter,* and so forth.

More than one point of view is possible as to the result, in intelligibility and expressiveness, of obliterating

[27] To illustrate the relative age of verb and nouns, it may be said that the *Oxford English Dictionary* assigns the verbs *run* and *hop* to the Old English period, while the nouns are dated as "1450" and "1508." respectively.

formal distinctions between verb and noun. Students of philology of the older school held it to be a sign of ruin and decay, and it is undoubtedly possible to find instances in modern writing in which ambiguity replaces a precision that the definite and visible separation of parts of speech would have insured. But the opinion that has gained increasing acceptance in our time would have it that there is ample compensation for any such loss in the very great gains in the direction of flexibility and simplicity. After all, as common observation demonstrates, the occasions on which one who reads Modern English on the printed page or hears it spoken is actually puzzled by a form that might be either verb or noun (or other part of speech) are few indeed. It may be added that spoken English is here in somewhat better case than written English because the pronunciation occasionally distinguishes a verb from a noun that in appearance is identical with it. The two obvious illustrations are the voicing of the final consonant when *abuse*, *grease*, *house*, *use*, *grief*, *belief*, and *proof*[28] become verbs; and the familiar differentiation in accent[29] between the nouns *conduct*, *contract*, *perfume*, *present*, and *subject*, and the verbs *to conduct*, *to contract*, *to perfume*, *to present*, and *to subject*. A similar differentiation between noun and adjective is accomplished by the two accentuations of *minute*, and a differentiation for meaning within a single part of speech in the

[28] But *knife*, *roof*, *race*, *promise*, and *practice* have the voiceless consonant (and hence the same pronunciation) whether they are verbs or nouns; and an attempt, fashionable some years ago, to differentiate between the verb *rise* and the noun *rise* by making the one [raɪz] and the other [raɪs] seems to have failed.

[29] For the history of this, *cf.* Jespersen, *Modern English Grammar*, Vol. I, 5.71.

adjective *gallant*, according as it is accented on the first or on the second syllable.

The subject of functional change or shift in part of speech has by no means been exhausted. It would not be difficult, for example, to collect instances of adverbs interchanging with verbs, with nouns, or with adjectives; of prepositions becoming adjectives; or even of pronouns becoming nouns.[30] An incidental result of such a survey might very well be that one would be led to doubt the validity of the lexicographer's practice of assigning a great many words to a single category as one part of speech or another. It is exceedingly doubtful, indeed, if the terminology that we have inherited from grammarians trained on Latin and Greek does adequately meet the needs of Modern English, so much looser and more fluid in its structure. The various parts of speech, so neatly labeled after classical models, blend with one another and in their actual use in English share each other's functions to an extent for which there is no classical precedent. For a last glimpse of the blurring of parts of speech and the facile shifting of the same word from one function to another, let us look at the vagaries of the adjective, and at the use of the noun in the position of the adjective.

In "the *good* die young," *good* has become a noun; and even more clearly has *bad* in "gone to the *bad*" (*bad* what?). The formal change is complete when what was once a qualifying adjective is used without the following noun and thereupon assumes the function of the noun completely: *private* (soldier), *general* (officer), *epic* (poem), *champagne* (wine), *muslin* (cloth), *common* (ground), the

[30] For examples of all of these, see Krapp, *Modern English*, pp.197–199.

blue (devil)*s*, not a *red* (cent), in the *red* (ink), from the *blue* (sky), and out of the *deep* (sea) illustrate the process. Usually, an adjective made into a noun in this way may be given the plural *-s* like any other noun: we may speak of our *betters*, of the *whites* of our eyes, or of eating *greens* or *sweets*. Adjectives similarly are often turned into verbs, sometimes with a verbal ending to distinguish the new part of speech (*to toughen, to tighten, to roughen*), but often without visible change: it is possible *to rough* (e. g., one's opponent in football) as well as *to roughen*, and (without distinction of meaning) *to loose* and *loosen*, and *to black* and *blacken*. *Black*, incidentally, may be a noun, as well as an adjective or verb, as may also another adjective just mentioned, *better* (*better* half, one's *betters*, *to better* one's condition).

On the other hand, the use of the noun in the position and with the function of the qualifying adjective is a more controversial matter. To have one noun modify another seems to some grammarians exceedingly reprehensible. But the formation is one that is separated by an impossibly thin line from the well-established full-word compound consisting of noun plus noun, written with or without a hyphen, as may be seen if *street car* is compared with *railway* or *subway;* or *street car conductor* with *railway-carriage* or *subway train*. Modern English would be the poorer if it were not allowed to use the noun in this way in innumerable phrases like *bond salesmen, art alliance, silver dollar, department store*, and *sports writer*.[31] True, it may be justly maintained

[31] Even phrases like *spring football practice, city school system, cod liver oil*, and *Philadelphia Gas Works Company* are not uncommon. Graff (in *Language and Languages*, p. 134) cites *Rexall milk of magnesia tooth paste* as an extreme but perfectly idiomatic extension of this process.

that the privilege is abused by those who write the headlines for our American newspapers, and who indulge in such locutions as *mystery woman*, *murder car*, *miracle man*, and the like. There seems to be no good reason (unless one so considers the exigencies of space—a factor that does undoubtedly account for many of the sins of the headlines) why *mystery woman* should be written, when *mysterious woman* and *woman of mystery* are both possible. Why the noun may often be properly used as an adjective has perhaps just been suggested: either because there is no corresponding adjective (of distinctive form, as *mysterious* corresponds to *mystery*), or because the alternative of a prepositional phrase would be uneconomical or awkward. The point may be illustrated in the parallel field of personal names. A few famous names, like *Shakespeare* and *Milton*, have well-established adjectives to go with them; but for the great majority of personal names, the corresponding adjectives do not exist and the nouns themselves must serve. Thus, though we may speak of a "*Shakespearean* play," a "*Miltonic* poem," or a "*Dickensian* character," we are forced to refer to a "*Conrad* novel" or a "novel *by Conrad*," a "*Barrie* play" or a "play *by Barrie*." Perhaps only Bernard Shaw, of recent writers, has persuaded people generally to use a distinctive adjective for him; and *Shavian* has been spread only by dint of assiduous efforts on the part of Shaw himself. Humbler men must be content to have their names used as either nouns or adjectives.

Our survey of processes in word-making is by no means complete. A special aspect of composition that is of

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In German, a single polysyllablic compound would be the equivalent for such phrases, while in French—*cf. huile de foie de morue* with *cod liver oil*—the prepositional phrase must be employed.

somewhat curious interest results in the type of word variously designated as the "blend" or the "portmanteau word." It has been said that the portmanteau word is what ensues when a speaker who is confronted by the choice of two words for a single occasion happens to possess "that rarest of gifts," a perfectly balanced mind.[32] The usual type is the blending of the first sounds of one word with the last sounds of another. Everyone has unintentionally telescoped words in this way, and it is exceedingly likely that the vocabulary has been enriched by words created through this process to an extent far greater than is usually recognized. Thus, *flaunt* is almost certainly the amalgamation of *flout* and *vaunt*, *slide* of *slip* and *glide*, and *twirl* of *twist* and *whirl*. Telescoping, sometimes of a slightly different character, is probably to be found also in *crouch* (*cringe* + *couch*), *flush* (*flash* + *blush*), *squash* (*squeeze* + *crash*), *splatter* (*splash* + *spatter*), *squawk* (*squall* + *squeak*), and so forth.[33] One writer particularly is associated with the deliberate creation of portmanteau words: among the many new words coined by Lewis Carroll, two blends—*chortle* (*snort* + *chuckle*) and *galumphing* (*gallop* + *triumphing*)—have met comparatively wide acceptance.[34] Contemporary newspaper and magazine writers often create new words in this manner. Sometimes the result is an apparently felicitous and useful addition; often, however, the effect is that of a rather cheap pun. Who shall say what may be the fate of *airmada* (*airplane*

[32] Lewis Carroll, in the preface to *The Hunting of the Snark*.

[33] Some of these, and many others, are listed in Louise Pound's "Blends, Their Relation to English Word Formation," *Anglistiche Forschungen* (Heidelberg), 1914. See also Jespersen, *Language*, pp. 312–313; McKnight, pp. 165–166; and Harold Wentworth's *Blend-Words in English*, Ithaca (abstract of Cornell thesis), 1933.

[34] Possibly *slithy* (*lithe* + *slimy*) might be added.

+ *armada*), *motorcade* (*motor-car* + *cavalcade*), *slanguage* (*slang* + *language*), and *smog* (*smoke* + *fog*),[35] all of which the writer has observed several times in recent periodical literature?

An account of word-formation in English almost necessarily implies some recognition of the part that individual speakers or writers have played in the development of the vocabulary. The great body of the word-stock is clearly anonymous—in the sense that no one knows who first created or even first gave literary currency to a given word. An appreciable proportion of it, however, is on a different footing, in that the word is definitely associated with an individual who is chiefly or solely responsible for its use. Since the completion (in 1928) of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which seeks to give, for every word, the quotation which represents its earliest use in the language, the part of the individual in the making of the vocabulary can be studied on a scale that was impossible until recently. It is evident, of course, that the first literary use of the word (even when that has been incontrovertibly ascertained) is not necessarily the same thing as the original creation or the first borrowing of the word; quite certainly, many words are used in speech long before they find their way into writing. Another consideration that must limit the usefulness of the quotations in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is that, in the very nature of the case, it is only definitely literary or learned words, almost never popular ones, that have been traced to the individual author who

[35] *Anecdotage*, *shamateur* (both listed in the 1934 Webster's), *alcoholiday*, and *socialite* (for *social* + *registerite*) are further specimens. Words of this kind, among others, are given in Robert Withington's article "Some Neologisms from Recent Magazines," *American Speech*, Vol. VI, No. 4 (April, 1931), pp. 277–289. Other lists of the sort will be found in subsequent numbers of the same journal.

stood sponsor for them. When these deductions have been made, however, it is still surprising how many words may be attributed, with at least a fair show of reason, to the creative genius of a man whose identity is known. Enough has been learned, at any rate, of the part of individuals in word-making to justify some review of the matter here.[36]

The etymological meaning of *poet* is "maker," and in a very literal sense some of the great English poets may be said to be the *makers* of the language. To the first great poet, however, though in the past he was often called both the maker of the language and the father of our poetry, very few words indeed can be definitely assigned. The assumption is that Chaucer was the first to borrow and give literary currency to a great many French words; but when it comes to definite evidence, very little can be produced. All that can be said is that many words—for example, these in *-tion: attention, duration, fraction,* and *position*—are first found in Chaucer and not again until the sixteenth century, and that a number of these, in all probability, are to be reckoned his. Doctor Bradley (with whom one disagrees with considerable trepidation) observes further that there is little evidence that even Chaucer's phrases have passed into common use: "Hardly any of his phrases—except 'After the scole of Stratford-atte-Bowe'—can be said to have become part of the language . . . "[37] Professor Weekley, echo-

[36] Accounts of the "makers of English," to all of which the present summary is indebted, will be found as Chapter VI in Bradley, Chapter V in Smith (*English Language*), and Chapter VI in Ernest Weekley, *English Language.* Mr. Smith's "Needed Words" and George Gordon's "Shakespeare's English" (*S. P. E. Tracts,* Nos. XXXI and XXIX) are also useful.

[37] P. 227.

ing this without the qualifications that Bradley gives it, states roundly, "Except for the 'Stratford-atte-Bowe' cliché, he is never quoted," and goes so far as to explain the assumed lack of quotability by saying, "Chaucer wrote his *Canterbury Tales* very much in the same words that he would have used, barring the rime, in relating them to his friends round the fireside, and probably seldom paused to polish a line . . . " This, as all good Chaucerians know, is utter nonsense. And surely, to produce evidence of Chaucer's phrases in common use, it is not only the professed Chaucerian who is familiar with other phrases from the *Prologue* than "the Stratford-atte-Bowe cliché"—for example, "a verray parfit gentil knight" and "as fresh as is the month of May," from the first two portraits. The novelist who entitled a recent book *Up Rose Emily* was presumably counting on a general familiarity with the delightful line in the *Knights Tale*,

Up roos the sonne, and up roos Emylye;

and the poet who has used the title *Now with His Love* is obviously assuming that his readers can supply the other half-line—"now in his colde grave" (from the same tale).[38]

Chaucer's contemporary, John Wyclif, evidently performed a similar service for the English vocabulary, but his borrowings were quite naturally from the Latin of the Vulgate Bible rather than from French. His adaptations of Latin words seem, on the evidence of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, perhaps more numerous than Chaucer's French borrowings, and the fact that he appends notes explaining many such words would indi-

[38] Likewise, evidence of a belief that some of the lines of the *Prologue* are generally familiar may be found in these two titles: Elizabeth Roberts's *Jingling in the Wind* and Bliss Perry's *And Gladly Teach*.

cate that he considered them novelties. Another famous fourteenth-century version of the Bible, that of John Purvey, likewise introduced noteworthy innovations. The two translators of the early sixteenth century, Tindale and Coverdale, working either from the original Greek and Hebrew, from the German version of Martin Luther, or from recent Latin renderings of the original tongues, often created new English equivalents that replaced older words reproducing the Vulgate rather than the Greek or Hebrew text. To Coverdale we are indebted for such familiar terms as *lovingkindness, tender mercy, blood-guiltiness, noonday, morning-star,* and *kind-hearted;* and to Tindale for *peacemaker, long-suffering, broken-hearted, stumbling-block,* and the first literary use of *beautiful.*

The great King James version of 1611 retained much of the vocabulary that had been established through the long tradition of English Biblical translation preceding it, including a good deal that was archaic in the early seventeenth century. It is therefore less notable for innovations than for perpetuating words that would otherwise have fallen into disuse. Since the English people have known the King James Bible as they have known no other book, it is not surprising that its diction has impressed itself upon common speech to an overwhelming degree. Shakespearean phrases are the only rivals—and they tend, on the whole, to be more "literary"—for the hundreds of words and groups of words from this source that are familiar counters in the currency of Modern English. To illustrate, let us observe these quotations from the shortest of the gospels—that according to St. Mark—limiting ourselves strictly to the briefer of familiar phrases (it might be added that some

of them are even more familiar, perhaps in a slightly different wording, from their appearance elsewhere in the Bible): "new wine in old bottles," "house divided against itself," "light under a bushel," "clothed and in his right mind," "virtue had gone out of him," "shake the dust off your feet," "a millstone about his neck," "the tables of the moneychangers," "a den of thieves," "the stone which the builders rejected," "the image and superscription," "marrying or giving in marriage," "the widow's mite," "wars and rumors of wars," "Lo, here and lo, there," "Ye have the poor with you always," and "the hour is come."

To return from the translators of the Bible to those other "makers" of English, the great poets. Spenser, Chaucer's successor in the imperial line, is noteworthy, like the translators of the Bible of 1611, for preserving expressions that had become archaic or even obsolete in his own day. This statement of the case, however, is insufficient, for it is clear that he resorted also to the use of dialect and to deliberate invention. He may be called the first English writer who, apart from the necessities of translation, self-consciously created words. Most of his creations, of course, have perished; and a few that are still familiar are likely to have an archaic air, like *drowsihead*, *elfin*, and *dreariment*. *Blatant* and *braggadocio* perhaps should not be so described; and certainly not *briny*, *horsy*, and *shiny*, if these are his,[39] as seems likely. The general character of Spenser's contribution to the language may be suggested by the fact that he kept alive the significance of *y-*, the weakened prefix of the past participle; the forms *ycladd* (clothed) and *y-drad* (dreaded), occurring in the first two stanzas of the

[39] George Gordon, "Shakespeare's English," p 272.

Faerie Queene, are typical of the archaic verbal forms scattered lavishly throughout the poem. Without them, perhaps archaisms (like *y-clept* and *hight*) that are still occasionally used would be quite unintelligible.

Shakespeare's supremacy in word-making is as unquestionable as his supremacy in other aspects of the use of language. Doctor Bradley, however, expresses a useful caution when he points out that the number of new words attributed to Shakespeare (because not yet found in an earlier writer) undoubtedly exaggerates the extent of his verbal innovations. Nor do the illustrations that Bradley cites of presumably Shakespearean creations—e.g., *control* (as a noun), *dwindle*, *homekeeping*, and *lonely*—seem especially characteristic. On the other hand, it would be strange if many a scene or a speech that is particularly Shakespearean in the inspired boldness of its conception, like the lines from *Macbeth* quoted in the preceding chapter, lacked invention in the use of words.[40] And, in fact, in these very lines, the words *multitudinous* and *incarnadine* (as a verb) are apparently new. We are perhaps on safer ground still when we call attention to the daring originality of Shakespeare's compounds; Bradley well observes that "Shakespeare abounds in splendid audacities, such as '*proud-pied* April,' 'a *heaven-kissing* hill,' 'the *world-without-end* hour.'"

On the whole, there is small reason to quarrel even with the more extravagant descriptions given by others who

[40] Professor George Gordon, in his admirable "Shakespeare's English" (*S. P. E. Tract No. XXIX*, 1928), calls attention not only to the "verbal audacity and word-creativeness" of Shakespeare, but to something that he feels has been more neglected: "his genius in the manipulation and development of meaning." To cite but a few of his quotations, Shakespeare was apparently the first to speak of *cudgeling* one's brain, *breathing* one's last, *backing* a horse, *catching* a meaning or a cold, and *getting* information or an ailment; and the first to call the world *dull*, an answer *abrupt*, speeches *flowery*, and plain faces *homely* (p. 267).

have studied Shakespeare's legacy to the language. Mr. Smith remarks that there are more new words in the plays "than in almost all the rest of the English poets put together," and Professor Weekley that "his contribution to our phraseology is ten times greater than that of any writer to any language in the history of the world." This is the less debatable if one is thinking not merely of individual words—since we have seen that the extent of Shakespeare's creativeness here is by no means certain—but of groups of words or phrases that are much more surely Shakespeare's and his only. The point is too generally familiar to require extensive illustration, but a brief list may not be out of place. The following quotations are from a *single* act of a *single* play (*Hamlet*, Act III), and a number of others might be added from the same source: "to be, or not to be," "that flesh is heir to," "consummation devoutly to be wished," "there's the rub," "this mortal coil," "the law's delay," "the undiscovered country," "the native hue of resolution," "the glass of fashion," "the observed of all observers," "trippingly on the tongue," "tear a passion to tatters," "it out-Herods Herod," "to hold . . . the mirror up to nature," "make the judicious grieve," "metal more attractive," "miching mallecho," "the lady doth protest too much," "as easy as lying," "pluck out the heart of my mystery," "very like a whale," "fool me to the top of my bent," "the very witching time of night," "it smells to heaven," "the primal eldest curse," "no relish of salvation," "a king of shreds and patches," and "hoist with his own petard."[41]

[41] As another and a curious illustration of the extent to which Shakespearean phrases are familiar, H. G. Castor points out in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, Vol. X, No. 13 (Oct. 14, 1933), p. 180, that

Milton's contribution both of new words and new phrases is evidently much less extensive than Shakespeare's, but often markedly characteristic. Words like *emblazoning*, *dimensionless*, *ensanguined*, *irradiance*, and *infinitude* have the eloquent sonority that might be expected of the poet of *Paradise Lost*. *Pandemonium*, a word that has later undergone a curious transference in meaning, is the name coined by Milton for the hall of the fallen angels; it obviously follows the analogy of *Pantheon*, as it has been noted that the very architecture of the building Milton describes likewise does. "The *anarch* old" is the splendidly descriptive phrase that Milton applies to the ruler of Chaos, that welter of warring elements. In quite another sphere, Milton coined the useful term *sensuous* to take the place of *sensual* after that word had taken on baser associations; it is the famous definition of poetry as "simple, *sensuous*, and passionate"—a noteworthy instance of sophisticated word-creation. It is well known that Milton is less "quotable" in short passages, not only than Shakespeare, but also than some poets of much smaller stature, such as Alexander Pope; it is not surprising, therefore, that his legacy of phrases that have become common property should be small. Everyone knows, however, a few Miltonic phrases, like "light fantastic toe" (*L'Allegro*), "dim religious light" (*Il Penseroso*), "writ large," "they also serve" (*Sonnets*), "His [God's] Englishmen," "not without dust and heat" (*Areopagitica*), "darkness visible," "human face divine," "fallen on evil days," and "confusion worse confounded" (*Paradise Lost*).

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from the nine and a half lines of *Macbeth* beginning "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow," nine recent book-titles have been taken. These include *All Our Yesterdays*, *A Walking Shadow*, *A Poor Player*, *Told by an Idiot*, [The] *Sound and* [the] *Fury*, and so on.

In later English poetry there is no one to compare with Shakespeare and Milton, in phrase-making as in other respects. The quotability of Pope, already alluded to, largely consists after all of well turned single lines or couplets that have become bits of proverbial wisdom without being particularly notable examples of *verbal* inventiveness. Perhaps the one later poet who even remotely approaches Shakespeare as a "lord of language" is John Keats. When the "Shakespearean" qualities of Keats are referred to, it is presumably first of all his ability in word- and phrase-making that dictates the use of the term. Particularly in the creation of compounds, Keats, more than any other later poet, recalls Shakespeare; it has been well remarked that some of these compounds—the tiger moth's *deep-damasked* wings, and the nightingale's *full-throated* ease—are themselves poems in miniature. There is of course a Spenserian streak in Keats; and like Spenser, he in some measure "made" his own language. As with Spenser too, his archaisms have scarcely taken permanent root, and his own innovations—like the words *aurorean* and *beamily* referred to by Mr. Smith—are not always felicitous. Keats's attitude toward words on the whole more nearly resembles the Renaissance feeling that language is for the individual to deal with and create as he sees fit than does that of any other poet of later times. Again it is not only in the single word but in the phrase that his memorable creativeness is to be seen. In the "astounding four lines" (as Hilaire Belloc has called them) that conclude the seventh stanza of the *Ode to a Nightingale*, he has created phrases—"alien corn," "magic casements," "perilous seas," and "fairy lands forlorn"—that are a permanent part of the language.

The Victorian poets contributed relatively little to word-creation, though Tennyson's compounds are sometimes exceedingly happy: *evil-starred* is one that has been widely adopted. *Fairy tale* and *moonlit* are also said to be innovations of Tennyson's, and "rift in the lute" is a familiar phrase that we owe to him. Browning's creations have a characteristic grotesqueness that limits their usefulness: *crumblement*, *febricity*, and *garnishry* are typical. *Artistry* is a similar formation of his that has, not without protest, won a more permanent place. More than can be said about Tennyson or Browning as word-makers might be said about an American poet of the nineteenth century, Walt Whitman. Whitman, of course, was convinced that "the new vistas need a new tongue"—in a word, an American language—and he did not hesitate to include in his poetry even the less polished of current Americanisms. In individual word-creations, however, which his theory of poetic diction would also justify, he dealt with somewhat surprising conservatism.[42] Many of the innovations he introduced—words like *camerado*, *libertad*, and *Americano*—smack of one influence particularly, the Spanish of the American Southwest. It is quite conceivable that the future historian of the language will have to give much more attention to word-creation by poets of the twentieth century than to word-creation by poets of the nineteenth. As yet, however, in spite of pronunciamentos by poets who would arrogate to themselves the right to make their own words (as well as their own punctuation, sentence-structure, and so forth), there is but little evidence of noteworthy achievement in this direction.

[42] See Louise Pound, "Walt Whitman's Neologisms," *American Mercury*, Vol. IV (February, 1925), pp. 199–201.

Our account of the "makers" of English has so far dealt chiefly with the poets. Prose-writers too have sometimes been responsible for the introduction of many words that bear the stamp of individual creation. Before the Modern English period, Wyclif, Malory, and Caxton are noteworthy names, not only in literary history in general, but in this special aspect of the use of language; and a similar observation might be made of such sixteenth-century writers as Sir Thomas More, John Lyly, and Robert Greene. The two last-named writers represent particularly the Elizabethan love of sheer oddity and the Elizabethan experimental attitude toward language. Perhaps the best illustration that can be given, however, of the prose-writer who creates his own vocabulary is a writer of the seventeenth century, whose name figures more often in the pages of the *Oxford English Dictionary* than that of almost any other author: Sir Thomas Browne.

Browne's Latinisms are not always individualized. Other English writers of the Renaissance might perhaps equally well have taken from Latin such words as *clamation* (shouting), *dissentaneous* (contrary), *donative* (gift), *fictile* (moulded), *exenteration* (disemboweling), *incrassated* (thickened), *ligation* (suspension), and *prescious* (foreknowing).[43] In Browne's time, that is to say, a good deal of the Latin vocabulary was potentially English —in the sense that the right to seize upon a Latin word and, with perhaps some slight change of ending, use it like

[43] These have all been cited as Browne's, but the evidence of the *Oxford English Dictionary* makes this attribution, for several of them, more than dubious. However, it is of course likely enough that Browne took over a Latin word independently, even when an earlier use of it in English has been found

an English one was generally taken for granted. Browne does not always use the Latin (or Greek) coinage because the English vocabulary is insufficient; sometimes, he seems to add the English equivalent by way of translation ("*improperations* or terms of scurrility," "*areopagy* and dark tribunal of our hearts"). Quite often, however, the Latin term follows; and though it adds nothing to the sense, it is abundantly justified by the rhythm of the phrase ("one common name and *appellation*," "the hill and *asperous* way"). Many of his original creations have not found another user. A few characteristic ones are *favaginous* (honey-combed), *paralogical* (fallacious), *digladiation* (fighting with swords), *quodlibetically* (in the manner of scholastic disputation), *pensile* (hanging), and *exantlation* (exhaustion).[44] But equally characteristic creations by him have found a permanent place in the language: *antediluvian*, *hallucination*, *insecurity*, *incontrovertible*, *precarious*, and *retrogression*. Moreover, at least a few of Browne's innovations have lost all sense of the merely ornamental; *electricity*, *literary*, and *medical* are, from any point of view, a necessary part of Modern English. If the later history of Browne's word-coinages is a case of the survival of the fittest, the extent both of the original list and of the survivors still offers eloquent testimony to his genius as a maker of words.

Browne may be taken as an extreme example of the free use that seventeenth-century writers made of Latin as a source of new English words. To some extent, the

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[44] These are cited by Sir Edmund Gosse in the chapter "Language and Influence" of his *English Men of Letters* volume on Browne. Gosse adversely criticizes the theory of word-creation that they imply; for a view that takes issue with Gosse, see Lytton Strachey's essay on Browne in *Books and Characters*.

use of French (more for direct borrowing, however, than for English adaptation) in the Restoration and in the early eighteenth century offers a parallel in the literature that directly follows the age of Browne and Milton. But though both Dryden and Pope, the dominating figures in this literature, have been credited with many new words, it is evident that what we have called the "experimental" attitude toward language common to the Renaissance has gone forever. Doctor Johnson, whose style admittedly is very largely based on that of Browne, follows his master at a distance in this matter, but does nevertheless introduce an appreciable number of Latinisms on his own account. Mr. Smith makes the interesting point[45] that authors of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries particularly would seem to have invented (or imported) exactly the words most appropriate to their own characteristics. Thus *fiddledede* and *irascibility* are attributed by the *Oxford English Dictionary* to Johnson, *etiquette*, *friseur*, and *persiflage* to Lord Chesterfield, *bored* and *blasé* to Byron, and *idealism* and *propriety* (in their usual modern senses) respectively to Shelley and to Miss Burney. It is likewise fitting, in a somewhat different way, that so much of the modern vocabulary of politics and government—such words as *colonization*, *diplomacy*, *electioneering*, *federalism*, and *municipality*—should be credited to Edmund Burke, one of the few great word-creators of the eighteenth century and, like Johnson and Browne, an exponent of the ornate rather than the simple style of prose. With these creations of Burke's should be compared the conscious coinages of Jeremy Bentham—words like *minimize*, *detachable*, *deteri-*

[45] P. 119.

oration, meliorability, cross-examination, and *exhaustive.* It is interesting to note that Bentham specifically argued in favor of deliberately creating new words.[46]

In the nineteenth century, English words are created in greatest quantity, in all probability, by two Scotsmen—Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Carlyle. "Creation," perhaps, is scarcely the word to describe Scott's services in this way most accurately, for his most characteristic innovations are rather revivals of old words or importations of dialect terms.[47] Thus, there is no record of the literary use of the Shakespearean words *fitful, borderer, thews,* and *arm-gaunt,* and the phrases "towering passion," "coign of vantage," and "yeoman's service" between Shakespeare's original use and Scott's reintroduction of them. More important is Scott's turning to the uses of literature (in his poems of course as well, but more especially in the *Waverley Novels*) many a word or turn of phrase that, until his use of it, had been confined to the dialect of his native land. These include such splendidly "Romantic" words as *raid, gruesome, uncanny, glamour,* and *grammerye* (the last two, variants of the same word, which we have also in a third form in the now commonplace *grammar*). Revivals that may be from older literature rather than popular dialect are *smouldering, weird* (in the sense of "fate"—Macbeth's "weird sisters"—especially in the phrase "dree one's weird"), and *fiery cross.* It is an odd circumstance that several of Scott's revivals or reintroductions have taken hold particularly in the United States. Mark Twain, we

[46] See the note on his attitude by Professor Graham Wallas, *S. P. E. Tract No. XXXI,* pp. 333 and 334.

[47] Most of the illustrations in this paragraph are taken from Professor Weekley's article "Walter Scott and the English Language," *Atlantic Monthly* (Vol. 148), November, 1931.

may recall, attributed the blame for the Civil War to the vogue of Scott in the South. However this may be, it is at any rate curious that the special application to political use of *henchman* and *stalwart* is peculiar to America; that *slogan* (war cry) in its advertising significance is much more American than British; and that the modern currency of *blackmail* is due to American practice. Finally, what seem to be innovations of Scott's, in the stricter sense of original creations, are *free-lance*, *red-handed*, *passage of arms*, and *Norseman*.

Carlyle's coinages are less romantic than eccentric. Like Scott, he levied upon the Scots tongue for some of his new words: *feckless*, *lilt* (in the sense of "cadence"), and *outcome* had before him been confined to dialect speech or writing. But far more characteristic of his fantastic audacity in word-creation are such outlandish coinages as *Bedlamism*, *dandiacal*, *grumbly*, and *gigmanity*. The genesis of the last is interesting and typical.[48] Like Matthew Arnold's "Wragg is in custody," *gigmanity* was suggested to Carlyle by the proceedings at a trial—one that has left other traces in English literature as well. What had fallen under Carlyle's eye was the report of the examination of a witness testifying as to the character of William Weare, for whose murder John Thurtell was being tried. The dialog between counsel and witness was as follows:

"What sort of a person was Mr. Weare?"
"He was always a respectable person."
"What do you mean by 'respectable'?"
"He kept a gig."

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[48] This account of *gigmanity* is indebted to John O'London, *Is It Good English?* New York, (Putnam), 1925, pp. 44 and 45.

Thenceforth, as in the perfervid close of *The French Revolution*, *gigs* were for Carlyle the symbols, and *gigmanity* the sum total of the impulses of a smugly respectable society.

Beyond mere idiosyncrasy, however, Carlyle's innovations in words were of value in restoring to English some little measure of its earlier freedom in compound-making. His compounds were on the German model, and he used the hyphen freely to join words that are not commonly so joined in English, though their German equivalents may be compounds. A great many, like the "*mischief-joy*, which is also a *justice-joy*" referred to by Doctor Bradley (the former the equivalent of the German *Schadenfreude*), have seemed mere Teutonisms that are distinctly not English formations, and they have not won other users. A few, like *swansong* (also an adaptation directly from German), have become generally current. He is also given part credit, with Matthew Arnold, for naturalizing the German *Philister* as English *Philistine* (materialist). A few other miscellaneous words—*decadent*, *environment*, and *self-help*—are coinages of Carlyle's that seem to have no taint of the eccentric. Some of his phrases, too, are still in familiar use: "the unspeakable Turk" and "the dismal science" (economics) have the true Carlylean ring.

Since Carlyle, there has been perhaps no single word-creator whose coinages have added any considerable number of words to the vocabulary. It is conceivable that such a revolt from the usual conventionalities of language as that which James Joyce has fathered, in *Ulysses* and elsewhere, will bear fruit of this kind. At present, all that can be said is that the reading public, taken by and large, looks with some distrust at a per-

formance like Joyce's—in respect to diction as well as to other matters. We may very possibly come to the point of being willing to grant to the individual author the right to make for himself a vocabulary that shall be more adequate to the expression of his own thought than the more familiar counters of English can be. Perhaps there will be no quarrel, however, with the statement that so far, the more common reaction to the unconventional treatment of word, punctuation, and sentence by such writers as Joyce, E. E. Cummings, and Gertrude Stein is one of either merriment or scorn.[49]

There is good reason, however, to feel that to revolt against convention in language is on the whole a healthy sign. No doubt Euphuism and Arcadianism were greeted with laughter in some quarters, but we have come to feel that there is an admirable as well as a ridiculous aspect of the Elizabethan juggling with words. Incidentally, such parallels may serve to indicate that there is nothing absolutely novel about the revolt against convention in our own day; it was well remarked, not long ago, that there was far more ingenuity, in a not altogether dissimilar direction, in the *Euphues* three and a half centuries ago than there is in the last volume of E. E. Cummings. Speaking generally, writers are more likely to be too conventional than the reverse in their attitude toward language. They feel the need for a new word or a new turn of phrase without doing anything to supply that need. Logan Pearsall Smith's suggestive article on "Needed Words"[50] catalogs some of the gaps in the English vocabulary, and Roger Fry's addendum lists the

[49] See Max Eastman's essay "The Cult of Unintelligibility" for an amusing presentation of the case against "inter-cerebral art."

[50] *S.P.E. Tract No. XXI.*

specific needs for words in connection with art. Mr. Smith's words on what men of letters have done in the past and should do more frequently in our own time may well be quoted; these services, he says, should include "the naturalization or translation of needed foreign words, the creation of new words or the discovery and revival of old ones, the authorization of vivid words of popular creation, the reclamation of old meanings, and the establishment of new discriminations."[51]

How one useful coinage may lead to another is suggested by a remark in the pamphlet just quoted. Mr. Smith alludes to Lord Chesterfield's complaint that English possessed no word to express the meaning of the French *mœurs*, since "*manners* said too little and *morals* too much." Chesterfield's suggestion was that English should adopt the Ciceronian word *decorum* to stand for the idea of "propriety of behavior." Mr. Smith points out that, as a matter of fact, *decorum* had already been added to the vocabulary when Chesterfield wrote, but that what is still lacking is a word to stand for another sense of the French *mœurs:* "the ways of living, usages, customs, and prejudices of a particular person or class or epoch." He adds in a footnote that the word *folkways* is sometimes used by American anthropologists in this last sense. Surely one can say more than this, for since *Folkways*[52] was used as the title of W. G. Sumner's great book, it has met very wide acceptance by students of sociology, as has also *mores*, another innovation of Sum-

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[51] The last point is prompted by the article on "Differentiation" in Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, in which the author lists not only discriminations that are in process of being established, but also others that might profitably be worked out in the future.

[52] Ginn, 1907.

ner's. And *folkways* begets analogical formations. Professor Herbert Shenton—incidentally, a sociologist primarily—uses the term *speechways*[53] to stand for a similar meaning with reference to language. *Airways*, however different in meaning, is probably suggested in form by the same model, and likewise *Peaceways*.[54]

The general attitude toward word-creation has undoubtedly undergone a change since Renaissance times, and perhaps more particularly in the last half-century. One of the original purposes of the Society for Pure English[55] was to encourage authors in an activity that their predecessors have engaged in but that has been increasingly given up in recent times. It was pointed out that most of the new additions to the vocabulary are the deliberate creations of men of science, many of whom are ill-fitted for the task, and that these new additions are but rarely formed out of English material. Men of letters are on the whole more prone than men of science to feel that vocabulary is not a proper field for experimentation; yet, from the very nature of their tastes and their calling, they should be precisely the ones from whom useful and felicitous coinages might be expected. Mr. Leon Mead[56] found that many American authors to whom he put the question of what words they had coined repudiated the idea that they had ever been guilty of such a practice, in much the same terms they might have used had they been accused of counterfeiting

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[53] *International Communication*, p. 46: "This approach to the problem might well be called a study of the speechways of mankind."

[54] The name of a society to promote the cause of international peace (advertisement in *Atlantic Monthly* for July, 1933).

[55] See the original prospectus (1913), reprinted after the Great War as part of *Tract I* (1919).

[56] *Word-Coinage*, New York (Crowell), 1902.

the currency of the land. Some authors, however, and many of the scientists who were also consulted, took a quite different attitude, that of pride in their handiwork. The actual words submitted were chiefly compounds of Latin and Greek elements, formed along classical lines; some—like *metropoliarchy* and *deanthropomorphization*—are remarkably awkward and repellent. English elements and English processes of derivation were markedly few.

One may regret that the task of coining new words has been so largely abandoned by authors and left so largely to scientists, to the lower order of journalistic humorists (whose self-conscious efforts at novelty are frequently pitifully cheap), and to the often anonymous creators of popular speech. Nevertheless there are not a few neologisms, of known and reputable authorship, that have been brought into use within recent years, and that have sometimes won widespread adoption. It may be of interest to go back a little and supplement our account of the makers of English by a miscellaneous list of word-creations by individuals within the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To the more important (from the present point of view) names in nineteenth-century literature that have already been mentioned may be added those of Coleridge (*pessimism*), Macaulay (*constituency*), Darwin (*atoll*), Huxley (*agnostic*), and O. W. Holmes (*anesthesia*). It is more difficult to find creations of authors still alive or recently dead that are at all well known. No later humorist, for example, seems to have been able to take up the mantle of Lewis Carroll, in this respect as well as in others; for not only are the blends *chortle* and *galumphing* immediately intelligible, but a number of others, of less evident etymology—like *brillig*, *jabberwock*, *frabjous*—are almost equally current coin.

Spoof, an isolated creation of Arthur Roberts's, is even more secure. Gelett Burgess has contributed a number of novel words like these, "hot from the depths of necessity"; but they can scarcely be said to have won a popular response, meritorious as *snosh* (vain talk) and *jujasm* ($<$*jubilant* + *orgasm?*) (expansion of sudden joy) may be. *Panjandrum*, a nonsense word of an earlier era—invented, it is said, by the actor Foote in a passage of similar arbitrary creations put together to test the word-memory of a fellow actor—has met a happier fate. Christopher Morley, among present-day American writers, typifies an attitude toward word-creation that is no longer common, even though what seems to be the coinage he is most proud of—*kinsprit*, a blend of *kindred* and *spirit*—has not won really wide use. Many of his innovations—like *infracaninophile* (friend of the underdog)—are obviously humorous nonce-words, made "rather for show than wear." Among the few individual coinages that are at once comparatively recent and widely known may be listed Bernard Shaw's *superman* (a hybrid adaptation of the German *Übermensch*, and the inspiration of other *super-* compounds), Admiral A. T. Mahan's *sea-power*, George Eastman's *kodak*, Gelett Burgess's *blurb*, Gamaliel Bradford's *psychography*, and W. E. Woodward's *debunking*.[57] Henshaw Ward's *thob*[58] and *thobbing* seem not to have met the response that possibly they merit.

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[57] According to F. L. Allen, in *Only Yesterday*, New York (Harper's), 1931, p. 236.

[58] "Most of the human efforts to reason have been passionate *thoughts* about *opinions* that were *believed* before the reasoning began. So I propose to put together the initials of those three words to coin the verb that we need—'thob.'"—*Builders of Delusion*, New York (Bobbs-Merrill), 1931, p. 127. *Thob* appears in the 1934 Webster's, labeled, curiously, as "slang."

Why do authors hesitate to coin words and, when they do, why do others hesitate to take up what seems to be an attractive and useful addition to the vocabulary? The answer to both questions would appear to be in part that at present, the usual attitude to the dictionary forbids. An author looks in the dictionary to see if a word that suggests itself is there, fails to find it—and discards it forthwith in favor of one that enjoys lexicographical sanction. A reader meets a word that is new to him, wonders if it is in the dictionary, does not find it—and silently registers his disapproval of the effrontery of the writer. Yet, as has been well observed by Jespersen,[59] "A word may have been used scores of times without finding its way into any dictionary[60]—and a word may be an excellent one even if it has never been used before by any human being." Suppose the reader is unable to find *somewhen* in a dictionary. Is the effect of the following sentence by Lowes Dickinson in any way damaged?—"You had a faith in the significance of your ideal, somewhere and *somewhen*, though where and when grew more doubtful as you grew older."[61] This is the sort of thing that, on the contrary, should be encouraged. The analogy of *somewhere* carries neatly over to *somewhen*. In like fashion, as someone has suggested, we ought to have *whenceabouts*, as a parallel to *whereabouts*. There would then be no excuse for the appropriation of the French *provenance*, or the use of the awkward Latin-

[59] *Growth and Structure*, p. 162.

[60] The present writer, in preparing a magazine article, was unable to find dictionary authority for *outmoded*, though he was quite certain it was far from a novelty. The word expressed his meaning more completely than "out of fashion" and seemed decidedly preferable, in an English context, to *démodé*. Was he wrong in using it?

[61] *After Two Thousand Years*, New York (Norton), 1931, p. 115.

ism *provenience* (the latter sometimes found in English dictionaries).

A rather large qualification may perhaps be added to the impression that has been conveyed of a general poverty of invention and a widespread reluctance, on the part of common usage today, to accept what individual coinages have offered. The field of politics seems to offer something of an exception to the general trend. A recent magazine article[62] compiles an impressive list (rather, to be sure, of phrases than of single words) of slogans and catchwords that have marked American political campaigns and identified political leaders[63] and movements from Colonial times until the present day. In contemplating such a collection, one realizes the force of Stevenson's aphorism to the effect that "Man shall not live by bread alone but principally by catchwords." Even in this field, however, only a few out-and-out coinages are to be found—for example, Theodore Roosevelt's *chinafication* (but not Harding's *normalcy*). Usually, the trick of arousing enthusiasm or inspiring contempt is accomplished by giving particular application to a phrase that is scarcely a novelty. Cleveland's "innocuous desuetude" shows more inventiveness, perhaps, than Wilson's "new freedom" or Franklin Roosevelt's "new deal"[64] and "forgotten man"—especially in view of the fact that the last is a resurrection of a phrase of W. G. Sumner's. But in general it may be argued that the political leaders who have appealed most persuasively to

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[62] "Slogan Cavalcade," by Vladimir Potts (*Vanity Fair*, April, 1933).

[63] E.g., "the plumed knight," "the happy warrior," "the schoolmaster in the White House," "the great engineer," "the great commoner," and "the peerless leader."

[64] President Roosevelt has recently confessed that "new deal" comes from Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*.

great masses of people have also been the most accomplished phrase-makers. One thinks of Bryan's "cross of gold," of Theodore Roosevelt's "big stick," "strenuous life," "malefactors of great wealth," and of Wilson's "self-determination," "peace without victory," and "safe for democracy." Disraeli was on sound ground when he observed that "with words we govern men."

In the foregoing discussion of the individual and the word, one interesting relationship has so far been neglected: the use that has been made of the names of individuals in creating new words. Consideration of this may appropriately conclude our survey of word-making. One group that immediately suggests itself is that made up of scientists' names that have been employed as units of measurement, especially in electricity; the international character of such terms is implied in the fact that *ohm* was originally a German personal name, *watt* a Scotch name, *faraday* an English name, *volt* an Italian name, and *ampere* a French name.[65] *Joule*, a similar transference of a personal name to a term of measurement in physics, has had a recently renewed vogue in the jargon of technocracy. Miscellaneous examples in other fields of the taking over of a surname, without any change, and using it as a common noun are *boycott, davenport, derrick, hansom, mackintosh, pompadour, raglan, sandwich, shrapnel, silhouette, theremin,* and *zeppelin.* Occasionally, Christian names have had a similar use; for example, *timothy* (hay) (from Timothy Hansen, its originator), *guy* (from Guy Fawkes), and *bobby* (policeman) (from Sir *Robert* Peel, reorganizer of the London force). Sometimes, the name is used

[65] Aiken, *English, Present and Past*, p. 83.

unchanged as a verb; "to *lynch*" and "to *burke*" (reminiscent of the infamous Burke and Hare murders in Edinburgh a century ago) are cases in point. *Boycott* of course is also a verb, and it deserves mention besides as having a European currency, having been naturalized in German, Dutch, French, and Russian[66] (in the last two languages, with separate forms for the noun). More commonly, the proper name is fitted with the suffix *-ize* for use as a verb: *pasteurize, macadamize, bowdlerize, mercerize,* and *mesmerize* are typical. Such words, of course, have often but a temporary vogue: *hooverize,* for example, refers to a policy advocated by the former president in his war-time capacity as Food Administrator and now forgotten, and *fletcherize* to the scheme of chewing each morsel of food a specified number of times—advice given by a certain Doctor Fletcher many years ago.[67] Though some of these terms are used with no derogatory significance, it would seem that in coining such a word, a very common intention is to hold the individual up to ridicule. Thus, *comstockery,* a word created by Bernard Shaw just before the attempted suppression of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in New York in 1905,[68] definitely connotes a ridiculous degree of prudishness. Somewhat similarly, a *spoonerism,* immortalizing the memory of the Reverend W. A. Spooner (d. 1930), means an unintentional but humorous distortion of the words in a phrase, as when "Is the dean busy?" becomes "Is the bean dizzy?"

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[66] John O'London, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

[67] Not long since, however, Doctor Fletcher's death was reported in the daily press—the cause was acute indigestion.

[68] *Cf.* Heywood Broun and Margaret Leech, *Anthony Comstock, Roundsman of the Lord,* New York (Boni), 1927, pp. 18 and 231.

Spoonerism, the term last mentioned, is very likely suggested by *malapropism,* the usual label of a kindred blunder in the use of words—caused, however, by ignorance rather than inadvertence. The word itself, as is well-known, comes from the name of the Mrs. Malaprop in Sheridan's *Rivals* who was addicted to a "nice derangement of epitaphs." It may be taken as typical of the use that has not infrequently been made of the names of persons who have existed only in literature. *Pander,* from Pandarus, the uncle of the heroine in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* who acts as go-between for the lovers, has passed into common use, in a sense which Pandarus himself regretfully foresaw. It is something of a tribute to Chaucer's influence that only in English has this development taken place; there are no corresponding terms utilizing the name of Pandarus in other European languages, though the story itself has had an international vogue. In *lilliputian* and *quixotic* we have adjectives of similarly literary ancestry. A very special kind of immortality is thus bestowed upon the creations of authors. Its final mark, perhaps, is the transformation of the initial capital into a small letter.

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CHAPTER XI

The Changing Meanings and Values of Words

IT is not the purpose of the present chapter to discuss the philosophical and psychological implications of meaning. Both philosophy and psychology necessarily enter into any investigation of the question, as is being increasingly recognized by present-day students of linguistics. As yet, however, it can scarcely be said that the "meaning of meaning" has been definitely set forth. Not even a summary of the trend of contemporary studies in this field can be attempted here.[1] Only a single aspect of the meaning of words will be considered at all; that aspect is change, as its affects English words. The conception with which we begin is that the meaning of words is as unstable, as completely subject to alteration, as is the sound or the outward form or symbolism.

It would seem that this concept of meaning as subject to change by usage should be self-evident. Yet one constantly encounters an attitude that completely

[1] Of recent works in English, the reader's attention may be directed to Ogden, C. K., and Richards, I. A., *The Meaning of Meaning*, New York (Harcourt, Brace), 1923; De Laguna, G., *Speech, Its Function and Development*, New Haven (Yale University Press), 1927; Gardiner, A. H., *The Theory of Speech and Language*, New York (Oxford), 1932; Graff, W. L., *Language and Languages*, New York (Appleton), 1932; Stern, G., *Meaning and Change of Meaning*, Gothenburg, Sweden (Wettergren and Kerber), 1931; and Bloomfield, L., *Language*, New York (Holt), 1933. Stuart Chase's *The Tyranny of Words*, New York (Harcourt, Brace), 1938, is a popular introduction to semantics.

ignores it. There is a prevalent notion, not so remotely akin to the Greek belief in the *etymon,* that the way to find out what a word means is to find out what it once meant. This is particularly true in respect to borrowed words in English, the belief evidently being that the meaning of the word in contemporary English and the meaning of the Latin or Greek word from which the English word is derived must be one and the same. A little reflection should show that an appeal to etymology in order to establish the present meaning of the word is as untrustworthy as an appeal to spelling in order to establish its present pronunciation. And for a reason that is almost exactly parallel: change of *meaning* is likely to have altered the etymological sense, which is thereby rendered archaic or obsolete, just as change of *sound* is likely to be unrecorded in the "antiquarian" spelling that so frequently characterizes Modern English. The study of etymology has great value and interest—a point to which we shall later return—but its usefulness in settling the question of what a word means is subject to considerable qualification.

Let us see what results when one ignores the idea that a word may change its meaning, and appeals to its etymology in order to determine its present meaning. A handbook on "correct English"[2] sets forth the following dictum: "*Dilapidated* . . . Said of a building or other structure. But the word is from the Latin *lapis,* a stone, and cannot properly be used of any but a stone

[2] *Write It Right,* by Ambrose Bierce, New York (Neale), 1928. The work is well worth investigating as a striking demonstration of what pedantry, combined with ignorance of linguistic processes, will do for one. To much of it, a witty definition of Bierce's own is curiously applicable: "*positive*—mistaken at the top of one's voice."

structure." One might just as reasonably argue that because *candidate* is related to the Latin *candidus* (white), it cannot properly be used of an aspirant for political office unless he is clothed in a suit of white linen (or other white material). More clearly, even, one might protest that *holiday* properly describes Christmas or Easter, but should never be used of Independence Day or Thanksgiving; or that *bonfire* should not be applied except where the combustible material is *bone*. These arguments are not much more grotesque than some that have been seriously maintained in defense of an etymological crotchet, while ignoring the possibility of change of meaning.

The fact is that for words in common and popular use, what the word once meant makes no difference whatever, and to know its etymology ordinarily helps not at all in determining its present use. Words, after all, are for the most part purely conventional symbols for ideas. They mean exactly what those who are using them intend them to mean—which may be something widely different from their "essential" or etymological meaning. This principle, to be sure, is somewhat altered with reference to "learned" words, which in the very nature of the case have a more restricted circulation. Here, convention has decreed that the etymology is of more importance; he who uses a definitely learned word does so at the risk of a more rational criticism if he uses it unlearnedly. It is difficult, of course, to say when a word is definitely learned. *Averse to*, for example, is a phrase in fairly general and fairly reputable use, though purists still shudder at the thought of following "turned from" (the etymological sense of *averse*) with the incongruous *to;* many users, however,

apprehend the meaning simply as "opposed," and see no reason why *to* should not be used. *Oblivious to* is distinctly more dubious. It seems perhaps more reasonable to expect that he who uses *oblivious* should be aware that its "essential" meaning is "forgetful" (or even that *obliviscor* is followed by the genitive), and that the phrase should be *oblivious of*, like *forgetful of* rather than like *blind to*. Evidently the general principle, though admittedly difficult to apply with consistency in practice, is that the more restricted the use of the word, the more it behooves the user to employ it with a consciousness of its precise etymological meaning.

For most words, it is clear that we have to reckon with a meaning that is variable rather than constant and that may have strayed widely from what the etymology of the word would suggest. Change of meaning, however, though usually unpredictable, is not utterly arbitrary; as we shall see in a moment, it often proceeds along familiar paths and in directions that are well known. Nor should we think of change of meaning as a phenomenon that is peculiar to the English language. It is reasonable to suppose that English is particularly subject to it, and that semantic changes, like both inflectional and phonetic changes, have occurred in English in a more extreme way than in many other languages. Changes of all three kinds are alike peculiarly characteristic of the free development of English. Cognate words in English and German are often widely different in meaning, and the difference is most commonly the result of some radical change in the meaning of the English word—though cases of the opposite kind, in which the English word has stood still

and the German one changed, or even of a third type, in which both have changed, are by no means lacking. A few examples of the characteristic English shift in meaning (while the German cognate retains the old meaning) will be given. *Schlagen* and *slay* are originally the same word, but the German word retains the general meaning of "smite" or "strike" while the English word has "specialized" to mean "strike with fatal consequences" or "kill." Notice, incidentally, to make the point that similar changes in meaning occur in other languages, how the unrelated Latin word *cædere* has specialized in precisely the same way as the English *slay*. *Knabe* is the cognate in German of Old English *cnapa* or *cnafa*, and has the same meaning, "boy"; but Modern English *knave* has a radically different one. Minor phonetic changes, especially the High German shift of consonants, of course go hand in hand with changes of meaning to obscure a cognate relationship that would otherwise be perfectly apparent.[3]

The changes of meaning with which it seems natural to begin are those that affect what we may call the "area" of the signification of the word. Words may undergo a narrowing or an enlarging of meaning: the processes usually called "specialization" and "generalization." Indeed, the same word may undergo both processes, at different stages of the development of its meaning. *Go*, for example, is a verb of motion that seems as general as possible in meaning, and presumably this is also the root meaning; early in its history in English, however, it must have specialized, for Old English *gan* sometimes means "walk," and in Middle Eng-

[3] *Cf.* p. 34.

lish *ryde or gon* (ride or walk) is a familiar formula. Although the present meaning is the generalized one, the specialization "walk" was still possible in the late seventeenth century, as we see in these phrases from Bunyan: "I am resolved to run when I can, to go when I cannot run, and to creep when I cannot go."[4] Borrowed words are quite as likely as native ones to undergo such transformations in meaning. *Virtue*[5] is connected with Latin *vir* (man). Thus, *virtue* first meant "manliness" in general; but its meaning later specialized to stand for the manly quality most in demand in the military state, namely "fortitude" or "warlike prowess" —the meaning familiar in Cæsar's *Commentaries*. But a still later Latin meaning is more comprehensive, and it was this very general meaning that was attached to *virtue* when it was borrowed in English through French. One possible specialization was "power," as in "Virtue had gone out of him," or even "magical power," as in "the virtue of the spell" or Milton's "virtuous ring and glass." More commonly, however, the word in English retained a general sense of "noble quality"—though more and more with reference to moral rather than to mental or physical characteristics. But another specialization limits its application to women; for example, "All the sons were brave, and all the daughters virtuous," where *virtuous* is equivalent to "chaste." "A woman's virtue" will today be interpreted in only the last sense. A curious evolution, indeed, when one recalls that the etymological meaning is "manliness."

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[4] Quoted by Bradley, p. 182.

[5] This history is given in greater detail in Greenough and Kittredge, *Words and Their Ways in English Speech*, pp. 241 and 242.

To proceed with illustrations of generalization and specialization as separate processes. Perhaps the extreme type of the one is that much used, and much abused,[6] group of "words that mean little or nothing, but may stand for almost anything."[7] The authors just quoted cite such words as *thing, business, concern, condition, matter, article,* and *circumstance;* to which we may add a great many others, like *character, nature,* and *proposition.* The broadening of meaning in the American use of *proposition* is paralleled in the present vogue of *gadget* (a recent importation from England) in lieu of a more accurately descriptive term, and in such other colloquialisms, prompted apparently by a lazy disinclination to search out the *mot juste,* as *jigger, thingumabob, doohickie, whatyoumaycallit,*[8] and so on. Further miscellaneous examples of generalizations of a more reputable sort are *picture,* once restricted, as the etymology would suggest (compare: the *Picts,* "painted ones"), to a "*painted* representation" of something seen, but now applicable to photograph, crayon drawing, and so forth; *butcher,* who once slew one animal only, the goat (Fr. *bouc*); the verb *sail,* which has been transferred to *steam* navigation, just as *drive* has been transferred to self-propelled vehicles; *injury,* which once was limited to "injustice"; *zest,* which meant "bit of lemon-

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[6] For this aspect of the matter, see R. W. Chapman's essay, "The Decay of Syntax," in *The Portrait of a Scholar,* New York (Oxford), 1922. Mr. Chapman is particularly severe on the modern use of *case* and *instance*—"the commonest and the most dangerous of a number of parasitic growths which are the dry rot of syntax."

[7] Greenough and Kittredge, p. 235.

[8] Louise Pound has collected more than one hundred such terms now current in popular speech: "American Indefinite Names," *American Speech,* Vol. VI, No. 4 (April, 1931), pp. 257–259.

peel"; *chest,* which usually meant "coffin"—"He is now deed and nayled in his cheste"[9]; *pen,* which meant "feather," but which is now much more likely to mean a writing implement tipped with steel than a quill; *quarantine,* from which the original meaning of a "forty" days' isolation has quite disappeared; and *companion,* which has likewise lost the etymological sense of "one who (shares) bread with" another.

Even more frequent than generalization, and even more readily illustrated in numberless familiar instances, is the opposite process of specialization. *Steorfan* is an Old English word, cognate with the German *sterben,* which meant "die"; but the standard Modern English meaning is a specialized one, namely "die from hunger." Another specialization, "die from cold," is found in certain Modern English dialects: "[he] . . . bid her come . . . sit close by the fire: he was sure she was starved" is from the Yorkshire dialect of *Wuthering Heights* (Chapter XXX). The older meaning of *meat* was "food" in general, as one might suspect from the archaic phrase *meat and drink* and from the compound *sweetmeat.* For the meaning "meat," the older term was *flesh* or *flesh meat.* It is interesting to observe, incidentally, that the German cognate for *flesh, Fleisch,* suggests first of all the specialized sense of "meat"; this is the present meaning, too, of French *viande,* while the English *viands* retains the general sense of "food." *Coast* is a borrowing, through French, from a Latin word for "side" or "rib" (compare Modern English *intercostal*), and once meant "border" or "frontier"—the "coast of Bohemia" was not always an absurdity.

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[9] Chaucer's clerk, speaking of Petrarch (*Clerk's Prologue,* l. 30).

But *coast* in present use not only has the usual specialization "seashore"; as employed in the eastern United States, it means specifically "Pacific coast." *Shore*, on the other hand, means, in parts of the east at any rate, "Atlantic shore."[10] In some of the same localities, however, "eastern shore" means what elsewhere would have to be expanded into "eastern shore of the Chesapeake in Maryland," just as in part of New England "the cape" means definitely "Cape Cod." *Token*, formerly having the broad meaning "sign," was long ago specialized to the use it has in such a phrase as *love token;* but in places where the word is used for the metal disc that represents the fare paid for a street-car or subway ride, this more narrowly specialized meaning will be the first one suggested.

One point is, of course, that localities and groups of people have their own specialized associations for words that otherwise may convey a broader meaning. It has been well remarked that "every man is his own specializer."[11] *Pipe*, for example, calls up different ideas in the mind of the smoker, the plumber, and the organist. *Ring* may be thought of in connection with jewelry, opera, politics, or pugilism—even though, in the last connection, the "squared circle" has long since superseded the original truly circular shape. In addition, however, to words that have so many different possible

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[10] In Philadelphia, it is often used in a still more specific sense, "southern New Jersey shore." It may be added that it sometimes bears a yet more localized signification: the writer, while waiting in line at a railroad ticket office, heard the man before him demand a "ticket to the shore"; to the clerk's query, "Atlantic City?" was returned a contemptuous "Sure!" This use of *shore* as synonymous with "Atlantic City" also occurs repeatedly in the headlines of Philadelphia newspapers

[11] Quoted by Greenough and Kittredge, p. 251.

interpretations that various specializations of meaning are inevitable, there is no lack of words that have specialized, in a very general interpretation of them, in a definite and clear-cut fashion. A few random illustrations of this omnipresent phenomenon may conclude our survey of the topic. *Undertaker* has superseded the earlier *funeral undertaker* and is universally understood with the qualifier omitted, just as, in the popular mind, *doctor* means only *medical doctor*. *Liquor*, which once was synonymous with *liquid*, is now definitely specialized. *Reek*, like the German *rauchen*, once had the broad meaning "smoke," as it still has in the Scotch dialect; but the Standard English use limits it quite definitely to unpleasant exhalations. *Disease* meant "discomfort" —"lack of ease" in general. *Girl* meant "young person (of either sex)." The limitation of *corpse* to "*dead* body" made it necessary to re-borrow the word in its Modern French form *corps* for another possible meaning of "body," and to make occasional use of the original Latin, *corpus*, for still another sense, "complete collection of writings." *Corn*, in general American use, will be immediately understood as "Indian corn" or "maize." But the word itself once meant simply "grain," and so, in other parts of the English-speaking world, it is differently specialized[12]—in Scotland, to mean "oats," and in England "wheat." Keats's allusion to "Ruth amid the alien corn" probably calls up, to many American readers, a very different picture from what the poet had in mind.

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[12] In other Germanic languages, the cognate word has still different specializations in various places: "barley" in Sweden, "rye" in north Germany, and "spelt" in south Germany. (Jespersen, *Mankind, Nation and Individual from a Linguistic Point of View*, p. 212.)

We have seen how the distinctive associations that words have for one individual or for one group may be a contributing factor to specialization of meaning. Other factors that help to account for both generalization and specialization are the fading of the etymological significance of the word and the rivalry of native and borrowed words. Thus, to illustrate the one point, *arrive* [<Lat. *ad* (to) + *ripa* (shore)] originally applied to the end of a voyage only, and was used without the preposition, since this was included in the word. Milton's "ere he arrive the happy isle" illustrates a use that is in strict accord with the etymology of the word. When, however, consciousness of the Latin parts that made up the word was weakened, it was no longer used transitively, but in the phrase "arrive at," and with the more generalized application to the end of any journey. A word of somewhat related meaning, etymologically, is *rival*. It is connected with the Latin *rivus* (stream), and has the same root that exists also in the Modern English *river* and *rivulet* and French *rivière*. The adjective corresponding to *rivus* was made into a new noun, which meant, in the plural, "neighbors who get water from the same stream."[13] From the resulting altercations over riparian rights came the broader meaning of "disputants" or "competitors" in general; and so, when the word was borrowed in English, *rival* had lost all connection with the root idea of "stream."

The other reason that has been mentioned as accounting for many changes in meaning is likewise common.

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[13] Greenough and Kittredge, p. 222. The etymology of *rival* as connected with *rivus* has, however, been denied; *cf.* Walde, A., *Lateinisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Heidelberg (Winter), 2nd ed., 1910, p. 655.

The borrowing of the Latin *animal* and the French *beast* meant that, with the native *deer*, English would have possessed three exactly synonymous terms for one idea; it is obviously in the interests of economy that *deer* should have specialized to mean one particular species of animal rather than "animal" in general. *Bird* and *fowl*, *dog* and *hound*, *boy* and *knave*, and *chair* and *stool* are further instances of words that were once synonyms but that have been differentiated in meaning —in these illustrations, by the specialization of the second term.

A further remark about generalization and specialization is suggested by some of the words just alluded to. It has often been pointed out that the languages of primitive peoples are likely to lack general and abstract terms. There will be separate words for *dog*, *cow*, *wolf*, and so forth, but no general term for "animal"; and separate names for *ash-tree*, *oak-tree*, and the like, but no class term for "tree" in the abstract.[14] Ability to find and name the common denominator among things in ideas that to more civilized minds call urgently for a summarizing term apparently comes rather late. Civilized languages have, for the most part, supplied this earlier deficiency in generalization, and indeed have often gone a step further by turning the resulting generalizations into new specializations. Old English, for example, had such generalized words as *gærs* (herb), *wadan* (go), *wīf* (woman), *gāst* (spirit), *dēor* (animal), and

[14] Poverty in abstract words may of course go even further than this: certain American Indian languages, for example, are said to have had separate names for "red oak," "black oak," and "white oak," but no word for "oak" in general; other primitive tongues have had names for different varieties of "dogs" but no general term for "dog."

steorfan (die), which have later been turned into the more specialized ideas of *grass*, *wade*, *wife*, *ghost*, *deer*, and *starve*. But Old English lacked, and Modern English has never supplied, certain generalized terms the need for which would seem sufficiently obvious. English, that is to say, in common with other modern languages has a needlessly specialized vocabulary in certain departments in which the influence of primitive habits of thought is still perceptible. The remarkable variety of terms used for groups or aggregations of animals is the outstanding illustration. Even today the tendency is to limit the applicability of the group term to one or two species of animals only. Thus we speak of a *herd* or a *drove* of cattle, but of a *flock* of sheep (or birds), a *school* of fish, a *pack* of wolves (or hounds), a *covey* of partridges, and a *swarm* of bees. Moreover, the technical vocabulary of animal-fanciers goes far beyond this in the bewildering multitude of its specializations, including such esoteric terms[15] as *nye* of pheasants, *cete* of badgers, *sord* of mallards, *wisp* of snipe, *doylt* of tame swine, *gaggle* of geese, *harras* of horses, and *kennel* of raches. There is a similar lack of economy in the profusion of names for the same animal (*cow*, *heifer*, *bull*, *calf*, *steer*, and *ox*), in the variety of names for the young of various animals (*puppy*, *kitten*, *kid*, *calf*, *colt*, *lamb*, and so forth), and in the practice of giving separate names to the male and female of the same species (*gander* and *goose*, *drake* and *duck*, *horse* and *mare*, *cock* and *hen*, *dog* and *bitch*).[16] The need for a generic term

[15] These, and many others, are mentioned in an editorial comment in the *New York Times* for November 20, 1930. All but *doylt* are recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

[16] McKnight, p. 239, calls attention, in greater detail, to the lack of generalizing terms in the animal kingdom, and suggests further that the

is of course particularly felt here and it is supplied, not quite satisfactorily, by the convention of making either the name of the male (*horse* and *dog*) or of the female (*cow*, *duck*, and *goose*), or even that of the young of the species (*chicken* and *pig*), perform a larger duty. That there is a distinct loss here, in accuracy as well as in economy of expression, is scarcely to be doubted.

So far we have been concerned with changes that affect what we have called the "area" of the meaning of the word. Another and perhaps even more interesting type of change—often, to be sure, associated with the types just mentioned, for there is something admittedly artificial in dissociating the various types of semantic change—is that which lowers or raises the word in the scale of refinement, courtesy, or taste. Words are subject both to "degeneration" and to "elevation" of meaning. Before speculating about the relative frequency of these processes, let us examine a few typical examples of each tendency separately.

Many terms that are descriptive of moral depravity were once quite without this suggestion. *Lust*, for example, meant simply "pleasure," as in German; *wanton* was "untaught"; *lewd* was merely "ignorant," "lerned and lewed" being a phrase commonly standing for "clergy and laity"; *immoral* was "not customary"; *vice*, "flaw"; *hussy*, "housewife"; *wench*, "protégé"; and *paramour*, "lover." In a similar way, words that impute rascality have often been thoroughly innocent labels: *villain*, for example, was "farm-laborer"; *counterfeiter*, "imitator" or "copyist"; *pirate* (at least in its

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variety of names for sea craft (*sloop*, *schooner*, *brig*, *ship*, *boat*, *dinghy bark*, and so on) is a similar survival of primitive habits of thought.

original Greek sense), "one who adventures or tries"; *ringleader*, simply "leader" (in a good or a neutral sense); *varlet*, *knave*, and *imp* meant merely "boy"; and *sly*, *crafty*, and *cunning* all implied the compliment "skilful." A perennial form of humor—the city man's ridicule of the countryman—is witnessed to in the degeneration of such nouns as *peasant*, *boor* (compare German *Bauer* and Dutch *Boer*), and *churl*, and in the usual implication of such adjectives as *bucolic*, *rural*, *rustic*, and *provincial*.

When a word may be applied in two possible ways, one favorable or complimentary and the other the reverse, it is extremely likely that it will specialize in the less desirable sense. Thus, *suggestive* is likely to mean only "evilly suggestive," though it *may* still mean "informative" or "illuminating," and though the noun *suggestion* has escaped any such specialization—just as the verb *to harbor* is limited to unworthy or illegal concealment (as in "harboring a criminal" or "harboring thoughts of revenge"), while the noun *harbor* retains the old broad and literal meaning of "haven." *Asylum*, through association with the idea of "refuge for the insane," has followed a course like that of the verb *harbor*. A *libel*, in Middle English and early Modern English, was simply a "brief bit of writing" [<Lat. *libellum* (little book)]; now it is definitely limited to something malicious or defamatory. *Doom* once meant "judgment"; now it means only "condemnation." *Reek*, as we have seen, can now stand only for unpleasant distillations; *stink* and *stench* have specialized in the same way from a formerly neutral meaning, and *smell* and even *odor* seem likely to follow their lead. One could formerly *resent* benefits as well as injuries, and

retaliate for favors as well as slights; compare with the present meanings of these words the ordinary implications of the phrase "get even with" or "get square with."

On the other hand, instances of words that have traveled an opposite path, from the humble to the exalted, or from the base to the refined, are not far to seek. The institution of chivalry brought about the elevation of *knight* (youth) and *squire* (shield-bearer); and *chivalry* itself was invested by the Romantic Revival with a glamor that the word [as we see from its source, Fr. *cheval* (horse)] did not originally possess. "Romantic" ideas in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were similarly responsible for the gain in dignity of such words as *bard,* once a term of contempt like *vagabond; minstrel,* once applicable to juggler and buffoon as well as musician; and *enthusiasm,* in the earlier eighteenth century akin to *fanaticism.* Like *knight,* other terms for rank or position have had the good fortune to take on added prestige when the offices for which they stood changed their character, and when their own etymological meanings were forgotten. Such is the history of *marshal* (originally, "horse-servant"), *chamberlain* (room-attendant), *minister* (servant), *constable* (stable-attendant), *governor* (pilot), and *steward* (sty-guardian). It is true that in a number of these words the extent of the elevation fluctuates: *marshal* is a less dignified title when it is applied to the lone policeman of an American village than when it is applied to the highest ranking officers of the English or the French army; there is a similar variation between the American and the British connotations for *constable,* just as *steward* may suggest a club attendant as well as

the Lord High Steward of England, or even the royal dynasty of the *Stewarts* (or *Stuarts*);[17] likewise, *governor* may mean the warden of an English prison or the chief administrative officer of one of our American states. On the whole, however, the fact that any present implication of these words represents a gain in dignity over the etymological one is patent enough. So too it is with a number of political and religious labels: *Tory*, *Whig*, *Puritan*, *Quaker*, and *Methodist* are well-known examples of names that were originally applied in contempt but that have taken on dignified associations (though, to some, *Puritan* and perhaps *Tory* still convey a derisive significance). Archbishop Trench long ago pointed out that the influence of Christianity elevated *angel* from merely "messenger," *martyr* from "witness," and *paradise* from "park," through the Biblical application to the abode of our first parents (as in *Paradise Lost* and "*earthly* paradise") to the "blisful waiting-place of faithful departed spirits."[18] Miscellaneous further illustrations of elevation are *pretty* from an early meaning "sly," through "clever," to something approaching "beautiful"; *nice* from an etymological meaning "ignorant," through its earliest English sense "foolish," and later ones like "particular," to its present broad and vague colloquial meaning of "pleasant" or "acceptable"; and *fond* from "foolish" to "affectionate."

The usual view of degeneration and elevation has been that the downward path is far the more common. In spite of protests like that of Professor McKnight, to

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[17] Greenough and Kittredge, p. 296.

[18] *On the Study of Words*, New York (Armstrong), 20th ed., p. 114.

the effect that elevation has been less noticed simply because it is less dramatic,[19] there seems to be every reason to agree with the general verdict. Examples of elevation, after all, are far less easy to find than examples of degeneration, which indeed meet us at every turn. Besides, most of the words that have been cited as undergoing elevation fall into a few obvious categories, while the types of degeneration are extremely various. The truth of the matter would appear to be that degeneration has been more noticed not because it is more spectacular but simply because it is omnipresent, as elevation is not. Why should this be so, and why should the use of words be made difficult by a lurking leer, a hint of unpleasant connotation that makes a word that appears to be absolutely right in denotation impossible for a given occasion? It is hard to escape the conclusion that there is a disagreeable commentary on human nature here. How difficult it is for superlatives to retain their superlative force—because the general tendency is to apply them on light occasion and hence to weaken their meaning! So *fair* comes to mean "passable," and indeed is often equivalent to "not good"; and *quite* has passed, in its usual American application at least, from "entirely" or "completely" to "moderately." The tendency to procrastinate finds illustration in a whole series of words or phrases—*by and by*, *presently*, *immediately*, *directly*, and *soon* itself—that have changed their meaning from "now" or "at once" to "soon" or "after a time." It is scarcely a far-fetched interpretation to see in the narrowing of

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[19] *English Words and Their Background*, p. 292; *cf.* also Janet Aiken, *English Present and Past*, p. 112, and Van Dongen, G. A., *Amelioratives in English.*

demure to apply to *mock* modesty, of *genteel* to *spurious* gentility, of *sophistication* to *worldly* wisdom, of *egregious* to notoriety rather than fame, of *sanctimonious* to *pretended* holiness, and of *grandiose* to *tinsel* (itself an example of degeneration) grandeur—to see in all these, and dozens of others that might be mentioned, the workings of human motives like suspicion, contempt, and general pessimism.

With degeneration is often associated the widespread tendency in language to avoid the direct word by employing a pleasant, neutral, or even meaningless substitute, which is described as its "euphemism" (from Greek words meaning "well" and "speak"). Peoples of all times and places have apparently felt that to pronounce certain holy or ominous words is to tempt Providence. On the other hand, the god, demon, or monster that is feared may be propitiated, if not by silence, at any rate by circumlocution or by deliberately misapplied compliment. Thus the Greeks called the Furies the *Eumenides* (literally, the "well-minded" ones); the Irish peasantry prefer to avoid the term *fairies* and to employ instead *gentry, little people,* or *good people;* and many primitive races have had elaborate verbal taboos that prevent the direct naming of animals that are feared and persons that are either venerated or despised.

Most striking, perhaps, of such reticences and equivocations (in language after language) are the euphemisms for ideas associated with death. Instead of the verb *die,* we substitute *pass away* or *on,*[20] *breathe one's last, expire, depart this life, be taken* or *called, go to a better*

[20] In Old English, *gefaran* and *forþfaran* were used in this way, as in German *fahren* and *vergehen* are used, and in French *passer, trépasser,* and even *partir* or *s'en aller.*

world, or *go west* (the favorite euphemism in the World War, curiously parallel to the Greek conception of the *Hesperides*, or Western Isles, the abode of the dead). The *dead* person is often alluded to as the *lost*, or the *deceased, departed, defunct*, or the like. Sometimes refuge is taken in slang phrases that coarsely and jocosely veil the idea of the verb: *kick the bucket, push up the daisies*, and *pass in one's checks*. Likewise, *death* itself is more obscurely alluded to by generalized terms like *end, passing, departure*, and *dissolution*. Again, *kill* is avoided in favor of *settle, do for, remove, destroy*, or (in lower strata of speech) *knock off, bump off, take for a ride, put on the spot*, or the like. The superstitious origin of these euphemisms seems clearly evident in the fact that many speakers simply cannot allude to an imminent death by saying, "If he should die . . . " It is as though to pronounce the word would bring about the dreaded possibility and lay the blame at the speaker's door. Instead of "If he should die," they say "If he shouldn't recover," "If he shouldn't come back," or—vaguest of all in the words themselves, but nevertheless perfectly clear in the meaning intended—"If anything should happen to him."

One means of veiling and obscuring the distressing truth is to employ a term that is not immediately intelligible, one that requires, in fact, something like translation. In place of plain words, therefore, we frequently have elaborate—usually borrowed rather than native—synonyms for ideas linked to death and disaster. *Casualty, suicide, mortality, obituary, accident*, and *fatality* have clearly originated in this way. *Cemetery* was once itself a euphemism (literally, "sleeping place"), but it has come to be felt as too direct in its

implication of "burial ground"; hence we have *memorial park*, or occasionally *necropolis*—"city of the dead," to be sure, but decently veiled in the Greek equivalents. *Undertaker* was apparently a euphemistic shortening of *funeral undertaker*, but it came to mean what it undertook to conceal; hence *funeral director* was evolved, and more recently *mortician*. The last of course is distinctly American, for this kind of squeamishness (combined, perhaps, with a greater love of the pompous) has gone farther here than in England. So too are *casket*[21] for *coffin*, and *funeral car* for *hearse* distinctively American euphemisms, as are also such elegancies as *mortuary chapel* and *funeral parlors*.

Not that euphemism is always to be ridiculed: it may well be maintained that on some occasions to soften the brutal reality is the part of taste and tact. But the effect of the process is obviously to weaken the force of the euphemistic substitute, and often to lead in turn, as has already been indicated, to the degeneration of that word. Thus *insane* (not healthy) begins as a polite evasion of the ugly truth; but it comes to have a direct and unequivocal meaning, so that other euphemisms must be resorted to—*simple*, *mental case*, and (formerly) *innocent* and *natural*[22]—to make good the loss caused by degeneration. Words associated with insanity, it may be observed in passing, afford a peculiarly fertile field for the study of change of meaning in general; not only euphemism, degeneration, and specialization, but also irony, metaphor, humor, superstition,

[21] Originally, a "little box"—especially a "jewel box."

[22] A frequent Shakespearean meaning; it survives in dialect much later. In French, incidentally, *simple* and *innocent* (and in German *einfältig*) have gone exactly the same way.

and pedantry are to be observed here as active forces. *Sælig* in Old English meant "happy" or "blessed" (a sense largely retained by Modern German *selig*); but Middle English and Modern English *silly* came, through an ironical application, to mean first "innocent" or "harmless"—the disguised Archimago refers to himself as "silly old man"[23]—and finally "feeble-minded" or "half-witted" (themselves, frequently enough, euphemistic softenings of more accurately descriptive terms). *Crazy* is a jocose metaphor, literally equivalent to "cracked," a word that is itself a slang term for "insane." *Insane*, incidentally, is chronologically before *crazy*, since it is a Renaissance euphemism for earlier terms like *crazy* and *mad* (the latter now colloquially transferred to anger rather than insanity, and decidedly stilted in its earlier application). In Old English, the equivalents of modern *dizzy* and *giddy* were the usual adjectives implying a lack of sense; according to Doctor Bradley,[24] "the prehistoric meaning of both seems to have been 'possessed by a god.'" *Foolish*, along with *crazy* and *mad*, largely superseded *dizzy* and *giddy* in their Old English meanings; the source of *fool*—a Middle English borrowing of French *fol*, in turn a slangy application of Latin *follis* (windbag)—is also interesting. Other words of this group that may be mentioned are *idiot* (in Greek and in early Modern English "private person"), in which the application to one mentally deficient seems an unusually far-fetched bit of euphemism; *imbecile*, of unknown root, but meaning "weak" in general before it meant "weak-minded"; *moron*, in

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[23] *Faery Queen*, Book I, Canto I, stanza 30.
[24] *Making of English*, p. 199.

which a Greek borrowing mercifully provides a less harsh-sounding term than its more familiar equivalent, "fool"; and *cretin*, from a French word which was originally a dialectal variant of *chrétien* (Christian). The foregoing list, it may be added, by no means exhausts the catalog of terms that betray an effort—on the whole, an effort creditable to human nature—to gloss over a dreadful fact.

Less admirable perhaps, but equally interesting, are the distortions in language that result when the human impulse to swear is held in check by religious or social prohibitions. The usual compromise is a word or phrase that suggests rather than states, that at once approaches the forbidden and shies away from it. Thus, *God* becomes *gad*, *damn* becomes *darn*, and *God-damned*[25] becomes *dod-burned*, *goldurned*, and so forth. Further distortions of the sacred name are *goodness*, *gosh*, *gorry*, *Godfrey*, and *golly;* and older oaths like *'Oddsbodkins* (for "God's little body"), *'Sblood* (God's blood), and *Zounds* (God's wounds). *Jesus* is suggested by *Geewhiz*, *Jerusalem*, *Jeezt*, and "for Pete's sake"; *Christ* is alluded to in *Cripes*, "for the love of *Mike*," and the otherwise meaningless "O for *cry*ing out loud"; *Jimminy Crickets* attempts to combine the two. A curious exhibition, indeed, of the human desire to sin combined with want of courage!

A form of euphemism to which passing reference has already been made is that in which the motive is prudery, often, to be sure, accompanied by ostentation. The

[25] *God-darned*, put by Galsworthy into the mouth of Hallorsen, the American professor in *Maid in Waiting*, London (Heinemann), 1932, is as unrealistic as the conversation of Americans in British novels usually is. No American ever euphemizes only one syllable of this word.

result is what Mr. Fowler has happily termed the *genteelism*, and defined[26] as "the substituting, for the ordinary natural word that first suggests itself to the mind, of a synonym that is thought to be less soiled by the lips of the common herd, less familiar, less plebeian, less vulgar, less improper, less apt to come unhandsomely between the wind and our nobility." Some of Mr. Fowler's examples are rather British than American—*serviette* for *napkin*, *paying guest* for *boarder*, and *coal-vase* for *coal-scuttle;* but others are more American than British—*expectorate* for *spit*, particularly. On the whole, indeed, an American must regretfully concede that the tendency both to be mealy-mouthed and to be pompous has gone farther in the United States than in England—though it is probably true that Englishmen are prone to exaggerate the difference.[27] Still, if Mr. Fowler can cite one pompous genteelism like *chiropodist* for *corn-cutter*, an American has no difficulty in citing dozens that are all too familiar to him: for a very few samples, *junior executive* for *clerk*, *exodontist* for *tooth-puller*, *custodian* for *janitor*, *realtor* for *real estate agent*, and *heating engineer* for *plumber*. The American passion for sonorous titles, even when the position in question is not particularly impressive, is further attested by such neologisms as *receptionist*, *beautician*, and *cosmetician*.

Of a rather different type of genteelism, that in which squeamishness rather than ostentation is the more

[26] *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, p. 212.

[27] In *Jesting Pilate*, Garden City (Doubleday, Doran), 1926, Aldous Huxley remarks on the "revaluation of values . . . (for the worse)" that has taken place in the United States. This revaluation he finds to be symbolized in the commercialization and degradation of such words as *service*, and the pretentious use of *mortician*, *casket*, and so forth—all as a result of the "humbug" necessary to maintain the democratic hypothesis that all men are equal.

prominent motive force, a few words may be added. There have always been certain taboos associated with parts of the body and their clothing. Though the Victorian preference for *limb* over *leg* (even when referring to a chicken or a piano) seems to the present generation the height of ridiculous prudery, the tendency to avoid the plain name in speaking of certain other parts of the body is of course still active, and—what may perhaps be illustrated with less offense to the conventions in question—the names for the more personal and intimate garments are likely also to be genteel euphemisms. Thus *shirt* and *drawers* (for women's use) give way to words like *vest* and *panties; petticoat*, a sufficiently innocuous term meaning "little coat," yields to *slip* or to *skirt* (curiously enough, itself a doublet of and evidently a euphemistic substitute for *shirt*, since it is the Scandinavian variant of the Anglo-Saxon word); while *underwear* or *underclothing* as the general term is superseded by the more elegant French borrowing *lingerie* or some such equivalent as *intimate wear*. Moreover, if the garments in question have been worn, it is no longer proper to refer to them as *dirty*, and still less, as our distant ancestors would have done without a qualm, as *filthy* or *foul;* no, *dirty clothes* have given way to *soiled linen*. We are not quite so far removed as we may at first suppose from the atmosphere of that period in French society when *shirt* was alluded to by an elaborate circumlocution meaning "the constant companion of the dead and living."

Post-war youth has prided itself on calling a spade a spade, and further, as someone has remarked, on inserting as many spades as possible into the conversation; but even youth has its reticences. Greater courage in

speaking plainly of sex and morals is curiously accompanied by a frequent timidity in referring to the ills and unpleasantnesses that flesh is heir to. Thus *halitosis*, the happy discovery of purveyors of mouth-washes, has found a wider usefulness, and *bad breath* is taboo; just as *acute indigestion* some time ago replaced the old-fashioned *belly-ache*. The advertisers would likewise have us suffer from *comedones* instead of *blackheads*, from *conjunctivitis* instead of a *sty* (in the eye), and from *alopecia* instead of *baldness*. Their efforts have been crowned with some success, for to wish to dignify a homely malady by giving it an imposing name seems to be a widespread human failing. Moreover, it can scarcely be said that modern conversation on the subjects of sex and morals is entirely free from genteel euphemisms. The obscure jargon of Freudian psychoanalysis is after all of a piece with the technical terminology for minor physiological troubles that has just been alluded to. Likewise birth, as well as death, is often a subject for euphemistic substitution, *to be born* giving away to *see the light of day*, *come into the world*, and so forth. The pre-natal state is even less likely to be referred to plainly; to a pregnant woman, in the fourth decade of the twentieth century as well as in the reign of Victoria, is too often applied the disgusting phrase *in a family way* or the still more fatuous *in a certain* (or *an interesting*) *condition*. Euphemism, in this field as in others, is neither dead nor dying.

Allied to euphemistic substitution, and likewise springing from dissatisfaction with the plain word, is the use of hyperbole or exaggeration. The most familiar illustrations are the adjectives and adverbs that indicate approval or disapproval. In the one group are terms

like *grand, superb, gorgeous, magnificent, perfect,* and *unique* (the last two, it would appear, both absolute in their nature, but nevertheless often qualified by *more* and *most*); in the other group are such words as *horrible, dreadful, outrageous, horrid, frightful, awful,* and—*lousy,* the adjective of the moment, the curious result of such incongruous motives as the will to call a spade a spade, the wish to shock by the use of the forbidden, and the desire to be emphatic. The point is, of course, that all the adjectives cited have their own distinctive meanings and serve admirably for exceptional occasions of various sorts; but they are by no means reserved for these exceptional occasions, with the result that their distinctive qualities are inevitably weakened. When the strong word is used on light occasion its strength begins to be dissipated, and when the fitting moment for it actually arrives it will no longer serve; the search for the *mot juste* must be begun again. One consequence is that the adjective of weakened force is frequently bolstered by an adverb that strives to restore its pristine vigor—but cannot do so long, for hyperbole has entered into *its* employment too. *Very* (truly) has, through overuse, become so weakened that *very good* may easily convey less of praise than an obviously sincere *good.* Expressions like *absolutely unique* and *awfully disgusting* betray a double hyperbole in their very aspect. There is nothing new, incidentally, about the hyperbolic qualifier: phrases like *monstrous agreeable, marvellous fine,* and *vastly pretty* merely anticipate by two or three centuries other phrases like *frightfully agreeable, wonderfully fine,* and *amazingly pretty.* Investigation of other aspects of hyperbole—for example, in terms of courteous address and in titles—would serve to strengthen one's feeling

that, like euphemism, its effect upon the vocabulary is a powerful one, in the present as it has been in the past. In considering hyperbole, too, as in considering euphemism, one should be warned against the overhasty conclusion that the results are only deplorable. Actually, a good case can be made out for the position that each builds up as well as tears down, that each contributes to replenishing the word-stock and keeping it in the state of flux that is by no means an unhealthy condition of language.

The types of change of meaning that we have been considering, as can scarcely be affirmed too often, are by no means to be thought of as mutually exclusive or as exhausting the possible types. Indeed, as has been indicated, there is something decidedly artificial and overprecise in any such catalog. The fundamental conception that should be enforced as to the meaning of the word is that this meaning is unstable. We may think of the first or "etymological" meaning as the nucleal center from which there is radiation or transference of meaning in all directions. Some words, to be sure—and some of the finest and most essential words of language—cannot be so considered: there is every reason to suppose that *father*, *mother*, *fire*, *thunder*, and other such inheritances from the prehistoric past mean in Modern English precisely what their Indo-European equivalents meant thousands of years ago. But they are the exception, and the other state of affairs is the rule. Words on the whole are likely to broaden or narrow their meanings, to go uphill or down in the scale of respectability, and to be subject to the shifts of meaning that figurative use (irony, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and so on) promotes; and the history of a

single word will often illustrate many of these changes. Consider, for example, a few of the various possible meanings of the familiar word *draw*. The root meaning is "pull by force," most clearly preserved in "draw a vehicle." But there are various manners of "pulling," and various effects. "Draw one's breath" and "drawn features" are more literal (though specialization begins to enter the second); "draw a lesson" or "draw an audience" are more metaphorical applications. The generalized (apparently through metaphor) meaning "obtain" is present in "He drew his wages" or "What did you draw?" But the last phrase may have a different meaning—not "What did you get?" but "What picture did you make?" For "pulling" a pencil across a paper creates lines that may form the pictorial representation of an object, so that the phrase "Can he draw?" will be understood in this highly specialized sense. This last sense, incidentally, may be metaphorically transferred to a picture in words as well as in lines: "draw a portrait" is to that extent ambiguous. A high degree of specialization, finally, is present in the hideous old phrase *draw and quarter* (remove the entrails), as also in a phrase still occasionally used, "*draw* a chicken," for which, more often, "*clean* a chicken" is euphemistically substituted.

A curious condition that sometimes results from the violent shifts of meaning to which words are subject may be briefly noticed. Occasionally, a word will evolve a meaning that quite reverses its original one. Doctor Bradley has pointed out[28] the steps by which the meaning of *fast* changed from "immovable" to "rapid in

[28] *Making of English*, pp. 161 and 162.

motion." In this instance, the more recent meanings did not entirely supersede the original one; hence it is possible both to "stand fast" and to "go fast." *Fine*, as the same writer notices, may likewise mean both "small" and "large," for the original sense of "highly finished" has been extended in opposite directions: it may express admiration for intricacy and delicacy, or admiration for luxuriant growth. *Phenomenal*, in present-day journalistic use at least, means "extraordinary"; it was formerly applied not to a wonderful event but to any observed event or process, and hence was more like "ordinary." *Upright* has meant both "erect" and "supine"; the two opposite senses occur in Chaucer. The Chaucerian sense for *reduce*, incidentally, is "add up"; the modern one, "take away" or "lessen." *Demean* was originally "conduct" (the noun *demeanor* still is more likely to be applied in compliment than the reverse), but popular etymology has associated it with *mean* rather than the French *démener*, its real source; so it comes about that the present colloquial, and sometimes the literary, use makes it equivalent to "degrade." A favorite modern (usually feminine) sense of *literally* makes it equal to its exact opposite, "metaphorically"[29]: "I was literally frozen." *Valetudinarian* includes the root idea of "being well" (Lat. *valere*), but it has gone from "solicitous about health" to "invalid." Further oddities of this sort in which opposite meanings are possible in the present use of the word are *scan*, "scrutinize carefully" or "read carelessly"; *nervous*, "weak"

[29] Rose Macaulay, "Catchwords and Claptrap," *Hogarth Essays*, Garden City (Doubleday, Doran), 1928, p. 113. This amusing paper discusses a number of examples of "man's deliberate revolt against the rigidity of language."

or "strong"; and *distract*, "annoy" or "amuse."[30] Occasionally, it perhaps should be added, opposite meanings are due not to change of meaning in one word, but to the confusion between two words: *let* has meant, in Modern English, both "hinder" and "permit," the one representing Old English *lettan*, and the other Old English *lǣtan*—which have eventually fallen together; *quean* and *queen*, sometimes cited as extreme examples of elevation and degeneration of the same word, are really from separate, though related, Old English forms, *cwene* and *cwēn*.

In the preceding paragraph has been mentioned incidentally a contributing factor to the unpredictable shifts of meaning to which words are often subject. This is the process known as popular (or folk) etymology, a topic both important enough and entertaining enough to be worthy of fuller treatment. Popular etymology consists essentially in the distortion of a word that somewhat resembles another in sound and in meaning, though the latter resemblance is often far-fetched or quite illusionary. The desire of the folk is evidently to deal in words that *mean* something; hence, a word that apparently makes no sense (because its true etymology is not known) is arbitrarily twisted into a new form that does at least convey to the popular mind a meaning, though it must be confessed that the meaning is sometimes a curiously irrelevant one. A road that runs diagonally across the State of New Jersey appears on the maps as *Provinceline Road*. The etymology is quite clear: it is so called because it formed the original

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[30] *Cf.* John O'London, *Is it Good English?* pp. 156–158, for these and other "words that have turned their coats."

dividing *line* between the old royal *provinces* of East New Jersey and West New Jersey. But the older country people of at least one district through which the road runs call it not *Provinceline* but *Providenceline Road.* The substitution is evidently made because *province* has ceased to have a meaning, while *providence* has one that can be made to serve; the familiar is preferred to the unfamiliar even though it entails using a longer word. Incidentally, there is a glimpse here into the difficulties that beset the science of etymology. If the variant *Providenceline* had come into use earlier, and made its way into general and official use, the clue to the true origin of the word might easily have been lost. The historian would then explain the name as "a line drawn by the hand of Providence," and comment on the piety of the early settlers! Many words are doubtless explained quite as erroneously because popular etymology has similarly obscured their real sources.

Borrowed words are of course particularly likely to be affected by popular etymology. The Old French *crevisse* (cognate with *crab*—compare German *Krebs*) that became Middle English *crevise* has been altered to *crayfish* or *crawfish* quite certainly because the "meaningless" *-vise* could readily be changed to the apparently similar (and not quite irrelevant) native word *fish.* *Simoom* (<Arabic *semūm*) is frequently, and now quite reputably, varied to *simoon,* presumably for a like reason: the obscure feeling that the *moon* has something to do with meteorological conditions, and that therefore *simoon* is a better word than *simoom.* *Primrose* comes from Old French *primerole,* and meant originally "first little flower (of spring)," but the erroneous association with *rose* has of course distorted the word irrevocably.

Surloin [from Fr. *sur-* (above)] was easily altered to *sirloin* (the change this time affecting only spelling), since *sir* was familiar and *sur-* was not. To "explain" the present orthography of the word, an apocryphal legend has been evolved: it has been said, and sometimes believed, that an English king went to the length of expressing his approbation of a favorite dish by conferring knighthood upon it, using the formula, "Rise, Sir Loin." Miscellaneous further examples of popular etymology affecting the forms and sounds of borrowed words are *buttery*, which is really not connected with *butter* but with *bottles* (M. E. *botery* and *botelrye* <O. F. *boteillerie*); *belfry*, which originally had nothing to do with *bells*—the Old French *berfrey* (tower) was inevitably distorted in this way, both because of the apparent gain in "meaning" by the introduction of the idea of "bell" and because of the easy transition from *r* to *l*; *mushroom*, in the second syllable of which the familiar, though here quite meaningless, *room* represents a distortion of the latter part of Old French *mouscheron; penthouse*, from French *appentis* (<Lat. *appendicium*), which has only a fanciful connection with *house; Jerusalem*, in *Jerusalem artichoke* (the latter word also an example of the process we are considering), which is a corruption of the Italian *girasole* (turning with the sun). The American *carry-all* has been explained[31] as an ingenious distortion of French *carriole*, and *petticoat-tales*, a curious name, current in Edinburgh, for "shortbread" as a corruption of French *petits gâteaux*.[32] Translation of foreign words into more familiar terms that are in sound, though not in meaning, approximately equivalent, sometimes achieves almost

[31] Mencken, *American Language*, p. 108. The *O. E. D.* confirms this.
[32] Barfield, Owen, *History in English Words*, p. 57.

incredibly grotesque creations in substandard speech: evolutions of this kind that have been either heard by or reported to the author include *shoemaker* for *sumac* (tree), *very close* for *varicose* (veins), *high geranium* for *hydrangea*, *choir practice* for *chiropractic*, and *ruddy Daniel* for *rhododendron*.

It should not be imagined, however, that popular etymology operates only upon borrowed words. The original meaning of a native term too can easily be lost sight of, and the word accordingly altered in form (and often eventually in meaning as well) to agree with some imagined etymology. Thus *sand-blind*[33] is a distortion of *samblind*, in which the first element was an Old English prefix, cognate with Latin *semi-*, meaning "half"; the word is likely to be used too as if it meant "totally blind" instead of "partially blind." A *hangnail* is not a nail that *hangs*, but one that is painful (Old English *ang*). *Titmouse* seems a curious name to give a bird until one discovers that its second element had originally nothing to do with "mouse," but comes from Middle English *mose* (<O. E. *māse*), a name for various species of birds. *Shame-faced* is an understandable variant of the older term *shamefast*, which meant rather "confirmed in modesty" than "disconcerted" (i.e., betraying shame in one's face). *Acorn* (O. E. *æcern*) is not really related to *corn*, *slow-worm* (O. E. *slā-wyrm*) to *slow*, *bride-groom* [O. E. *brȳd-guma* (bride-man)] to *groom*, or *hiccough* (an echoic word which has various earlier forms, including *hicket* and *hickup*) to *cough*.

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[33] Greenough and Kittredge, *op. cit.*, p. 335. Many of these illustrations of popular etymology are suggested either by Chapter XXIII of this book or by Chapter XIII of McKnight, G. H., *English Words and their Background*.

There is a good deal of something not very remotely akin to popular etymology to be observed in "learned" and etymologically erroneous spellings which, as we have already seen, have not infrequently replaced earlier spellings that were superior both phonetically and historically. The folk and the scholar have sometimes proceeded in much the same way in distorting a word through some purely fictitious theory of its origin. Sometimes, indeed, it is discovered that what was once thought to be a form established through popular etymology is really the original one, and the rival form is due to the kindred process of learned error. Thus, *country-dance* has been more than once cited[34] as an example of popular etymology, on the assumption that it represented a corruption of *contre* (opposite)-*danse*. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, however, the truth is nearly the reverse of this,[35] the real explanation of the rival forms being that *contre-danse* is a mistaken "correction" for *country-dance*. On the other hand, the spelling *rhyme* (for the simpler *rime*) used to be attributed to a learned error in explaining as from Greek ῥυθμός (as in *rhythm*) what was really from Old English *rīm* (measure); however, the earlier theory is now believed to be correct, and *rhyme* is thus scarcely an "absurd spelling"[36] (at least etymologically—though *rime* of course may be preferred on other counts).

Words altered by popular etymology have often, as most of our illustrations indicate, displaced the original

[34] As in McKnight, p. 183.

[35] Vendryes (*Language*, trans. by Radin, p. 181) also asserts that "the English *country-dance*, itself borrowed from French, has passed back into that tongue under the form *contre-danse*, which does not make sense."

[36] Greenough and Kittredge, p. 333. The spelling *rime* can really be defended etymologically, since, according to the *O. E. D.*, the *immediate* source of the English word is O. F. *rime*.

forms and become thoroughly accepted in standard speech. Much the same process of popular usage eventually sanctioned by standard speech is often to be observed in the phenomenon that we shall consider next in our review of various aspects of the changing meanings of words. Slang, to which we now turn our attention, differs, however, from popular etymology in being a conscious substitution (as popular etymology rarely is), and in offering, characteristically, either a new meaning (or use) for an old word, or a new creation, though it is true that what is sometimes evolved is a distorted form of a previously existing word.

It is difficult both to define slang and to indicate its relation to other linguistic phenomena. The popular impression as to what it is is often erroneous: there is no necessary connection, for example, between the slangy and the vulgar, or between the slangy and the ungrammatical; further, there is nothing new about slang, nor is there anything peculiarly American. Some of these misconceptions we shall return to. In addition, it may be asserted also that entirely competent treatments of slang sometimes take in too much territory. One such treatment, Professor Krapp's excellent discussion in *Modern English*,[37] will serve as our point of departure. It is, incidentally, striking testimony to the ephemeral character of a great deal of slang that Krapp's illustrations, brought together about twenty-five years ago, impress the reader, for the most part, as antiquarian specimens. Truly, there is nothing so completely dead as last year's slang.

There are, according to Professor Krapp, four chief varieties or subspecies of slang; (1) counter-words,

[37] Pp. 199–211.

(2) cant phraseology, (3) picturesque metaphor, and (4) picturesque sound. By the first term, "counter-word," is meant a word that serves as a kind of maid-of-all-work, one that has so far lost its original, perhaps highly specialized, meaning that it is commonly employed for the greatest variety of occasions. The first illustration that comes to mind is, of course, *nice*, in the broad and loose sense of "pleasant"; Krapp aptly compares the present vogue of this word with the Elizabethan fondness for *fair*, and the eighteenth-century liking for *elegant*. But the history of *nice* and the histories of *grand*, *fine*, *awful*, and so forth, merely illustrate, it would seem, the working of factors like generalization, hyperbole, and elevation or degeneration. Words of this class resemble slang-words only in their tendency to appear in and out of season—for one of the more irritating characteristics of a certain type of slang is that it is used *ad nauseam* (as "O. K." is today constantly substituted for "Yes" or "All Right," and as "I'll say so" was similarly used a few years ago). "Damnable iteration," however, seems insufficient to make the counter-word truly slang. Parenthetically, it would appear futile to oppose any longer the present extension of the meaning of *nice*. The sense "pleasant" or "agreeable" can scarcely be labelled "colloquial"—much less "incorrect"—when one encounters it with increasing frequency in well-written and well-edited periodicals of our own time.[38]

We must reject, then, the notion that the counter-word is essentially slang. Two of the other categories that have been listed, picturesque metaphor and picturesque

[38] E.g., "It is nice to be told how imaginative people wish the past had arranged itself . . . " Bernard DeVoto, "How Not to Write History," *Harper's*, Vol. 168 (January, 1934), p. 198.

sound, are dubious for another reason: they are perhaps not so much distinct types of slang as methods or processes that have been used in creating slang. It seems more fruitful to look for our definition of slang under the remaining head: cant phraseology. Even here there is difficulty and considerable difference of opinion among writers on slang, many of whom would list "special languages" (such as thieves' jargon, or the peculiar vocabularies of students, artisans, lawyers, stockbrokers, and so forth) as separate phenomena.[39] To the present writer it appears to be impossible to draw a line between slang and the "special language." Slang, we may say then, is an intentionally and humorously distorted form of speech in which the desire for novelty and distinctiveness of expression is paramount. *Cant* (or the earlier *flash*) was first used in English, and *argot* (formerly *jargon*) in French, to characterize particularly the "special language" of beggars, vagrants, and thieves, in which the primary motive was perhaps rather concealment than humor. But the two things inevitably blend, and in slang as we understand it today there is more than a trace of the desire for a tongue that shall be sophisticated and intelligible only to the initiated.

One of the interesting aspects of slang is the fact that it not only exemplifies but exaggerates general linguistic processes. Words and phrases come into being and drop out in ways exactly like those of legitimate speech, but in slang the introduction is more violent and the departure more rapid. We have come more and more to think of the general vocabulary, like other phases of

[39] For different points of view in this matter, see Jespersen, *Mankind, Nation, and Individual from a Linguistic Point of View* (Chaps. VIII and X), and Vendryes, *Language*, trans. by Radin, pp. 249 and 250.

language, as in a continual state of flux; nowhere is this more apparent than in slang, for here the whole cycle of a word's career—introduction, popularization, overuse, senescence, and demise—is often visibly before us in the course of a few years. There is another kind of cycle too which is frequently perceptible within the observation of a single generation: the successive substitution of phrase after phrase to stand for the same thought. Take the retorts connoting cynical or contemptuous disbelief, and notice how the slang fashion alters almost year by year: "Tell it to the marines," "Tell it to Sweeney," "Is zat so?," "Says you," "So's your old man," "Oh, yeah!" This list, arranged more or less chronologically, is quite evidently selective and incomplete.

Slang is often and quite properly associated with youth; this association helps in part to account for such elements in it as contempt for authority, irreverence, high spirits, and freshness. Perhaps the most typical form of slang is that of students; but we may note that this slang, like other brands, has no absolute consistency, even at a single time, for it alters from school to school and from university to university. Oxford is not quite at one with Cambridge in this matter, nor do Yale and Harvard completely agree as to how, at a given moment, a certain object or idea is to be referred to. Rapid changes in fashion, in the slang of a single institution, are of course even more striking. In the *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, two articles have appeared, almost exactly two years apart (May 24, 1929, and May 22, 1931), in which undergraduates explain the vocabularies of the day. The differences are decidedly noteworthy. In 1929, *oke* (for *O. K.*) is "of great popularity"; in 1931,

it is "rapidly passing out." The word that is most important of all in 1929—*Geest!* ("This mellifluous word is without doubt the most essential part of the undergraduate vocabulary")—is not so much as listed in 1931. Another prime favorite of 1929, the verb to *cream* (interpreted as meaning the same as *knock cold, cool, beat up on,* and *take*) has likewise disappeared completely. *Toughie, smoothie,* and *softie*—words, incidentally, so appallingly feminine that the older graduate can hardly credit them, and words that, to him, completely explain any decline in football fortunes—are not unknown in 1931, but they are clearly obsolescent.

In both lists there is evidence of the lingering on of certain slang terms familiar a quarter of a century ago—*flunk, cram, grind, gut* (for earlier *cinch*), *crib,* and *drag*—and there is also a measure of slang not peculiarly scholastic or recent, such as *dope* (either "information," or "a foolish person"), *boob,* and *swell.* The last two are evidently (in 1931) rather revivals than survivals, for it is affirmed of *boob* that "the word has the same connotation that *sap* formerly had" and of *swell* that it is "the most popular adjective of the moment." *Swell* can be pronounced, and is so pronounced outside of academic circles too, in such a way as to convey that the speaker intends it as a newly fashionable use of a quaint old slang counter. Perhaps the compiler of the more recent list is right in thinking that undergraduate slang is in these days becoming less flamboyant, like students' dress and general demeanor. At any rate, the following observation is an interesting one: " . . . the fear of being *collegiate* [a curious slang development, by the way] is anathema enough to most undergraduates to make their slang more and more conservative. The

'plenty nutsy babe' of not so long ago is now 'a mighty fine girl.'"

There will not be space in which to enlarge upon the special varieties of slang, besides students', that have been developed. As has already been indicated, it is the writer's opinion that no line of demarcation can be drawn between "special language" and slang, and that in the ways of speaking peculiar to the theater, the printing house, the hangar, the garage, the camp, the baseball field, and so on (quite without end), there is an inextricable blend of the more general habits of speech with a technical language, serious and humorous, that results, in each instance, in a special brand or variety of slang.[40] Some of these are doubtless more self-conscious than others, and in some the influence of an individual is more apparent than in others. What has been called "the language of Lobster Alley,"[41] for example—by which is meant a certain phase of the New York theatrical world—has, it is said, grown under the patronage and

[40] For somewhat exaggerated but none the less interesting and amusing glimpses of these jargons, attention may be called to the newspaper series of cartoons by H. T. Webster entitled "They Don't Speak Our Language." Mr. Webster discusses the subject in an article of the same title, in the *Forum*, Vol. XC, No. 6 (December, 1933), pp. 367-372. A bibliography for slang would be endless. Mention may perhaps be made of the seven-volume work of Farmer and Henley, *Dictionary of Slang and its Analogues*, New York (Dutton), 1905—one-volume edition, 1929; and of a few recent works like Irwin, Godfrey, *American Tramp and Underworld Slang*, New York (Oxford), 1931, and Rose, Howard N., *A Thesaurus of Slang*, New York (Macmillan), 1934; Weseen, Maurice H., *Dictionary of American Slang*, New York (Crowell), 1934; and Partridge, Eric, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, New York (Macmillan), 1937. The reader will find many articles on the slang of the student, the racketeer, the convict, the soldier, the aviator, and so forth (as well as on contemporary American slang in general) in current periodicals and in *American Speech*.

[41] Suggested by the title of an article in the *Bookman*, Vol. LXXII, No. 4 (December, 1930), by Hiram Motherwell.

guidance of the weekly newspaper *Variety* and its late editor, Sime Silverman. The title of "father of baseball slang" has been bestowed (*New York Times*, Feb. 13, 1932) upon the late Charles Dryden, but it is of course evident that there have been many active sons among younger baseball reporters. A curious misconception, by the way, is that which attributes the creation of baseball slang to those who are termed, in that jargon, *fans*. It needs only a very little observation of the spectators who day after day attend our professional baseball games to make it evident that *they* are not intellectually capable of creating a speech. Of course it is not the fans, but the baseball reporters, driven by the pitiless necessity of finding new terms in which to describe what after all varies little from day to day, who invent the fearsome jargon of baseball. The fans merely repeat it and sometimes give it currency.

Instead of enumerating and illustrating the varieties of slang, we must turn our attention to the linguistic processes through which the slang word is evolved. Because slang is likely to be created by groups of individuals placed in special circumstances it follows that substitutions for the more formal word can be employed without obscurity. Just as, in language in general, the more familiar counters and formulas of speech can be spoken rapidly and briefly, so, in the special circle of users of slang, not only phonetic clippings and irregularities, but also semantic novelties may be freely indulged in. Thus we have in slang not merely elisions, syncopations, and losses of syllables, but the use of figures like metonymy, metaphor, and hyperbole as well. Most important of all is metaphor. This is the most characteristic type of creation that slang admits. The meta-

phorical substitution for the plain, literal word conduces both to a changed meaning for what was once deliberate metaphor, and to a constantly renewed succession of metaphors for a given idea. Let us look at some of the ideas that have had a varied expression in cognate languages because slang has employed a series of metaphors to designate them.

The parts of the body are an especially fertile field in which to observe the change of meaning and substitution of terms that are brought about by slangy metaphor. We may take the concept "head." The ordinary legitimate word is, in English, *head;* in German, *Kopf;* and in French, *tête.* In this instance, it happens that, of the three languages, only English has retained, as the usual term, the older and more respectable root, which, however, does appear in the other two languages in more colorless and less common words, German *Haupt* and French *chef.* English *head,* that is to say, is not cognate with *Kopf* and *tête,* but it *is* cognate with *Haupt* and *chef* (<Lat. *caput*). In German, *Kopf* (related to English *cup*) evidently originated in the same sort of slangy metaphor that accounts for *tête* (<Lat. *testa* [pot], [pitcher]); in both cases, the more vivid slang substitute drove out the more dignified word as the general term.[42] But so far as the slang of popular speech is concerned, the process of course does not stop with one metaphorical substitution, or with change of meaning affecting only the word brought in (and possibly the one that is super-

[42] This process, it may be interesting to note, frequently explains why it is that in French the word for a given idea is not the derivative of the Latin word that would seem its most likely ancestor; *cheval* (horse), for example, does not descend from the classical Latin *equus,* but from a late Latin *caballus,* which apparently had, to begin with, a slangy flavor like that of *nag.*

seded, which may be given a limited, specialized usefulness such as *chef* and *Haupt* have). Popular slang of course prefers to dip its bucket into the well of metaphor again and again. Thus, though only *head* is possible in formal use, there are metaphors without number in slang—*bean, block, nut, dome, upper story, belfry, coco,*[43] and so on. In French, exactly similar developments are to be observed, *noisette* and *coco* duplicating the metaphors of *nut* and *coco*, and *bobine* (bobbin), *fiole* (little bottle), and so on, providing additional ones.

Fortunately or unfortunately, it is doubtless a work of supererogation to enlarge upon the use of metaphor in creating slang. One other illustration may serve to bring out the fecundity and variety of slang in this field: English (chiefly American) terms for the idea of "drunk" or "intoxicated." We have, for example, nautical metaphors like *three sheets in the wind* and *half-seas-over;* culinary ones, like *stewed, boiled, fried,* and *pickled;* pathological ones, like *ossified, paralyzed,* and *petrified;* and an endless miscellaneous list that need not be further classified, represented by *full, tight, half-shot, canned, lit, loaded, tanked, pie-eyed, shellacked, soused, piffled, piffli-cated, blotto, stinko,* and so *ad infinitum.*

One curious result of the use of metaphor in creating slang is that certain expressions that were literal in their original application are metaphorically transferred to general use and then sometimes become so familiar that the metaphor fades out, leaving the word a colorless part of the general vocabulary. This is particularly

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[43] For *coconut,* which, incidentally, has become the ordinary word for "head" in Beach-la-mar (Jespersen, *op. cit.,* p. 155)—a further striking illustration of the metaphorical substitute superseding the plain word, and changing its own first meaning in the process.

evident in the vocabulary of sport that has been transferred, by way of vivid metaphor, to a more common use. *Foul play*, for example, was a term in gambling, but it was extended metaphorically to the game of life. The present use has no tincture of slang about it, though it is a curiously specialized one: when *foul play* is alluded to in the newspapers, it means quite definitely that "murder" is suspected. "To hit the mark" (from archery), "to hit below the belt" (from pugilism), "to run counter" (used of hunting dogs that go in the wrong direction), "it's up to you" (from poker), "to bandy [words]" (from an early species of ball-game), "to tilt at" (from the medieval tournament), "to win the palm" (from ancient sport), "to parry" (from fencing), and "to show the white feather" (from cock-fighting)[44] illustrate how what is literal in its original use becomes metaphorical when given a wider application and then sometimes assumed an almost literal cast once more. The slang, of course, appears in the metaphorical use; but it may be said that some of these expressions—"hit the mark," "parry," and "bandy"—have completely lost any odor of slang, while others—"it's up to you," for example—are perhaps in the process of losing it.

In addition to metaphor, figures of speech like metonymy, hyperbole, and irony are freely utilized in the creation of slang. American slang has often been described (like American speech in general) as more characterized by exuberant hyperbole than is British slang, which goes in rather for humorous understatement. To have a *thin time* is a peculiarly British way of referring to a really harrowing experience. On the other hand, to describe a vain person as having a *swelled*

[44] Greenough and Kittredge, pp. 56–58.

head, and then improving upon this by explaining that such a one finds it necessary to use a shoehorn in putting on his hat—this is characteristically American. Metonymy appears in such a term as *skirt* or *frail* (and the older *rib*) for "woman," and, of course, it has a share in many of the metaphors already cited; likewise, irony constantly blends with other figures. Clippings and other phonetic irregularities are perhaps sufficiently obvious. The slang origin of *cab* did not prevent its eventual adoption in standard speech, and one may confidently predict the same fate for *taxi* and *bus*. Student slang is particularly rich in creations of this sort, such as *math, psych, lab, gym*, and so forth. A final type of slang creation—what has already been alluded to as picturesque sound—may be briefly mentioned here. This often takes the form of a mocking imitation of dignified literary words; such appears to be the explanation of *absquatulate, curmudgeon, rambunctious, rapscallion, sockdolager*, and *spondulix*.[45] Jespersen quotes a letter of Southey's[46] which gives many illustrations of this kind of coinage in a slang vocabulary peculiar to Mrs. S. T. Coleridge; some specimens, which have apparently found no other user, are *red-raggify, confabulumpatus, toadymidjering, wattlykin, detestabumpus*, and *jabberumpeter*.

Two familiar questions about slang should perhaps be dealt with: Where does it come from, and where does it go? In reference to the former question, there seems no need of differentiating between slang and other aspects of language. It is just as anonymous, for the

[45] McKnight, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
[46] *Op. cit.*, p. 154.

most part, as the general vocabulary is. Those who exploit it in print very rarely see their individual creations win a wide currency. A list of the ten men who are thought to have done most for current American slang has recently been compiled.[47] But an examination of their actual contributions makes it very clear that in place of the "hundreds" of words they are popularly thought to have put into general circulation, only one or two words (or none at all) make up the sum total of each individual's share. Walter Winchell, for example, is often referred to as a great inventor of American slang. But of creations attributed to him, perhaps only *making whoopee* (and his paternity of this is dubious) can be said to be in really general use. Punning novelties of his like *chin-ema* for "talkies" and *Reno-vate* for "divorce" have a certain flip cleverness, but they are far too sophisticated and technical for common use. The real masters of written slang in our day—of whom the late Ring Lardner was easily first—have but a negligible share in its actual making; their part is rather to give a wide currency to what is already in existence. Like other words, slang terms are usually of obscure and nameless origin. The only essential difference, on this side of the matter, is that they appear in general use, and disappear from it, much more rapidly.

As to the other question, the eventual fate of the slang term, there are obviously three possibilities. The two that everyone recognizes are (1) that what has at first the defiant novelty and the colloquial character typical of slang may lose these attributes through continued and more elevated use, and hence cease to be slang at all;

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[47] By W. J. Funk. See *Time* for Jan. 15, 1934.

and (2) that what is in vogue today may cease to be in vogue tomorrow, and eventually drop out of use completely. Both courses are generally familiar, and illustration would be superfluous. What is not so commonly understood is the third (of course the rarest) possibility; a slang word or phrase may linger on the outskirts of respectability for decades, even for centuries, and neither drop out of use completely nor be incorporated in the standard vocabulary. A very few years—often indeed only months—usually determine whether an expression is or is not likely to have the sanction of standard use. But occasionally a word—*booze* is a case in point—will for hundreds of years knock vainly at the gate for admission to the reputable vocabulary. For a more recent illustration, it is curious that, among slang phrases standing for an urgent invitation to depart, *beat it* was competing, in the first decade of the present century, with *skidoo* and *twenty-three*, both of which have long since become of historical interest only, while *beat it*, after at least twenty-five years of use, is still with us and somehow seems likely to remain (without becoming reputable) after much younger rivals, like *scram*, have been forgotten.

It may be worth noticing that occasionally we have something like a reversal of the process by which slang becomes reputable speech. A word or phrase may fall so completely in dignity that it takes on the associations of the colloquial, and sometimes those of out-and-out slang. Often it is impossible to say whether what appears to us a bit of racy slang (sometimes because it duplicates a current locution) had anything like the same association a century or several centuries ago. We are surely right, in general, in feeling that in Chaucer, for example, the

conversation of Pandarus is as utterly natural as it is partly by reason of the colloquialisms and the slang it contains. But has Chaucer's use of *the bones* (for "dice") in the *Pardoner's Tale* (C, l. 657), directly anticipating a bit of contemporary slang, exactly the same flavor as the word now has? "Slang phrases from Shakespeare" are sometimes compiled; for example, these:[48] "beat it," "done me wrong," "she falls for it," "not in it," "not so hot," "if he falls in, good night," and "let me tell the world."[49] What seems to us slang, however, is by no means necessarily slang to Shakespeare, who sometimes means literally what we take metaphorically, and sometimes, through sheer coincidence, hits upon what has become, in another context, twentieth-century slang. Chaucer and Shakespeare certainly use slang enough, as must any poet who realistically echoes the conversational speech of his day; but their slang is almost never ours.

Slang, we have said, is difficult to define. It remains to be added that it is equally difficult to outline an attitude toward its use. That slang is a phenomenon of long standing in language surely needs no further demonstration. There is every reason to suppose that the standard language will continue in the future to enrich and invigorate its resources, as it has done in the past, by appropriating a certain modicum of the slang of the moment. The attitude that looks upon slang, then, with nothing but horror is evidently one that works against the best interests of the language. This need not mean, however,

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[48] Most of these are from a list in the *Golden Book* for April, 1932.

[49] Likewise Browning, as Professor J. C. Seegers has pointed out to me, uses "What a man!" (*Protus*, l. 23) and "my weakness" (*Cristina*, l. 5) in a way that may, at first, surprise.

that because slang is useful to language, the more use made of it the better, regardless of the purpose or the occasion of speaking or writing. If advice must be given, what seems to the present writer most in need of being said is not that the use of slang is wrong, but that its effective use is difficult. Slang is difficult to use well because it is so largely figurative. Failure to hit the mark with a metaphor is worse than failure to find the right prosaic word simply because the attempt has been more ambitious. The inept or the inappropriate use of slang is like a jarring note in an otherwise harmonious musical chord. There is doubtless some truth, too, in the familiar observation that the habitual use of slang has a deleterious effect on the user's command of words. Though often exaggerated, the danger is real enough. The stock defense of the unrestricted use of slang is that "slang is expressive." This, though true enough of many a slang creation in its infancy, is quite the reverse of true of the same expression when everyone is using it. After all, most words cannot stand up against constant wear without a dimming of bright colors or a dulling of keen edges. Far from being "expressive," the typical slang word or phrase in the heyday of its popularity is a feeble counter indeed, as drab and neutral as the most hackneyed word in the language.

The difficulty of slang is illustrated in the sparing use that has been made of it in literature. A writer whose stock in trade, so far as his use of conversation goes, is up-to-the-minute slang may achieve temporary success at the cost of quick oblivion. As his language gets out of date, so may he get out of date. This fate, perhaps, is overtaking O. Henry and has already overtaken a writer still alive who has entrusted even more of his literary

fortune to a slang that is already outmoded—George Ade. It is hard, incidentally, to add many names to the list of recent writers of any real significance whom one associates particularly with slang. P. G. Wodehouse and Ring Lardner are perhaps the names that suggest themselves first—and if Mr. Wodehouse is not a "significant" writer, it is still no small thing, as one of his enthusiasts has put it, to be the most readable of living authors. But for one Ring Lardner there are a dozen Sam Hellmans; for one first-rate practitioner, there are many inferior imitators. To contemplate what most of those who exploit slang for literary purposes really accomplish with it is not, on the whole, calculated to inspire the budding writer with confidence in its possibilities.

Slang offers so many striking illustrations of general linguistic processes that we have strayed perhaps unduly afield in discussing it. There is still at least one more subject, however, to be explored before we leave the general topic of vocabulary. This is something that we have already touched on from another angle, and that is quite naturally associated both with slang and with the changing meaning of the word in general: American vocabulary[50] as compared with British. What we have previously remarked is that the somewhat different

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[50] A convenient summary is McKnight's chapter on "American English," *op. cit.*, pp. 23–36. A. C. Baugh's *History of the English Language* also contains, pp. 415–470, an excellent introduction to the general subject of American English. For more exhaustive studies, see the works of Mencken, Tucker, and Krapp listed on p. 97. Bartlett, J. M., *Dictionary of Americanisms* (New York, 1877); Horwill, H. W., *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage* (New York, 1935); Thornton, R. H., *An American Glossary* (Philadelphia, 1912); the first installments of the new *Dictionary of American English* (Chicago, 1936–); and the two periodicals, *Dialect Notes* (1890–) and *American Speech* (1925–), are additional sources of first importance.

contacts to which American English has been exposed—especially the languages of the American Indian and those of the French and Spanish colonizers of the New World—account for the presence in our speech of certain words that are not shared with the speakers of British English. What is to be added here is a comment on characteristics of the American vocabulary that have resulted not from different sources of the word-stock, but rather from the fact that American English has sometimes given new meanings to old words and sometimes retained old meanings for words that have assumed a new value in British English. Differences in the field of slang of course come about also through a somewhat different, and perhaps a more frequent, employment of the methods of creating slang that have just been discussed.

When English-speaking colonists came to America in the seventeenth century, it was natural, since the plants, animals, and topography of the New World were in many respects novel, that numerous familiar words should be given a different application when used with reference to the American scene. This is a usual linguistic consequence of colonization. Here of course is the explanation of how it is that many everyday words like *daisy*, *robin*, *corn*, *creek*, and so forth, convey to an American a different picture from what they convey to an Englishman. Sometimes, the fresh application of an older word has given it a new lease of life in American speech; a particularly numerous group of illustrations may be suggested in such representative topographical terms as *branch*, *fork*, *divide*, *snag*, *cut-off*, *watershed*, *gap*, *tidewater*, *freshwater*, and so forth. Often the novelty consists in compounding a new word from old elements:

backwoods, *cowboy*, *corncob*, *haystack*, *camp meeting*, *snowplow*, *bullfrog*, and *potato-bug* are random examples. Change of meaning in old words and the creating of new compounds from old material are processes that together account for a great many of the terms that are often described as Americanisms.[51] Of equal interest, however, are the survivals in American speech of older English words that have either disappeared or taken on new connotations in England.

It is curiously true that a certain familiar type of British scorn for American habits of speech that differ from English is particularly reserved for expressions that seem to the Englishman to be, but actually are not, "Yankee innovations." The classical illustration, probably, is the unfailing mark of the American on the English stage or in the English novel: "I guess." Even when the Englishman, exceptionally, recognizes that the American sense of "imagine" or "suppose" is not a novelty but a survival, he is still likely to argue that the American and the older English use are to be differentiated in some subtle fashion.[52] This deep distaste for things American, incidentally, may even take the form of resisting the reintroduction of an older English word that has been appropriated by Americans, even when the English commentator acknowledges that the current English substitute is thoroughly inferior. The authors

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[51] The second group has a better right to be so described. For the origin of the term *Americanism*, and the several meanings that have been attached to it, see Mathews, M. M., *The Beginnings of American English*, Chicago (University of Chicago), 1931, pp. 17 and 31–33.

[52] I have elsewhere attempted to show—"The Chaucerian-American 'I Guess,'" *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 1 (January, 1933), pp. 37–40—that this belief, as expressed in *The King's English* (3rd ed., 1930, p. 33), is erroneous.

of *The King's English*, just now alluded to, follow their remarks on "I guess" by this pronouncement as to *fall:*

> *Fall* is better on the merits than *autumn*, in every way: it is short, Saxon (like the other three season names), picturesque; it reveals its derivation to every one who uses it, not to the scholar only, like *autumn;* and we once had as good a right to it as the Americans; but we have chosen to let the right lapse, and to use the word now is no better than larceny.[53]

Guess and *fall* were two of the words that James Russell Lowell selected to illustrate his thesis, in the introduction to the *Biglow Papers* (second series), that the popular speech of New England contained many survivals of words or meanings of words once standard in England but later abandoned. It is, in the opinion of the present writer, fortunate that not merely New England speech but American speech generally has retained these, and others like them, in defiance of British scorn and American Anglomania. That *bug* or *sick* or *bloody* has suffered specialization or degeneration of meaning in England is surely no sufficient reason for altering the value that the word has long had in the United States. Moreover, if American speech has kept alive such picturesque and expressive compounds as *clodhopper, greenhorn, loophole,* and *ragamuffin,* and retained such useful older meanings as the ones an American associates with *burly, homely, deft, scant,* and so forth[54]—so much the better for its present state of health!

By way of summarizing impressions derived from a consideration of differences between the British and American vocabularies, two points are to be emphasized:

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[53] Reprinted by permission of the Oxford University Press.
[54] Mencken, 4th ed., p. 128.

the differences are real enough, and on certain levels of speech, fairly numerous; at the same time, their extent may easily be, and frequently is, grossly exaggerated. Let us look first at the one side of the case. Difference in the choice and use of words, though of course much less than the difference in pronunciation, is still considerable enough to make the realistic imitation of American conversation virtually impossible for the British novelist. Not only do the colloquialisms and the slang of the moment elude him, but even old and well-established differences in inflectional forms and idiom are imperfectly grasped. One small but conspicuous error on the part of the British reporter of American speech may be noted: his conviction that because Americans sometimes use *gotten* where the Britisher would employ *got*, it follows that the past participle for *get* in American speech is always *gotten*. The truth is, of course, that while some Americans use *gotten* in the sense of "become," "acquired," "received," and the like (e.g., "He's gotten better" and "I've gotten bad news"), no American uses *have gotten* in the sense of "possess," "cherish," or "have"; for the latter uses, the idiom is either *have got* or *have*. The English writer's failure to appreciate this minor differentiation may be illustrated in the following phrases from "American" conversation in recent English novels: "The kid's the only one who's gotten sense"; "That's what's wrong with Mexico, they've gotten no public spirit," "we haven't gotten your roots"; "you've lost the spirit of inquiry; or if you've still gotten it . . . " [55]

[55] The first two quotations are from Rose Macaulay's *Staying with Relations*, the second two from Galsworthy's *Maid in Waiting*. I have elaborated elsewhere—*American Speech*, Vol. VI, No. 4 (April, 1931).

Differences in vocabulary and idiom must then be considered to be great enough to prevent an Englishman from reporting American conversation with accuracy. It may be added that these differences are likewise enough to offer a minor difficulty to an Englishman reading an American novel or seeing an American play—though here, of course, it is only slang that is likely to be misinterpreted. The writer once observed, in the program notes that furnished a glossary for an American play presented in London, the following definition (among others equally noteworthy): "*to crack wise* = 'to speak knowingly.'" The Travelers' Library edition of Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* contains a glossary for the English reader, in which the following typical misapprehensions are to be found: *to buck* (to defraud, cheat), *flivver* (a cheap motor-car, of delicate build), *heck* (familiar for Hecuba, a New England deity), *Hunky* (Hun), *razz for fair* (heavy censure), *roughneck* (antithesis of highbrow), *roustabout* (revolutionary).

On the other hand, as has already been suggested, it is very easy to make too much of whatever differences in the use of words actually exist, especially since most of these differences are obviously to be found, for the most part, in colloquial and slangy speech only. The tendency of Mr. Mencken's *American Language* the present writer believes to be utterly misleading in this respect through its continually contrasting formal and literary

pp. 314–316—with reference to Miss Macaulay's book, the point made in the text; in "American Speech according to Galsworthy" (*ibid.*, April, 1932), I have pointed out the same error, together with a number of others, in Galsworthy's imitation of American conversation generally. In a very gracious letter commenting on this article, Mr. Galsworthy observed that he had decided, in order not to increase the sum total of Anglo-American irritation, to refrain from future attempts to deal with American speech.

British English with colloquial (frequently vulgar) American speech. In his original preface,[56] Mr. Mencken declared: "I can write English, as in this clause, quite as readily as American, as in this here one"; and throughout successive revisions of the book (though perhaps least in the final edition), there is the same implication that *typical* differences are those between polished British and guttersnipe American speech. The only fair comparison, it is to be insisted, is that between British and American speech on corresponding social or cultural levels.

One must admit at once that it is very easy to compile long lists of paired words in which English and American speakers or writers express, or may express, the same idea differently. But lists of this kind[57] tend to repeat each other in rehearsing certain well-worn examples (*luggage, baggage; shop, store; guard, conductor;* and the like), and to include not only insignificant (*barber's-shop, barbershop; coals, coal; brakesman, brakeman;* and so forth) but decidedly dubious variants. Thus, *luggage, shop,* and *guard* all have a certain vogue in America as well as in England; and it is absurd to imply that there is a clear-cut national differentiation between *return-ticket* and *round-trip-ticket, angry* and *mad, bath-robe* and *dressing-gown, crazy-bone* and *funny-bone,* and so forth. A careful examination of lists of this kind leaves one unimpressed by that sense of a great gulf between two vocabularies that the lists are intended to convey. It is

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[56] P. vii, 1st ed. (1919).

[57] *E.g.,* in *The American Language,* 3rd ed., pp. 116–119, and 4th ed., 233–237. Another comparison of the same sort is F. L. Griffin's "Learn English Before You Go," *Atlantic Monthly,* June, 1932, pp. 775–776. I have criticized the accuracy of some of Mr. Mencken's items (in the fourth edition) in "Notes on *The American Language,*" *American Speech,* October, 1937, pp. 185–189.

evident, for one thing, that there are only a few departments—shopping and travel, especially—in which there are numerous variations. Further, it is often clear that what have been cited as national differences in the past should no longer be so counted. It may not be altogether admirable, but it is the fact that haberdasher's terms like *great coat*, *top coat*, *waistcoat*, *dressing-gown*, and *boots* (for *shoes*), and a great many miscellaneous ones like *overshoes* (for *rubbers*), *music-hall* (for *vaudeville-theater*), *face-cloth* (for *wash-rag*), *ground floor* (for *first floor*), *agenda* (for *program*), cited by Mr. Mencken—that these and many others like them have ceased to strike an American as at all exotic.

Nor has the assimilation been in one direction only. An Englishman discussing the present state of the British vocabulary is perhaps more likely to dilate upon—it may be to lament about—the extent of its Americanization than upon any other feature. Professor Weekley[58] speaks of the "eager adoption" of *underdog*, *butting in*, *live wire*, *third degree*, *frame-up*, *gunman*, and the "now indispensable" *bluff*, *pep*, *stunt*, and *blurb*. An Englishman writing in an American magazine[59] observes: "You send us *high-hat*, *hokum*, *getaway*, *panties*, *water-wagon*, and *hangover*, and we send you *swank*, *spoof*, *click*, *the wind up*, *tell off*, *tick off*, and *up the pole*." The recent (1933) "Supplement" to the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes among the trends that have been manifest in the half-century which it covers, "the varied development of colloquial idiom and slang, to which the United States of America have made a large contribution . . . ."

[58] *The English Language*, pp. 77–80.

[59] Seaman, H. W., "The Awful English of England," *American Mercury*, Vol. XXX, No. 117 (September, 1933), pp. 72–82.

Though such words as the following are labeled in the "Supplement" as "U. S."—*racketeer, hijacker, hooch, go-getter, jay walker, whoopee, hooey, movie, speak-easy, ride* (*take for a*), *spot* (*put on the*), and so forth—the very fact that they are included is a step in breaking down the appropriateness of the label.

The agencies that cause American and British vocabulary alike to cease to be distinctive are more numerous and more powerful today than they have ever been in the past. Obviously the radio, the "talkies," the vogue of English novels and English plays in America, and that of American novels and American plays in England provide means of familiarizing the people of the two countries with each other's speech to an extent that has not been previously approached. There seems every reason to conclude that, though "colloquial idiom and slang" continue to develop more vigorously than ever before, and somewhat differently on the two sides of the Atlantic, the differences between American and British English are, through the influence of these agencies of internationalization, destined to diminish rather than increase. One reason for thinking so is the fact that while radio and "talkies" apparently foster the rapid growth of the more ephemeral types of speech, they also frequently make their vogue more temporary. Those words that survive a brief period of probation are not only given some degree of permanence in the country of their origin, but stand a better chance of becoming transatlantic English as well.

Complete standardization of vocabulary has of course not been attained, nor is it conceivable, the factors involved being what they are, that it will ever be attained. What perhaps is more open to debate is the desirability

of approaching this ideal, in vocabulary as in pronunciation. To the present writer, the small differences in the meanings or uses of words that he encounters in reading an English book are (if they are not an Englishman's reproduction of "American" conversation) pleasant and interesting rather than irritating; certainly, unless an unusual measure of slang is present, they can never be, to any moderately literate American, the cause of serious unintelligibility. To be specific, in the first page and a half of an English novel[60] opened more or less at random, there occur four words or phrases that are not used, or not used in the same way, in ordinary American English: *city* (financial district), *residential flats* (American "apartments"), *hoarding* (billboard), and *lorries* (trucks). The number, probably, is too great to be typical, but that is not the present point. What is conveyed to the American reader by such Briticisms is the agreeable sense of a different atmosphere, a pleasant awakening of other literary associations—perhaps, in addition, memories of travel abroad. This is accomplished without any suggestion of a barrier against the full understanding of the English writer. Why should we feel that variations between American English and British English are different, except in degree, from variations within the field of American English? Because a New Yorker says *block* where a Philadelphian says *square*, or identifies a street corner by giving the numbered street second, while a Philadelphian puts it first ("Broadway and Fortieth Street," "Sixteenth and Chestnut"), it does not follow that either expression is superior or inferior, as a counter of speech, to the other. It would

[60] *Big Business*, by A. S. M. Hutchinson, Boston (Little, Brown), 1932.

seem most sensible to feel similarly about the somewhat greater difference between the American and British uses of words: they are merely different and, to one interested in words, interestingly different, in the unimportant variations that they display. Both modes of speech have a right to exist, and the variations between them may be discussed without heat or rancor.

If one is at all justified in assuming a general interest in "words and their ways," perhaps space may be found for a comment on a last aspect of this department of our subject. Those who use words and speculate about them are usually given to wondering how individual words have come into being, how they are related to other words, and what their histories in our speech have been. Etymology is a field that has a wide appeal; and though, as we have already suggested,[61] it may be wrongly used, its fascination is surely both legitimate and praiseworthy. Anyone who is capable of being interested in words at all can scarcely fail to be instructed as well as entertained by glancing through the pages of Skeat's or Weekley's etymological dictionaries, or by dipping, even at random, into the infinite riches stored up in the volumes of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Perhaps the first query of the man on the street with reference to etymology is this: "How do we know where the word comes from?" It is to be feared that the candid answer, far more often than the questioner realizes, would be, "We don't." Etymology was the first field of linguistics to attact attention; but until comparatively recent times only guesswork was required to establish, to the etymologizer's satisfaction, a historical connection between words that had some chance resem-

[61] P. 423.

blance in sounds or sense.[62] What the layman does not realize is that a great deal of the etymological information in our dictionaries is, or should be, qualified by "probably," "perhaps," "conjectured to be," or the like. Reckless etymologizing in the past goes far to justify Mark Twain's satirical derivation of *Middletown* from *Moses* by "dropping the *-oses* and adding the *-iddletown*," and the aphorism, attributed to Voltaire,[63] to the effect that in etymology consonants count for very little and vowels for nothing at all. It comes as something of a shock, nevertheless, to find so competent a critic as Jespersen observing of modern dictionaries: "It is of course impossible to say how great a proportion of the etymologies given in dictionaries should strictly be classed under each of the following heads: (1) certain, (2) probable, (3) possible, (4) improbable, (5) impossible —but I am afraid that the first two classes would be the least numerous." [64]

To account for the limitations of our etymological knowledge, we may remind ourselves that pure root-creation has rarely been an active process in historic times; that only comparatively seldom can we associate an individual speaker or writer with the first use of a word; and that "phonetic laws" (like Grimm's Law) have a very restricted applicability in establishing etymology—if, indeed, the term *law* itself[65] is not utterly

[62] For illustration of etymological speculation in ancient, medieval, and early modern times, see Pedersen, *Linguistic Science*, pp. 1–8.

[63] Bloomfield points out that this often-quoted saying appears in a work of Max Müller's without a definite citation; he himself has been unable to find it in the works of Voltaire (*Language*, p. 511).

[64] *Language*, p. 307.

[65] For a recent discussion of the various meanings that have been attached to "phonetic law," see Graff, *Language and Languages*, pp. 235–251.

misleading. Analogy is evidently a force that tends to obscure etymology, as when unrelated words that somewhat resemble each other are made formally identical: *corn* (on the foot) and *corn* (the grain), *weeds* (plants) and *weeds* (garments), *let* (allow) and *let* (hinder) are familiar examples of words hat are known to be etymologically distinct. Moreover, analogy utilized in the service of popular etymology has doubtless veiled the true source and history of many other words. The clue to the correct etymology of the word may be lost in many other ways; for example, a mere mistake in its pronunciation—particularly when this results in a simpler combination of sounds—may be spread by imitation and become the standard form. Inadvertent confusion and blending of two words Jespersen believes to be a far more common method of creating new words than is generally recognized.[66] It is entirely conceivable that errors of all sorts, on the part of children as well as adults, have often been perpetuated, so that the word is given a form that either tempts an entirely erroneous etymological theory or suggests none at all. At any rate, there are evidently possibilities enough to explain the prevalence of mistaken or dubious etymologies, and to account for the fact that many very familiar words are of quite unknown origin. To illustrate the last point, *bogus*, *blizzard*, *jazz*, *jitney*, and *sundae* are Americanisms of mysterious derivation; *dog*, *boy*, *cut*, *dodge*, *fit*, *fog*, *fun*, *girl*, *jump*, *job*, *lad*, *lass*, *pull*, *pun*, and *put* are puzzling monosyllables of (apparently) native English origin; *brave*, *bronze*, *baroque*, *baron*, *flute*, *frown*, *rococo*, and *zinc* are from the Continent, most of them familiar

[66] *Language*, p. 312.

in other European languages also, but all representing unsolved enigmas.

The opportunities for going wrong in etymological guesswork find their classical illustration in the words for "fire" in English, French, and German: *fire, feu,* and *Feuer.* The cross-relationships might be imagined in several ways, but one point would seem to be sure: a common source. This, however, is exactly what cannot be asserted. *Fire* and *Feuer* go back, indeed, to a common Germanic ancestor, which is cognate with Greek πῦρ,[67] the word that we have borrowed as *pyre;* but French *feu,* for all its misleading resemblance in appearance and identity in meaning, is from the unrelated Latin *focus* (hearth). Authors have often laid themselves open to ridicule by asserting or implying an erroneous etymological relationship. The effectiveness of Milton's lines:

> And saw the ravens with their horny beaks
> Food to Elijah bringing even and morn—
> Though ravenous, taught to abstain from what they brought.

is unquestionably weakened by a knowledge that *raven* and *ravenous* are only apparently from a common source: *raven* is from Old English *hrœfn,* while *ravenous* is from Old French *ravineux* and is related to *rapine* rather than *raven.* Chaucer was more fortunate in making poetical capital of his (quite correct) etymology for *daisy:* "the 'dayesye' or elles the 'ye of daye'" (*Prologue to the Legend of Good Women,* l. 184). But Carlyle has been derided for his insistence that the "true meaning" of *king* is "man who can." To see an intimate relationship between *king* and *can* (especially in the German

[67] As Grimm's Law would suggest.

forms *König* and *können*) is tempting, but quite mistaken: *king* is really related not to *can* but to *kin* (cognate with Latin *genus*—Grimm's Law again). Thus the *king* is "etymologically" not the "able" man, but the man "of the tribe"—a meaning not at all relevant or helpful to Carlyle's theory of greatness.

Etymology, then, may easily be put to the wrong kind of service; even when correct, it is likely to tell us no more than what the word once meant—not what it means now. It helps not at all to reveal the innermost truth of things, though faith in some such mystical end to the study of etymology dies exceedingly hard. Etymologies, often palpably absurd, are constantly being employed to demonstrate some deep verity concealed in a word. The practical usefulness of knowing the derivation of a word must be stated very differently. Such knowledge often serves the more pedestrian purpose of keeping the user of the word from definite mistakes in its pronunciation, spelling, or meaning. Even here, however, a sense of the source and cognate relationships of the word is of qualified service and may actually mislead: the writer has observed a misspelling of *bloom* apparently by association with German *Blume*, and misspellings of *ceiling* and *apartment* apparently through association with French *ciel* and *appartement*. Though it helps in one's spelling of *excellent* and *repellent*, and *ignorant* and *dominant* to connect them with the proper Latin conjugations,[68] it may be misleading for pronunciation to recall the compositional elements of *Christmas*, *handkerchief*, and so on.

[68] And to associate words that are frequently misspelled—*sacrilegious* and *supersede*, for example—with the Latin words that are represented in them.

Similarly, as remarked before, a sense of the derivation of the word is something of a two-edged weapon when it is a question of its present meaning and use. The meaning of the word we have seen shift its ground continually; to bring it back arbitrarily to its etymological starting point may be thoroughly artificial. Because *endorse* is literally "on the back," shall its application to the *face* of a document be deemed absurd?[69] Because *transpire* (breathe through) is more appropriate, etymologically, to "leak out" or "become known" than to "happen," is there any reason to feel that the popular extension to "happen" may not become standard?[70] It has been argued that Canterbury rather than London is the *metropolis* of England, because *metropolis* (mother city) is properly used only in the original ecclesiastical sense of "chief *cathedral* city."[71] All of which brings us back to the doctrine that usage, not etymology, determines the meaning of words. If enough people "misuse" *awful*, *aggravate*, *terrible*, and the like (as in the past they have "misused" *nice*, *silly*, and *fond*), the etymological meaning is bound to be superseded by one that has hitherto been deemed incorrect. To take the opposite position is to identify one's attitude with that of the writer thus quoted by Brander Matthews:[72] " . . . for twenty-five years or more I have kept my eye on this little word *people* and I have yet to find a single American or English author who does not misuse it." When one

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[69] Professor Krapp, in *Modern English* (1909), p. 282, seems to answer this question affirmatively; in *The Knowledge of English* (1927), p. 140, he answers it negatively.

[70] *Cf.* Bloomfield, *Language*, p. 442, for a demonstration of *how* this transference of meaning has come about.

[71] Quoted by Fries in *The Teaching of the English Language*, p. 79.

[72] *Parts of Speech*, New York (Scribner's), 1901, p. 226.

is confident that everyone else is out of step, it is time to reëxamine the grounds for one's own assurance.

Notwithstanding what has just been said, it may still be asserted that to know the root meanings of words often has a genuine, even a utilitarian, value. Words, after all, are all too frequently used loosely rather than precisely, and to be aware of the original force of the word may save one from what is, both etymologically and by the standard of the best current use, an out-and-out blunder. Etymology unmistakably helps one to discriminate among words that are sometimes misapprehended as synonyms. When, during the Great War, newspaper writers had occasion to refer to a command that had suffered severe losses, they sometimes varied the expression of the idea by describing the body of troops in question as being *annihilated*, and again as being *decimated*. The objection, of course, is that the one word says too much and the other too little. It is difficult to see how anyone conscious of the *nihil* in the one word and the *decimus* in the other could use them so: clearly, the command was not reduced to "nothing" if there was a single survivor; on the other hand, a command that lost only every "tenth" man in such an engagement as was described was incredibly fortunate. Likewise, to understand the source and history of the Greek borrowing *protagonist*—i.e., "first actor (in a play)"—will help to keep one from the familiar misuse of it as the opposite of *antagonist*, a misuse which apparently arises from taking *pro-* to mean "for," instead of associating it with *proto-* (first). To insist on an "etymological" meaning with a learned word like *protagonist* seems to the writer a very different thing from a similar attitude as regards such everyday words as *awful*, *horrid*, and the like. The

principle actuating the discrimination has already been set forth: the greater obligation to use a learned word learnedly.

The most important reason for interest in etymology, however, is not a utilitarian one. It may be admitted at once that the claims for etymology as a practical means for insuring correct pronunciation and spelling, and conducing to a felicitous diction, are often grossly overstated. What seems much more certain is that, to anyone with a flair for words, delving into etymology is an end of itself. It may do little in the way of giving an accurate command of words, but it can do much in making the meanings of words richer and more picturesque. To know that *ephemeral* is literally "of a day" may help but little in dissociating it from *transitory*, *temporary*, and *evanescent* (all of which have their own interesting pictures); but it certainly renders the word more vivid. Even more certainly, to investigate the derivation and cognate relationships of *read*, *write*, *pen*, *style*, *letter*, and *alphabet*, while not at all necessary as a step in understanding the present use and meaning of the words, is a fascinating occupation in itself. Unexpected and often entertaining stories are again and again revealed in the history of a word; a few random illustrations of such words are *curfew*, *candidate*, *neighbor*, *eliminate*, and *recalcitrant*. Not infrequently, indeed, what the story reveals is a valuable glimpse into some perhaps obscure chapter in the development of human thought or manners. The more human side of what the scientific etymologist has discovered is today, as never before, at the disposal of the mere amateur in words.[73]

[73] Of books that deal particularly with the "romance of words," Ernest Weekley's work of that title, New York (Dutton), 1922, may be

References for Further Reading

The books cited in the present chapter, in the footnotes on pp. 422, 462, and 472, and:

Bloomfield, Leonard, *Language*, New York (Holt), 1933.

Bradley, Henry, *The Making of English*, New York (Macmillan), 1904.

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Krapp, G. P., *Modern English, Its Growth and Present Use* New York (Scribner's), 1909.

McKnight, G. H., *English Words and Their Background*, New York (Appleton), 1923.

Schreuder, Hindrik, *Pejorative Sense Development in English*, Groningen (Noordhoff), 1929.

Stern, Gustav, *Meaning and Change of Meaning*, Gothenburg, (Wettergren and Kerber), 1931.

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suggested, together with his series of later books in the same field, of which the most recent is *Something About Words*, New York (Dutton), 1936. Logan Pearsall Smith's *English Language*, New York (Holt), 1912, and *Words and Idioms*, New York (Houghton, Mifflin), 1925, and Owen Barfield's *History in English Words*, Garden City (Doubleday, Doran), 1926, are also useful, as are the etymological dictionaries of Skeat (4th ed., Oxford, 1910) and Weekley, New York (Dutton), 1924. Naturally, the first source of etymological information in general is the *O. E. D.*

CHAPTER XII

Syntax and Usage

SO far in our study we have been concerned primarily with the word as an isolated unit, and only incidentally with the combination of words into phrases and sentences. In addition to reviewing the sources and the development of the vocabulary, we have touched on the inflection of the word, the sound, the spelling, and finally the meaning: the departments of linguistics that are technically known as morphology, phonology, orthography, and semantics. What is still before us is a necessarily brief view of another field, that which deals with the uses of words in phrases or sentences. This is what is referred to by students of language as *syntax*—virtually, the same as what is popularly meant by *grammar*, a term, however, that in more technical use includes also the phonetics and the accidence (or morphology) of the language. Syntax may conceivably be treated in a number of ways; for example, as prescriptive, historical, or descriptive. Here we shall be concerned only indirectly with the first approach, that which lays down the laws of correct usage; and comparatively little space can be spared for the second, which would explain how certain conventions have been established. Our object must rather be to comment, of course selectively, on certain aspects of syntax that are of interest in connection with the present language, as we actually observe it in the speech or writing of today. The

phrase "syntax and usage" that has been chosen as the chapter heading may serve to suggest that there is sometimes a real or apparent conflict between theory and practice, that prescriptive syntax and actual usage (which we shall endeavor to describe) are not entirely at one. We shall therefore be particularly interested in those points of syntactical usage that present a problem to the present-day speaker or writer of English—in which, in other words, the conventions of another day seem to be breaking down. In regard to many such matters, there is good reason to feel that we are living in a period of transition, that a number of conventions that were once—for good or insufficient reasons—deemed unassailable are now the subject of sometimes over-enthusiastic attack by the radically minded, and of equally stubborn defense by the conservative.

The point of view that is to be kept in mind is that "grammar," which we shall use in this chapter in the popular sense of the term, is subject to change by usage in precisely the same way that other aspects of language are subject to change. This is a conception that many persons seem to have difficulty in accepting. They will assent to the idea that the sounds, spelling, and meanings of words alter with the passage of time; but they feel that the grammatical principles that they were taught in childhood (very likely outmoded even then) are such eternal verities that to question them would be impious. Yet it is evident to one who explores even superficially the history of the language that syntax—and often, consequently, idiom—has been in a state of flux throughout. We now say, for example, "He was awarded the prize," where once only "Him was awarded the prize" would have been possible. What has happened, evi-

dently, is that our feeling for the normal sentence pattern, in which the subject comes first, has *made* a subject of what was once the indirect object (placed first because the person is more important than the thing). Besides, where there was no distinction of case, as in nouns (compare "John was awarded the prize"), no formal change was involved, so that "John" was easily interpreted as subject rather than indirect object. This new interpretation established a precedent that was followed even where it made necessary a shift from "him" to "he." The consequence is a Modern English sentence pattern ("The general was offered the crown," "I was granted a favor") that is now thoroughly acceptable, though an occasional purist,[1] finding no analogy for it in Latin syntax and struck by the difficulty of parsing "crown" or "favor," still objects to it. For another illustration, let us observe the history of the phrase that is now either "It is I" or "It is me"—a differentiation to which we shall return. In Old English, the corresponding idiom, like the Modern German "Ich bin es" except for the order, was "Ic hit eom." In Middle English, this alters to "Hit am I"; but it proves impossible, eventually, to maintain *I* as subject when it follows the verb. The shift to "It is I," therefore, takes place; but in this new phrase, as early as the sixteenth century, *me* is competing with *I*, obviously because the objective form is instinctively preferred for the position following the predicate. The point that we would emphasize here is the thoroughgoing way in which the syntax of the phrase has been shifted.

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[1] *E.g.*: "*Given.* 'The soldier was given a rifle.' What was given is the rifle, not the soldier. 'The house was given a coat (coating) of paint. Nothing can be 'given' anything." (Ambrose Bierce, *Write It Right*, p. 31.)

The rival phrases that have just been alluded to form one of the battlegrounds in current discussions of "correct English." It seems worth while, therefore, to go somewhat more deeply into the implications of divided usage in "It is I (me)" and kindred phrases. First, just how is usage divided? There can be no doubt that the usual textbook condemnation of "It is me" as "ungrammatical" is absurd in view of the actual facts of the case. Moreover, to the present writer, even a better-informed view, such as that of Professor Curme[2]—"the predicate pronoun should be in the nominative and in choice language usually is, but in popular and loose colloquial speech there has persisted . . . a tendency to employ here the accusative of personal pronouns as the predicate complement after the copula"—overstates the case for "It is I (he, they, *and so on*)." It seems more accurate to distinguish, not between "choice" and "loose colloquial" speaking or writing, but between more and less formal occasions for both speaking and writing. Here, as always, the spoken language sets the pace; and in the spoken language, especially of the less formal (but not necessarily the "loose") type, only "It is me" is in natural, idiomatic use.[3] Writers employing dialog in the printed page sometimes hesitate to employ it, out of deference to a tradition that condemns it; or if they use it, they do it either apologetically or defiantly, in such a way as to indicate that they recognize that they are violating a generally accepted grammatical rule. The quotations shown on p. 495 illustrate these attitudes.

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[2] *Syntax*, p. 41.

[3] This includes, of course, the spoken language realistically rendered in literature. See the many examples, chiefly from contemporary British practice, of the literary use of "It is me" cited by G. H. McKnight in *Modern English in the Making*, pp. 532 and 533.

His eye was so dim,
So wasted each limb,
That, heedless of grammar, they all cried *That's him.*
(Ingoldsby, *The Jackdaw of Rheims*)[4]

"That's *him* [italics]," said Ann Veronica, in sound idiomatic English. (H. G. Wells, *Ann Veronica*, Chap. VI)[5]

"He may be any of the passengers who sit with me at table."
"He may be me," said Father Brown, with cheerful contempt for grammar. (G. K. Chesterton, *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, p. 145)

The true status of the two expressions in question seems to the present writer such that "It is I" rather than "It is me" is now on the defensive. This reversal of attitudes that have obtained in the past is illustrated in a recent characterization of "It is I" as "suburban English."[6] The implication is of course that the phrase is overcorrect, artificial, and stilted. A contemporary American novelist, Robert Nathan, touches this distinction very neatly when he has a character, speaking naturally, say, " . . . it's me she's married to, not him, and I won't stand for it" (*There Is Another Heaven*,[7] p. 124); a little later (p. 128), the same character, in a formal, almost a bombastic tone, gives utterance to these words: "It was I with whom she lay in bed; it was I she consoled." The difference in the atmosphere of the two speeches, be it noted further, is suggested also by the stilted "with whom she lay in bed," as contrasted with the colloquial "she's married to." Contemporary English, in other words, discriminates between "It is I"

[4] New York (Houghton, Mifflin), 1919.
[5] Quoted by McKnight, *supra*.
[6] By William Ellery Leonard in "Concerning the Leonard Study," *American Speech*, Vol. VIII, No. 3 (October, 1933), p. 58. See also Wallace Rice's article "Who's There?—Me," *ibid.*, pp. 58–63.
[7] New York (Bobbs-Merrill), 1929.

and "It is me" (or, more commonly, "It's me") by employing the one phrase in formal, literary style and the other in informal, colloquial expression; and it may well be argued that the language is the richer for the distinction.

How can we account for the drift to "It's me"? One reason for it, quite certainly, is that the position of the word in the sentence has become more important in determining its inflectional form than the traditional syntax involved. Furthermore, the objectives of the personal pronouns have been gaining at the expense of the nominatives, which tend more and more to be used only when they are immediately followed by a predicate. We feel, in some obscure fashion, that the objectives are both the more normal and the more emphatic words. The classical illustration of this emphatic use of *me* is in the passage from Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*,

> Be thou, spirit fierce,
> My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

This is indeed the triumph of poetry over grammar. And how feeble, how grotesque would *I* have been! Another illustration of the greater force of the objective pronominal forms is thus cited by Havelock Ellis:[8] "The Frenchman, when asked who is there, does not reply, 'Je!' But the would-be purist in English is supposed to be reduced to replying, 'I!' Royal Cleopatra asks the Messenger: 'Is she as tall as me?' The would-be purist no doubt transmutes this as he reads into: 'Is she as tall as I?' We need not envy him." Shakespeare

[8] *The Dance of Life*, New York (Houghton, Mifflin), 1929, Chap. IV. The whole argument for the "psychological necessity" of " . . . a double use of 'me' in English" is worthy of consideration.

of course lived before the establishment of the "rules" by grammarians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the freer syntax that his works display—where not "corrected" in modern school editions—often anticipates developments that are only now being given academic sanction. As to the "corrections," the First Folio reading of a familiar passage in *Macbeth* is

> lay on, Macduff,
> And damned be him that first cries, "Hold, enough!"

but a weaker *he* too often silently replaces *him* in our school texts.

"It is me" is undoubtedly in a stronger position than "It is them," "It is him," or "It is her." Many of us, without being able to give very sound reasons for doing so, would agree with Professor Weekley's practice: "Personally I say 'That's me,' hesitate at 'That's him (*or* her)' . . . "[9] *Current English Usage* likewise lists "It is me" as "established," but finds that "If it had been us . . . " is on the border-line, while "I'll swear that was him," "I suppose that's him," "I am older than him," and "It seems to be them" are all "disputable."[10] Nevertheless, good contemporary speech and writing often employs the objective forms of other pronouns than the first personal (singular) in analogous ways. Ramsay MacDonald used these words in his speech open-

[9] *Cruelty to Words*, New York (Dutton), 1931, p. 79. And of course others who condone "It is me" will condemn "It's him" or "It's them" more emphatically. C. T. Onions (*An Advanced English Syntax*, p. 34) takes this stand: the one is "used even by educated speakers," the others are "generally regarded as vulgar or dialectal."

[10] It should, perhaps, be added that "You are older than me" is also "disputable." For the meaning of "established" and "disputable," see p. 99 of this pamphlet.

ing the naval conference of January, 1930: "The way of Great Britain is on the sea, for it is a small island . . . Its defence and its high-road have been the sea . . . Our navy is no mere superfluity to us: it *is* us." Though the *us* was widely criticized, would not *we* have been both flat and absurd? Aldous Huxley uses a similar *us* in this phrase: "A movement whose consummation is *us* [italicized] must be progressive."[11]

In the light of citations like these, it would seem that the usual textbook statements on the use of the personal pronouns need revision. What is really happening to pronouns in general has recently been summed up thus by Jespersen:[12] "On the whole, the natural tendency in English has been towards a state in which the nominative of pronouns is used only where it is clearly the subject, and where this is shown by close proximity to (generally position immediately before) a verb, while the objective is used everywhere else." This tendency, more marked as we have shown it to be in colloquial than in literary style, has as yet won but little recognition in the grammars and handbooks of writing and in our schools. When it is admitted that there is a drift in current English that takes more account of the position of pronouns in the sentence than of the traditional meaning of their case forms, the drift is all too likely to be noted as resulting in "incorrect" syntax.

Jespersen's way of putting the matter is certainly more suggestive than Curme's. The latter[13] speaks of "the plain drift of our language . . . to use the accusative of personal pronouns as the common case form for the

[11] "One God or Many," *Harper's*, No. 952 (September, 1929), p. 401.
[12] *Essentials of English Grammar*, p. 136.
[13] *Syntax*, p. 43.

nominative and accusative relations; just as in nouns there is here no formal distinction," and continues by citing examples—all, however, from dialectal or substandard speech—in which *me* replaces *I* immediately before a predicate. There would seem, however, to be no indications of a tendency in this direction in good colloquial speech, in which *me* has superseded *I* only after the verb or where used without a verb (as in *Dear me!*, *Unhappy me!*, and so forth). The drift, then, is not really a tendency for accusatives to replace nominatives in all positions, but rather for the separate forms to be interpreted and used in a new way, one dictated by word-order. The principle applies too to other than personal pronouns, especially to the interrogative *who*. What we notice here is a strong tendency to use the traditionally nominative form *who*, rather than the accusative *whom*, whenever the word comes first in the sentence, no matter whether it is subject or object. The inverted order used in a question will therefore result, in natural, unpedantic speech, in sentences like these: "Who did you see?" "Who is the message from?" "Who did you call on?" Thus there is no real incongruity between the drift to *me* in *It is me* and that to *who* in *Who did you see?* The circumstance that in the one instance it means the replacing of a form traditionally nominative with one traditionally accusative, and that in the other it works in the opposite way, merely makes the general principle the more obvious.

There is, however, a further point to be made about the present use of *who* and *whom* (both interrogative and relative). The general leveling of inflections in English provides a powerful impetus to substitute a caseless and generalized *who* even where traditional syntax calls for

whom. After all, many people get through life without ever saying *whom;* if they are aware of its existence at all, they regard it as a luxury of speech beyond their simple needs. George Ade once described in these illuminating terms a man obviously not of the folk: "He wore horn-rimmed spectacles and said 'whom.'" The situation, then, is not quite parallel with the one that we have discussed with reference to the first and third personal pronouns, singular and plural; it is clear that even the most illiterate do not simply discard *I* in favor of *me*, or *they* in favor of *them*. What we are here concerned with is the drift, making its way upward from the lower levels of speech, to replace *whom* with *who in every position in the sentence*. The interrogative *who* coming first in the sentence is the entering wedge of a more general movement to eliminate *whom* completely. Still, to find an eminent student of language like Jespersen making the following statement doubtless comes as something of a shock to many minds: "Grammarians have been so severe in blaming this ["Who did you meet there?" and so forth] that now many people feel proud when they remember writing *whom* and even try to use that form in speech."[14]

To the present writer, this way of putting the matter is sound and salutary doctrine, even if a trifle sweeping. Exception may be taken, nevertheless, to a qualification that Jespersen gives to his most recent remarks about *who* and *whom*: " . . . the only places in which *whom* is still naturally used are those in which it comes immediately before the subject of the following verb: *than whom*

[14] *Op. cit.*, p. 137. The notation under *whom* in the *O. E. D.*—"no longer current in natural colloquial speech"—is perhaps less extreme in its implication.

and sentences like the following: 'Ferdinand, whom they supposed is drowned' (Shakespeare); 'I met a man whom I thought was a lunatic' (E. F. Benson); 'Let Gilbert's wife be whom she might' (G. Eliot)." Here the objection is to Jespersen's use of the word *naturally*. *Than whom* is a phrase that has scarcely a place in colloquial English at all; it belongs essentially to formal, literary style. The other illustrations of the "natural" use of *whom*—sentences of the type of "We feed children whom we think are hungry," which Jespersen elsewhere[15] has defended most elaborately—must be discussed more fully.

Most grammars of course dismiss the *whom* in "We feed children whom we think are hungry" as a gross error, though it is curious that Mr. Fowler, in observing " . . . probably no grammarian would have a word to say for it,"[16] should have overlooked the fact that one of the greatest of modern grammarians, Jespersen, has had many words to say for it. One may, however, be convinced by the cogency of Jespersen's reasoning, and feel with him that the attacks on the construction are based on at least two false premises,[17] without feeling that at present the *whom* in such sentences is in *natural* use. It seems to the present writer dictated rather by an attempt at "correctness" that has gone astray. The psychology would seem to be that the writer is too conscious of the

[15] *Philosophy of Grammar*, pp. 349–351, and *Modern English Grammar*, Part III, 10.7$_3$ *ff*.

[16] *Modern English Usage*, p. 724. *Current English Usage*, though its trend has been widely criticized as ultraliberal, likewise classifies this construction as "illiterate"—"definitely among uncultivated usages" (p. 110).

[17] Namely, that a subject *must* be in the nominative, and that the insertion of the words "we think" does not change the relation between the relative pronoun and its verb.

existence of *whom* in the language; as a consequence of the fear of being thought ignorant of "correct" syntax, he uses *whom* in and out of season—surely the exact opposite of a *natural* use of it. Present-day writers who use *whom* in such a construction thus afford an additional and a very striking illustration of the fact that *whom* lacks any real vitality in contemporary English, since one of the best exhibitions of the decadence of a form is its use contrary to the plain drift of the language—in this instance, the generalized and caseless use of *who*.

Collections of contemporary uses of *whom* in the construction under consideration have several times been made,[18] but perhaps the present writer may add others that he has observed in his reading. If it be granted that the *New York Times* represents the better grade of present-day journalistic writing, the following quotations would apparently indicate that the construction is familiar in the newspapers of today:

Gen. Butler, whom the ragged bonus-marchers secretly hope will undertake to lead a nation-wide organization . . . , advised them today to go home. (Aug. 2, 1932)

Some of the Republicans objected to the man whom they thought was a Democrat occupying an important post. . . . (Jan. 1, 1931)

. . . our ability to select the men whom we all believe will merit future public confidence. (Feb. 27, 1933)

Novelists and short-story writers, of greater and less repute, furnish the following citations:

The fourth, whom they judged might possibly live for a time, was reserved for more leisurely handling. (Agnes Repplier, *Mère Marie of the Ursulines*, p. 196)[19]

[18] E.g., Fowler, *op. cit.*, pp. 724 and 725; Weekley, *Cruelty to Words*, pp. 23–27; and Jespersen, *op. cit.*

[19] Doubleday, Doran, 1931.

. . . always she was conscious of people who stared, or whom she imagined were staring. (Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*, p. 187)[20]

He saw a middle-aged woman . . . , whom for an instant he thought might be Miriam terribly changed . . . (H. G. Wells, *The History of Mr. Polly*, Chap. X)[21]

The four men whom he had assumed were Austin and the servants . . . (Freeman W. Crofts, *The Ponson Case*, p. 46)[22]

. . . the kind of young man whom one knew instinctively had a good mother and a bad tailor. ("Saki" [H. H. Munro], *Complete Short Stories*, p. 35)[23]

Quotations like these surely indicate the imminent departure of *whom* from living speech rather than a remaining "natural" retention of it in the construction discussed. Perhaps a lingering consciousness of case-form that still fails to take the trouble to sort out the traditional uses of *who* and *whom* helps also to account for the unauthorized use of *whom* (or *whomever*) where it is the subject of a verb in a clause introduced by a preposition. This construction is illustrated in the following sentences: "And you heard nothing as to whom it might be?" (Eden Phillpotts, *Found Drowned*,[24] p. 95), and " . . . all the whatnots that a man collects and insists on showing to whomever enters his house" (Lord Dunsany, *Don Rodriguez*,[25] p. 105). The upshot of the whole matter clearly is that one of the few remaining strongholds of case-form in Modern English is considerably less impregnable than is commonly supposed.

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[20] Covici, Friede, 1928.
[21] Boni, 1930.
[22] Boni, 1931.
[23] Viking Press, 1930.
[24] Macmillan, 1931.
[25] Putnam, 1922.

Our discussion of cases in the pronouns has indicated that the position of the word in the sentence is a consideration that often takes precedence over other factors in determining what form shall be employed. The importance of word-order in Modern English may be illustrated further—and where no question of case is involved—in another hotly debated crux of contemporary usage, the split infinitive. Modifying words in Modern English generally come immediately before the words they modify; this, as we have seen, is one of the incidental necessities of the thorough inflectional simplification that the language has undergone. Moreover, a very familiar sentence pattern consisting of subject, adverbial modifier, predicate, and object tends to be followed even where the adverb does not logically refer to the verb: "He only had one" is an order objected to by purists but nevertheless persisted in by a very great majority of speakers. There is a strong impulse, therefore, to put the adverbial modifier of the infinitive immediately before the infinitive and after its "sign," the preposition *to*. This order has apparently been developed also through the influence of many parallel phrases: *to sincerely regret*, after all, is not very different from *he sincerely regrets, that he should sincerely regret, of sincerely regretting*, and so forth. There seems no logical reason why the infinitive should not be "split"—really a misnomer, since *to* is not properly a part of the infinitive—just as there can scarcely be hesitation about "splitting" the predication *he regrets* or the participial phrase *of regretting*. Nevertheless, there is a powerful convention that forbids, and it is this that is in conflict with the feeling for word-order that leads to the splitting.

To understand the convention, it is necessary to be aware that the infinitive with *to* was originally a substantival phrase, in which a noun in the dative case was governed by, and of course immediately preceded by, the preposition *to*, which formerly meant "toward." As early as the fourteenth century, however, *to* ceased to be felt as a preposition; hence the way was open for the insertion of adverbs between *to* and the infinitive. But the opportunity for greater precision of expression which the split infinitive affords has been made use of only occasionally by many writers, and some have sedulously striven to avoid it altogether. Grammarians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries condemned it so severely and so successfully that even now only a few writers employ it freely, and it is one of the favorite taboos of those teachers—unfortunately, no inconsiderable number—who are unaware that there has been any development in language since the days of Queen Anne. As a matter of record, however, the split infinitive has had the sanction of at least occasional use by many good writers for at least three centuries, and there are signs today that the unreasonable prejudice against it as vulgar or uncultured is beginning to abate. Certainly, the literary precedent for it and the solid advantages to expressiveness that it may possess have been pointed out by students of language in our day as never before.[26]

As to one's individual attitude on the split infinitive, it is to be admitted, of course, that there is a certain risk

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[26] For an older defense, see T. R. Lounsbury, *The Standard of Usage in English*, New York (Harper's), 1908, pp. 240–268; for recent favorable views of it, see the witty article by Fowler, *op. cit.*, pp. 558–561, and the excellent treatment by Curme, *op. cit.*, pp. 458–467.

attached to a free use of it: the writer may be censured for being ignorant of rhetorical conventions rather than admired for being independent of outmoded restrictions. The practical advantage of a certain deference to this, as to many another no more reasonable convention, is probably sufficiently obvious. What is perhaps not so obvious is that the writer (or speaker) who blindly bows to the taboo runs other and possibly worse risks: he is quite likely to create something that is either ambiguous or awkward (or both). Let us look first at the possibility of ambiguity. When the adverb precedes the *to*, it is often not clear whether it refers to what goes before or to what follows.

The inaugural speech is expected frankly to set forth in the fewest words possible Mr. Hoover's position on all these and other issues . . . (*New York Times*, Jan. 28, 1929)

[Is there a "frank expectation" or an "expectation of frankness"?]

. . . such writers as Hemingway, Dreiser . . . have not failed heartily to abet the leaders. (*Saturday Review of Literature*, May 7, 1932)

[There is the momentary suggestion of the absurdity "hearty failure."]

Clearly the men whom Hoover and ex-Secretary Baker plastered with flattery as the saviors of their country have it in their power very nearly to wreck it. (*New Republic*, Oct. 14, 1931)

[Does "very nearly" qualify "have it in their power" or "wreck"?]

. . . a young woman with a figure whose perfection her ill-fitted corsets and clothes failed altogether to conceal . . . (E. P. Oppenheim, *Clowns and Criminals*, p. 5)[27]

Von Hern performed the introduction with a reluctance which he failed wholly to conceal. (*Ibid.*, p. 462)

[27] Little, Brown, 1931.

[In both instances, it is presumably not "total failure," as is at first suggested, but "failure at total concealment" (i.e., *partial* failure) that is really intended.]

Apart from the risk of ambiguity, there is a downright clumsiness of expression which the split-infinitive phobia engenders. These quotations from General Pershing's memoirs (*New York Times*, Jan. 13 and March 17, 1931) suggest that the split infinitive is expressly prohibited in *Army Regulations*: " . . . but few of its officers had the experience necessary fully to understand its functions . . . " "The fact that we had smothered the enemy artillery was an advantage, as it enabled the leading waves deliberately to do their work without serious loss." It is curious, too, to note in an uncompromisingly militant critic like George Jean Nathan such excessive timidity in the face of a split infinitive as the following excerpts from a single article (*Vanity Fair*, May, 1931) betray: " . . . I allow myself the honor seriously to doubt." "If the gentlemen in Downing Street were determined deliberately to spread subtle propaganda . . . " " . . . who makes it a business closely to follow their activities . . . " "Seriously to review such garbage . . . ." Such stylistic eccentricities meet one all too often in contemporary prose; for a few more random examples:

This appeared greatly to cheer the Times reviewer. ("Solomon Eagle" [J. C. Squire], *Books in General*, 2nd Series, p. 152)[28]

. . . that acquaintance with Southey, . . . which was deeply to color the next few years of his life. (*C. H. E. L.*, Vol. XI, p. 130)

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[28] Doubleday, Doran, 1919–1921.

. . . there was a fine chance for a Senator with character and brains effectively to unload his mind . . . (*New Republic*, March 25, 1931)

This mannerism the present writer feels to be justly commented on by Mr. Fowler as follows: "It does not add to a writer's readableness if readers are pulled up now and again to wonder—why this distortion? Ah, to be sure, a non-split die-hard!"

Possibly, however, the most grotesque result of the fear of the split infinitive is the fact that it not infrequently causes a writer to take elaborate precautions to avoid offending against a convention that does not exist. "To severely criticize" is a split infinitive, but "to be severely criticized" or "to have severely criticized" is not. "Successfully to have mined or torpedoed the ship would have required considerable and expensive equipment and a good many hands" (Walter Millis, *The Martial Spirit*,[29] p. 128) is decidedly an awkward way of expressing the idea "to have successfully mined . . . "—to say nothing of the fact that the present infinitive would be still more desirable. "They appear rapidly to have assimilated . . . " (H. C. Wyld, *The Growth of English*, p. 116), with its irrelevant suggestion of "a rapid appearance," likewise betrays the extreme solicitude of the "non-split die-hard." More remote ramifications of apparently the same trend are to be noticed in an occasional distorted word-order that seems dictated by the writer's anxiety to get the adverb disposed of as soon as possible lest he should commit the unpardonable sin—even though he is not always quite clear as to what the sin is. "Nobody solicitously is

[29] Houghton, Mifflin, 1931.

trying to save science for the simple reason that in its own sphere science is saving us" (H. E. Fosdick, "What Is Religion?" *Harper's*, March, 1929). [Here it would seem that the writer feared that even between *is* and *trying* the adverb would be too near the infinitive, and so inserted it in the strange position that it now occupies.] "If the Olympic Games permanently were abandoned, what difference would it make?" (Jay House, Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, Feb. 18, 1932) [The only plausible explanation of this oddity is that the necessity of avoiding "to permanently abandon" led the writer to avoid the somewhat similar "were permanently abandoned."]

The sensible conclusion would seem to be that while deference to a not very reasonable convention makes it wise to avoid the construction ordinarily, and certainly makes it unwise to take the opportunity to split every possible infinitive, the occasional use of a split infinitive is entirely permissible. One may well agree with Mr. Fowler's conclusion that a split infinitive is preferable to real ambiguity or patent artificiality. Reason is all on the side of the splitter: note, for example, that there is no objection, in any quarter, to a construction like this—"It is the virtue of Cummings' poems to capture and accurately preserve the color of moments like this" (*New Republic*, Jan. 27, 1932); and the fact that there is no other equally unambiguous and straightforward way of expressing such an idea as this—"He ended a string of abuse with a vigorous back-hander, which I failed to entirely avoid" (Conan Doyle, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*,[30] p. 106). But, as in the matter of spelling reform, there are other things than reason to consider.

[30] McClure, Phillips, 1905.

To a really astonishing degree the authority of an older generation of grammarians has been strong enough to hold in check such powerful forces as analogy, the demands of clarity, and the usual trend in word-order.

Our discussion of syntactical usage in present-day English has so far revolved about case-form and word-order particularly. These two conceptions are of course related in that the trend of current English, especially in its less formal and more colloquial aspects, is to put more emphasis upon position and less upon case-form. Another general conception that offers a point of departure for comment on present-day usage is agreement or concord. Here again it is obvious that theory and practice are somewhat at variance. The stricter rules of the grammarian who would force English into the Procrustean bed of Latin syntax dictate that a plural subject shall be followed by a plural verb, that a singular noun shall be referred to by a singular pronoun, that a word in apposition shall have the same case as the word with which it belongs, and so on—in short, that there shall be complete agreement in number, gender, person, and case wherever these categories are preserved in distinctive forms.

Let us look first at agreement in number between subject and verb. There is, to begin with, little if any advantage in expressiveness in the retention of this syntactical convention. As Jespersen puts it,[31] " . . . singular and plural in verbs have nothing to do with the verbal idea: when we say 'birds sing' with the plural form of *sing* . . . this does not denote several acts of singing, but is only a meaningless grammatical contrivance show-

[31] *Essentials of English Grammar*, p. 216.

ing the dependence of the verb on its subject." There is every reason to feel that English has gained much and lost very little through the inflectional leveling that has left only the ending *-s* to stand for difference in number in verbs. Early Modern English usage permitted a great deal more liberty of choice between singular and plural forms of verbs than is at present allowable, at least in theory. It is of course quite generally admitted that collective nouns may take either a singular or a plural verb, according to whether the thought stresses the body or the parts that make up the body; thus, "the senate was in session" and "the senate were debating" are both admissible. But only substandard speech today makes the free use of singular verb with plural subject that is to be found in the King James Bible or in Shakespeare. This earlier use is particularly common where the singular verb *precedes* a number of subjects, as in the Biblical "Now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three," "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing," "To comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height," and "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory." Earlier English, however, also permits this lack of agreement between subject and verb when the plural subject precedes, as in "Where moth and rust doth corrupt," "Hostility and civil tumult reigns" (Shakespeare, *King John*, Act IV, scene 2, l. 247), "Our faith and knowledge thrives by exercise" (Milton, *Areopagitica*), and "Every transaction and sentiment was so remote . . . " (Johnson, *Rambler*, No. 4).

Good contemporary prose is perhaps less bound by the rule of concord, theoretically made rigid since the eighteenth century, than is generally realized. Gram-

marians sometimes allow as a legitimate exception the construction in which two nouns that together make up an idea are followed by a singular verb, as in "the long and short of the matter (*or*, the sum and substance) *is* . . . " However, not every use of singular verb with plural subject that is to be found even in formal, literary style can be defended on this basis. Here are a few miscellaneous examples of the construction:

The office had been in abeyance for many years, and its revival and bestowal at this time *was* indeed a remarkable sign of the royal favor. (Lytton Strachey, *Elizabeth and Essex*, p. 161)[32]

It is when that action and reaction *is* vivid enough that there start forth . . . visions chiseled in words. (John Galsworthy, "Literature and Life," p. 4)[33]

. . . their experience and leadership *is* considered too valuable to be exposed in the front-line trenches. (Elmer Davis, "Makers of Martyrs," *Harper's*, August, 1933, p. 350)

But the assault and robbery *is* at least equally likely to have been a reason for his voluntary resignation. (F. N. Robinson, edition of Chaucer, Introduction, p. xix)[34]

The New Deal has been in existence almost two months and critical examination and appraisal *has* begun. ("Personal and Otherwise," *Harper's*, January, 1934, oppo. p. 248)

In some of the foregoing quotations the singular verb doubtless seems more natural and more necessary than in others; taken together, however, they serve to demonstrate that the rule-of-thumb application of the principle of "concord" to this point of syntax is somewhat unsatisfactory for present-day English.

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[32] Blue Ribbon Books, 1933.
[33] Included in *Candelabra*, New York (Scribner's), 1933.
[34] Houghton, Mifflin, 1933.

As a further bit of evidence that contemporary English prose does not always follow the strict rule of agreement in number between subject and predicate, we may examine two successive sentences written by one of the most skilful of recent writers, G. Lowes Dickinson (*A Modern Symposium*, p. 139):[35]

> For such nobility, as all history and experience clearly shows, if we interrogate it honestly, is the product of a class-consciousness. Personal initiative, personal force, a freedom from sordid cares, a sense of hereditary obligation based on hereditary privilege, the consciousness of being set apart for high purposes, of being one's own master and the master of others, all that and much more goes to the building up of the gentleman; and all that is impossible in a socialistic state.

That a subject may have an essential unity though it happens to be expressed in two words connected by *and* is a principle that will help to explain why "all history and experience" (i. e., "all the experience of history") is followed by *shows*, and "all that and much more" by *goes*. But there is probably a better, though a subtler, reason. If, in the first sentence, *show* had been used, it would have been necessary to refer to the obviously plural subject by *them* rather than *it;* these plurals would somehow have been less harmonious with the singular *is* of the main clause that is resumed after the two parentheses. Even more clearly, in the second sentence, there is not only greater force and intensity in the singular *goes* than there would have been in the plural *go*, but the antithesis between *goes* and *is* would have been weakened if the parallelism in number had been destroyed by the opposition of *is* to *go*. In both sentences, to follow

[35] Doubleday, Doran, 1905. Reprinted by permission.

the rule of "concord" would have been to obtrude syntax and make it conspicuous; and that is precisely what Modern English when well handled does *not* do.

In the point of syntax that has just been commented on, it is evident that modern literary style makes at least some use of a greater freedom that obtains in popular speech and that obtained in older literature. A somewhat similar story is that of the interesting phenomenon, peculiar to Modern English, known as the "group-genitive." When we say "the chairman of the board's opinion" it is clear that the opinion referred to is not that of the board, but that of its chairman; in other words, the phrase "chairman of the board" is inflected as a unit, and the ending *-'s* is attached to the end of the phrase, not added to the noun to which it syntactically belongs. Thus we say, "the mayor of Philadelphia's house," "the man in the street's attitude," and "my brother-in-law's car," just as we habitually add the possessive ending to only the second of a pair of personal names that together form a partnership: "the King of England's influence" is thus akin to "Beaumont and Fletcher's plays," "Gilbert and Sullivan's works," and so on. The locution "the King of England's influence," however, has established itself only gradually, and within the Modern English period; Malory, for example, used instead such a construction as "Sir Marhaus, the king's son of Ireland." In colloquial English today, the group-genitive is used extensively, and in an extreme fashion. Bradley[36] notes that a phrase like "That was the man I met at Birmingham's idea" is not at all uncommon in speech, though

[36] *The Making of English*, p. 61.

it is scarcely possible in writing. It is evident, however, that it may be used in writing that imitates actual speech, or even suggests it. The colloquial turn that the construction gives to the following sentence admirably suggests that what we have is a reproduction of a man's thoughts: "He thought he'd go after them; he could take the little girl with the hair ribbon's other hand, and walk with them, two grown-up people and one little girl." (Robert Nathan, *There Is Another Heaven*, pp. 138 and 139) Incidentally, the writer just quoted furnishes, this time in dialog, a different and a very extreme example of group inflection—the superlative ending *-est* attached to a long phrase, "hand-in-glove with God Almighty": "He was the hand-in-glove with God Almightiest man you ever see." (*The Woodcutter's House*, p. 85)[37]

A curious instance of pedantic blindness to the facts of usage is the persistence of the impossibly artificial "someone's else" in our school handbooks. The group-genitive "someone else's" has established itself, beyond any cavil, in both colloquial and literary style; yet many of our school texts, and many of those who administer them to unfortunate pupils, continue to insist on "someone's else." It is a melancholy observation to put on record, but for the purpose of the present chapter a significant one, that while more than half the linguists who were consulted for the preparation of *Current English Usage* classified *everybody's else affairs* as illiterate or at best semiliterate,[38] the teachers of English would place it among "established" usages.

[37] Mathews, 1932.

[38] "Not English—a pseudo-correction by the semiliterate for *everybody else's*" was one comment.

What has just been suggested is that the brand of "grammar" taught in our schools tends to be not only prescriptive but proscriptive. Far from regarding English as a living language susceptible of change and development, it considers that its syntax has been definitively codified and is now fixed and unalterable. To defend this point of view it is necessary to outlaw any locution or construction that is at variance with theories originally laid down by grammarians now long dead. A remarkable illustration of the discrepancy between theory and practice, and the resulting necessity (from the point of view of the kind of teacher referred to) of preaching against firmly rooted habits of speech, is the present status of our future auxiliaries *shall* and *will*. The elaborate code of distinctions that has been built up by theorists is of course simply ignored in general present-day—and more specifically present American—usage. To the folk, *shall* is almost as unknown as *whom*. But what is its use in cultivated speech?

A foreign student of language, illustrating the point that the dialect of a colony tends to do away with certain subtle distinctions of the language of the home-country, has this to say of our present topic: "The difference between *I shall* and *I will* no longer exists in the English spoken in America: *I will* alone is used for the future."[39] At first blush, this strikes an American as a gross exaggeration, but a little reflection makes it evident that the statement is not, after all, very wide of the mark. Most educated Americans would *write*, "I *shall* be glad to come," but they would *say*, "*I'll* be glad to come." Now *I'll* must be, phonetically, the contraction of *I will*,

[39] Vendryes, *Language*, p. 353.

not of *I shall;*[40] so that the phrases commonly used in American speech ("I'll be there," "I'll be glad to serve") do, in a sense, level the distinction between *I shall* and *I will.* At the same time, a differentiation between *I shall* and *I will* is unquestionably preserved in writing of any degree of "correctness" or formality.

Incidentally, with reference to *I'll,* the present writer feels that there is something decidedly misleading about statements like these: "The contracted forms *'ll, 'd* . . . [are] . . . never contractions of *shall, should:* 'I'll go, we'll go, I'd go.' . . . The written forms *I shall, we shall* are often in rapid speech pronounced *Ishl, weeshl.*"[41] These last contractions are surely, so far as American conversation goes, theoretical rather than realistic. In opposition to Curme's opinion, Professor Krapp's observations may be quoted: "*I'll, you'll, he'll* may as well stand for *I will,* etc., as for *I shall,* etc."[42] " . . . as this abbreviation ['*ll*] may stand for either *shall* or *will,* there is no way of telling whether *I'll, you'll, he'll* contains the one or the other of these forms . . . "[43] The upshot of the matter would appear to be that Jespersen and Curme, while of course correct in assuming *I'll* to be developed from *I will* and not from *I shall,* are wrong in implying that in its present-day use *I'll* always and necessarily represents *I will* as opposed to *I shall.* In its American use, at any rate, *I'll* is simply

[40] *Cf.* Jespersen, *Modern English Grammar,* Part III, 15.2 (1).

[41] Curme, *Syntax,* p. 362.

[42] *Modern English,* p. 295. Professor C. C. Fries, in an elaborate discussion of *shall* and *will* in Modern English, *P. M. L. A.,* Vol. XL, No. 4 (December, 1925), pp. 963–1024, takes issue with this way of putting it. In the opinion of the present writer, the objection confuses the origin of *I'll, you'll,* and so forth, with their present interpretation and use.

[43] *Comprehensive Guide to Good English,* p. 533.

a generalized form, which is often used, indeed, partly because it does not imply *either* "I will" or "I shall." To be sure, the less cultivated speaker in using it does not realize that he is avoiding a difficulty, but the more speech-conscious person is, perhaps subconsciously, grateful for the opportunity of dodging a choice that is largely artificial.

That American speech is far from being in accord with the "rules" for *shall* and *will* is even more evident when *I'll* cannot serve to dodge the difficulty. Admittedly there is a neat and useful differentiation in meaning between "Shall you be there?" (an inquiry) and "Will you be there?" (an invitation); but in natural, unaffected speech, this differentiation simply is not made. "Shall you?" to American ears sounds "stilted, tony."[44] The rules of our textbooks are here in line with a distinction that in England is in perfectly natural and unforced use but that is not followed in the United States—or in Ireland or Scotland. Some years ago, this quotation from another periodical was reprinted in *Punch:* "Before traveling in France I think that I will have to study French." Underneath it appeared the following comment: "We think that the writer shall have to study English first." Would "I think that I will have to study French" have appeared to an American editor as worthy of mocking quotation? And would his American readers have got the point of it if it had?

Space cannot be spared here even for a summary of the "rules" for *shall* and *will*—especially since the exposition of these rules varies most remarkably in different grammars and dictionaries. Surely, however,

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[44] *Current English Usage*, p. 115.

an American is justified in looking with some distrust at this way of putting one of the most cherished of the rules: "In the first person, *shall* has, from the early Middle English period, been the normal auxiliary for expressing mere futurity. . . . To use *will* in all these cases is now a mark of Scottish, Irish, provincial, or extra-British idiom" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). If Scots, Irishmen, Americans, and other "extra-British" speakers do not use the "normal" auxiliary, it is a little difficult for one who is not a Southern Englishman to understand how it can continue to be "normal." Again, Professor Fries has amply demonstrated[45] not only that actual usage has been quite different from what the rules would imply, but also that the rules themselves were compiled in defiance of existing practices. It is somewhat startling to discover that the complete scheme of conventional rules, which was formulated in the eighteenth century and repeated with more conviction through the nineteenth, unmistakably had its origin in the typical eighteenth-century purpose of "correcting" the practice of English speakers and writers by means of these very rules. These precepts were based on "reason," not usage; indeed they explicitly repudiated even the practice of "the most approved authors."

Perhaps all that can safely be said of contemporary trends with reference to *shall* and *will* is that there is a general drift, more marked in American than in English practice, away from *shall* and toward *will* in almost every category. Deference to the artificial and arbi-

[45] In the article on *shall* and *will op. cit.*, and also in "The Rules of Common School Grammars," *P. M. L. A.*, Vol. XLII, No. 1 (March, 1927), pp. 221–237. See also Leonard, S. A., *The Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage, 1700–1800*, Madison, Wisconsin (University of Wisconsin), 1929.

trarily formulated rules is less common, even in formal writing, than it once was. At the same time, it is quite clearly unwise to assume that *shall* is always pedantic or affected; in a question with the first personal pronoun, for example, *shall* is almost always preferred in general American (though not Scotch or Irish) practice. The popular drift to *will* has, of course, been opposed by the conservative tradition of the schools as well as the survival of an older attitude toward "rules" in our grammars; and the opposition has been successful enough to make it expedient for anyone who desires to conform to generally accepted standards to pay some deference to it. However, to use only *will* as the sign of the pure future in all three persons would certainly be an improvement over the confused and confusing distinctions that are still recommended. The popular tendency, then, is one that should be encouraged rather than combated; it may be observed that the best of present-day grammarians (for example, Poutsma, Curme, and Jespersen) on the whole incline to this attitude. For teachers of English, often completely ignorant of both the history and the dubious validity of the "rules" they advocate, to insist that their pupils must conform to the fantastic code of discriminations between *shall* and *will* and *should* and *would* (a code that Jespersen takes 118 pages to outline) is an act of folly.

Another point in which a traditional rule of syntax is more often followed in English than in American practice, but in which nevertheless American teaching usually insists on strict conformity, is the convention as to the "generic" personal pronoun *one*. Several observations suggest themselves with regard to this form and its use in the sentence. In the first place, it is not

quite analogous to the French *on* or the German *man*, for *one* is used much less freely; there is no English parallel, for example, for *on dit* or *man sagt*. Again, English writers have employed what Mr. Fowler has termed the "false first-personal use of *one*" more commonly (and doubtless more naturally) than have American writers. Viscountess Rhondda, telling of her experience on the *Lusitania*, used the *I* that seems natural for vivid first-hand narrative until the *one* construction suddenly suggested itself—with this result: "*One's* lifebelt held *one* up in a comfortable sitting position with *one's* head rather back, as if *one* were in a hammock. *One* was a little vague and rather stupid." To most Americans, it is safe to say, this seems a peculiarly stilted and artificial jargon. Nevertheless, it occasionally obtrudes itself in American writing of the more mannered variety: "*One* has no reproaches for the people who get headaches at movies: *one* can only be sorry for them. *One* has, indeed, no reproach for the people who honestly do not enjoy them. *One's* only reproach is for the people who have pre-judged them . . . " (Katharine F. Gerould, in "What, Then, Is Culture?" *Harper's*, January, 1927).

What most Americans feel to be the chief awkwardness about *one* is of course the theoretical necessity of referring to it by itself, or by *one's* or *oneself* (or *one's self*). In early Modern English, *one* might be continued by *his*, *him*, and *himself* (*oneself* indeed is unknown in Shakespeare). American, and other "extra-British," usage often perpetuates this older practice; but the schools are likely to insist on the alien nicety of "When one employs *one*, one is obliged to continue *one* to the end of one's sentence." It is fair to add, however,

that a flouting of the "rule" in American speech and writing of the more formal sort is probably less common than the practice of avoiding like a plague any construction that requires the application of the rule. To shun the necessity of using *one* (or another form of the same pronoun) more than once, or at most twice, in the sentence is thus the practical compromise between deference to a convention and defiance of it.

Perhaps one of the most curious examples of divided usage today is the hesitation between adjective and adverb (or between two forms of the adverb, one with and the other without the *-ly* suffix) that frequently occurs when the qualifier follows the predicate. Should one say, for example, *I feel bad* or *I feel badly?* The writer has elsewhere[46] elaborated the theory that many of us change our answer to this question several times, and that these vacillations represent at least four stages in the development of our attitude toward syntax. The theory behind *I feel bad* is of course that the verb of sensation is usually a copula linking the subject with a predicate adjective. Thus, *it smells bad* (i.e., "seems, by the smell, to be bad") is unquestionably preferred; but the locution is very near another in which a different interpretation makes the qualifier an adverbial modifier of the verb: *it smells abominably* (i.e., "it smells in an abominable manner"). Certainly, *I feel badly* has a considerable weight of usage behind it. A recent and very competent opinion is to the effect: "It is probable that a consensus of the speech habits of American professors of English would show a majority in favor of

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[46] "Grammarians," *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 150, No. 2 (August, 1932), pp. 254 and 255.

'I feel badly.'"[47] Professors of English, however, presumably use it—if they do use it—because they feel that the locution is established in natural, idiomatic English. Their adoption of it may give it a certain sanction; but it seems clear to the present writer that what accounts for the prevalence of *I feel badly* is something very different: the vague feeling, on the part of the very numerous class of the semiliterate, that an adverb (always to be identified, in their belief, by the *-ly* suffix) is more "correct." It is, then, the striving for "correctness" that seems in a fair way to establish a locution that, according to the standards most of its adherents are endeavoring to live up to, is not "correct" at all.

There is, however, a great deal more involved in the type of dilemma just referred to than has yet been indicated. Why, for example, should the same person say "I feel bad," but "I feel very badly about the matter"? For the same reason, very likely, that accounts for "go slow" by the side of "he went slowly down the street." Euphony and rhythm, that is to say, sometimes take precedence over traditional syntax. But in the second pair there is still another complication. The choice between *slow* and *slowly* is not that between adjective and adverb, but rather between rival forms of the adverb. *Slow* is here an old adverb that has never been completely superseded by *slowly*. In many combinations, it is more idiomatic than *slowly* (e.g., "How slow he climbs!" "Please read very slow"

[47] Ward, C. H., *Grammar for Composition*, New York (Scott), 1933, p. 246. To be compared with this is Curme's surely overabrupt dismissal of *I feel badly* from all consideration (*Syntax*, p. 37). Mr. Ward, incidentally, writes me that he has heard even *I feel rottenly* on certain academic lips.

and "Sing as slow as you can").[48] The analogy of *go fast* perhaps helps to explain how it is that *go slow* has maintained itself and now serves as a foothold for resisting the encroachments of *slowly* in other phrases. Other adverbs without ending[49] are *hard, fast, first,* and *much.* Alongside of the adverb *hard* (with difficulty), there is the adverb *hardly* (scarcely); and it is a curious illustration of the pull of analogy that there is some attempt to form "more correct" adverbs from the others as well. *Fastly* of course is merely illiterate, and *muchly* a rather dreary attempt at humor; but *firstly* has made such progress that it seems on the way to becoming standard.

"Unidiomatic *-ly,*" as Fowler calls it, thus comes about in more than one way. In a particularly dignified announcement of one of our leading actresses in a new rôle, this unfortunate statement was made: "The curtain will rise at 8:15 sharply." Now *sharp* is not perhaps an adverb in the best standing, since it is somewhat colloquial in tone; but it *is* an adverb, and it means "precisely." *Sharply* means nothing of the sort. In the pseudo-Biblical diction of *The Good Earth,*[50] use is made of this phrase: "to rest easily in the grave." The authentic idiom is of course "to rest easy," which means rather "to be easy" (or "at ease") than "to rest without difficulty" (the irrelevant suggestion of the other phrase). The attempt to improve on well-established proverbial phrases like "easy come, easy go," "mighty kind," "clean through," "sure enough,"

[48] *Cf.* Fowler, *Dictionary of Modern English Usage,* p. 542. But the differentiation in *Current English Usage,* pp. 131 and 132, seems more plausible.

[49] For the historical explanation of this type of adverb form, see p. 135.

[50] John Day, 1932.

and "wide apart" (by substituting *easily, mightily, cleanly, surely,* and *widely*) is likely to be fraught with ridiculous consequences. A slightly different matter is the choice of the adverb where the predicate adjective is really called for. Thus, "to stand firm," "to lie sick," "to hang low," "to sit quiet," "to pass unseen," "to shine bright," "to feel tired," and "to sound loud"[51] are a few of the many constructions in which the adjective rather than the adverb is either preferable or essential. But there is often the possibility of using the adverb when the phrase is slightly varied; for example: "He sat quietly in his place," "He stood firmly on his feet," and "The stars shine brightly in the sky." Taking everything into consideration, it is not to be wondered at if there is often indecision as to whether adjective or adverb is to be used, or whether the simpler adverb is to be preferred to the adverb in *-ly*.

To return to examples of that type of divided usage in which the teaching of the schools is not strictly followed in wide and sometimes in good practice. A construction that is sternly prohibited in the grammar of the schools is that in which *and who* or *and which* (or *but who* or *but which*) is used without a preceding relative clause introduced similarly. The corresponding idiom is regularly used in French, but academic opposition to its use in English has been strong enough to cause it to be regarded, quite generally, as an error. Jespersen says of it:[52] "It is, however, frequently heard in colloquial English, and is by no means rare in literature, though not so

[51] See Jespersen, *Modern English Grammar*, Part III, 17.2, for a full discussion.

[52] *Op. cit.*, Part III, 4.12.

much used now as in the 18th century." That its use is by no means confined to colloquial speech or to the literature of the eighteenth century or earlier is attested by the following quotations from three leading (nineteenth-century) exponents of that most carefully written prose form, the familiar essay:

The sweetest names, and which carry a perfume in the mention, are Kit Marlowe, Drayton . . . (Charles Lamb, "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading")

. . . others of a less extravagant character, and that excite and repay interest by a greater nicety of detail . . . (William Hazlitt, "On the Pleasure of Hating")

Montaigne . . . —the creator of a distinct literary form, and to whom even down to our own day . . . every essayist has been more or less indebted. (Alexander Smith, "On the Writing of Essays")

Professor Jespersen, incidentally, is true to his own conviction as to the usefulness of the idiom when he writes, "The method I recommend and which I think I am the first to use consistently . . . " (*Language*, p. 418), and " . . . a question beset with considerable difficulties and which need not detain us here" (*Growth and Structure*, p. 63). Finally, the use of the construction in literary English of our own time may be illustrated in these excerpts:

. . . a spinster cousin of the family, always present, always silent and whose lips never ceased moving . . . (Thornton Wilder, *The Cabala*, p. 94)[53]

. . . a free intelligence playing over the problems of our time, without prejudice or passion, and which has won for itself a commanding position in the life of the nation. (James Truslow Adams, *Saturday Review of Literature*, Jan. 7, 1932)

[53] Modern Library, 1929.

In the light of citations like these, it is clear that the familiar statement of the school rhetorics that the *and which* (*who*) construction is *never* employed in good writing is decidedly an overstatement of the facts in the case.

A final illustration, and a more inexcusable one, of pedantic prohibition in the face of widespread and thoroughly idiomatic usage, may be added: the "rule," now happily less dwelt upon than formerly, that a sentence must not end with a preposition. As is well-known, it is largely to John Dryden that we owe this absurd principle. Dryden's sudden realization that in Latin the preposition never comes last in the sentence moved him to recast the English sentences of his prefaces in order to eliminate what he had come to feel as barbarous. His influence has been amazingly powerful; school grammar after school grammar has repeated the warning against the prepositional ending, in spite of its continued use in the best speech and writing. A wrong use of etymology, incidentally, undoubtedly furthered the movement that Dryden began; the literal implication of *preposition* has often been invoked to prove that a preposition should not come last. The better texts of our own time of course no longer include the warning; but every college instructor in English knows how firmly intrenched the tradition still remains in the teaching of English in our lower schools. Schoolboys come to college, generation after generation of them, knowing pitifully little, to be sure, about their native tongue, but with a few deeply rooted ideas on grammar and rhetoric. What they know, if it is not too cynical to put it thus, consists quite largely of things that are not so; and among these scraps of mis-

information, almost as the cardinal tenet, is the notion that a sentence should not end with a preposition. To illustrate: two college freshmen were endeavoring to recall this sentence from the *Religio Medici*—"For the world, I count it not an inn, but an hospital; and a place not to live, but to die in." It is surely not inexplicable that the students should have independently set down, as their idea of how Sir Thomas Browne should have worded it, this paraphrase: "I count the world not an inn but a hospital, and not a place in which to live but a place in which to die."

Space cannot be taken to exemplify further the cleavage to be observed between theory and practice in current English syntax. What the illustrations already cited seem to imply must, however, be set forth more completely. There are, it may be maintained, two extreme and opposite attitudes toward grammar and syntax, and they are related, at least in part, through cause and effect. The one is the traditional school attitude that stems directly from the eighteenth-century grammarians. This attitude makes for the rejection of actual usage and for the retention of the outmoded conventions that clutter up the rhetorics. What it stresses is prohibition, and what it neglects is observation. Teaching of this sort insists that sentences shall *not* begin with *and* or *but*, and shall *not* end with *to* or *in*. It insists upon *It is I* for all occasions, upon the strict application of the rule as to *one*, and upon an impossibly complicated (and variously interpreted) set of distinctions between *shall* and *will*. It is particularly severe with such venial sins as the split infinitive, and with locutions current in popular colloquial speech like

between each bed,[54] *and which, like he does, these kind of apples,* and *those sort of people*[55]—for it avoids the difficult task of differentiating among the several purposes and planes of discourse. It even outlaws such completely established idioms as *none are, someone else's* and *had rather.*

That an attitude exactly opposite to the one just outlined should exist need occasion no surprise. It requires very little observation of the actual customs of speech and writing to see that there is a discrepancy between such precept and authentic practice. The schoolboy, consciously or unconsciously recognizing that the language foisted upon him in the classroom has no real existence elsewhere, very sensibly rejects it for other than classroom purposes. Perceiving that what is taught him is artificial, bookish, and pedantic, he comes to feel that "grammar" as a whole is to be rejected. This then is the attitude that is at once the consequence and the antithesis of the ultraconservative approach to language characterized above. It adopts the comfortable, albeit unfortunate, theory that the study of grammar is a case of much ado about nothing, or, at best, about very little indeed. This point of view once found expression in a letter congratulating a newspaper columnist on his admirable ignorance of English grammar. The communication is so illuminating in its frankness that it will be quoted:

If you are really as ignorant of English grammar as you profess to be, you are to be congratulated, for there isn't any

[54] *Cf.*: *Current English Usage*, p. 140.

[55] Jespersen (in *Essentials of English Grammar*, p. 202) says, " . . . we may look upon *kind* and *sort* as unchanged plurals . . . "

such animile. English is practically a grammarless tongue. What is found in books called "English Grammar" that children are obliged to study in their so-called education is a lot of stuff faked up by self-styled grammarians, whose object is to make the English language seem to be like languages that have a grammar, when, in fact, it is totally unlike them. For instance, the only forms of the verb "to be" in our language today are "be" and "been." There is no nominative case in English, so, of course, it cannot agree with any verb. And so on through all the "conjugations" and "declensions" and "syntax" that the grammatical fakirs have invented. Keep on writing English "as she is spoke" by fairly intelligent Americans, and your column will be above reproach on the score of its grammar.

These ideas, violently exaggerated and not particularly well-informed as they are, yet contain a certain grain of truth. What is more to the point for the present purpose, this repudiation of grammarians as fakirs and of English grammar as a fraud is obviously due to the fact that the writer has encountered the wrong kind of grammar and grammar-teaching. The attitude that holds that there is no such thing as English grammar is an entirely natural reaction to the attitude that takes no account of the drift from emphasis on form to emphasis on word position, admits no difference between colloquial and literary style, and, finally, has never understood the fundamental concept of syntax being subject to change by usage.

These opposite attitudes, reactionary and anarchistic, have recently been brought clearly into the light in the curiously varied reception accorded *Current English Usage*, by Professor S. A. Leonard and his associates. While the ultraliberal element rejoiced to find their own convictions as to the "correctness" of many a popular

locution apparently upheld by this cross section of the "actual practice of the educated world," the conservative-minded were profoundly shocked. To them it seemed that liberty of choice in matters of syntax had degenerated into mere license, and that popular "errors" were being given the approval of academic sanction. Neither extreme opinion is of course well justified. The usage of the majority—perhaps even a majority of the "educated," unless that term is more strictly interpreted than it generally is—does not necessarily constitute good usage. On the other hand, to observe that many educated speakers consider certain colloquial phrases thoroughly established—for colloquial purposes—should cause distress only to those who are deaf to the actual cadences of spoken English, and who are ignorant not only of the existence of different levels in language, but also of the possibility of change through usage.

The attitude of newspapers on questions like these is particularly interesting. With certain noteworthy exceptions, such as the *New York Times*, whose many editorial comments on linguistic matters are consistently well-informed and enlightened, our newspapers are ordinarily given to heavy-handed humor or solemn protestations against tampering with the sacred "grammar" of the language. The sort of thing that is commented on, and the typical comment, may be briefly illustrated by this excerpt from a recent editorial (in the Philadelphia *Evening Ledger*, Feb. 28, 1934):

> The President has written a letter to Speaker Rainey, announcing that he would veto the Bonus Bill if it were passed, adding, "I don't care who you tell this to." Teachers of English who are justifying errors in grammar on the ground

of usage may tell us that this form of words is correct . . . There seems to be a difference between official English and the English of the grammars.

Comment on this is perhaps superfluous, but it would be interesting to know what grammars the editor had in mind.[56] He was not acquainted, it may be conjectured, with any really authoritative recent treatment of the "*who* and *whom*" question. Nor does it seem possible to express a more wrong-headed view on the larger question of the relation between syntax and usage than is done in these words: "justifying errors in grammar on the ground of usage." How can an error, it may be asked, remain an error if it is justified by usage? What is of course implied is the familiar delusion that "grammar" has been codified, once and for all, and that the particular school text used by the individual years ago, with its tenth-hand repetition of the "logic" of eighteenth-century grammarians, summed up the final truth on the subject.

Our survey of some of the questions of syntactical usage in present-day English has necessarily been brief and cursory. It is to be hoped, however, that enough has been said to indicate that syntax is to be regarded, like spelling, pronunciation, and meaning, as a department of language in which a shifting of standards is incidental to, indeed an essential condition of, the life and change that are the very soul of speech. The question of what, at a given time and for a particular

[56] Presumably, not Jespersen's *Essentials of English Grammar*, for one. It would be extremely salutary for the editor to ponder these words in its first chapter (p. 17): "Grammatical expressions have been formed in the course of centuries by innumerable generations of illiterate speakers . . . "

purpose, constitutes good English will always be a difficult one. But the realistic approach to it is evidently through observation of the changing contours of language in actual, present-day use. Let us, by way of conclusion, look at some of the factors in this most important and most perplexing of all the problems that confront the individual in the use of language.

Good English is not merely correct English; it is something at once greater and different. But even the lesser question of what is correct is not always easy. By what authority is correctness to be determined? Standards of various sorts have been proposed and appealed to in settling a particular question of usage. Perhaps Jespersen's formulation of these standards is the most satisfactory that has been compiled: the standard of authority, the geographical standard, the literary, the aristocratic, the democratic, the logical, and the esthetic.[57] Yet each one of these in turn proves to be questionable and, for the purpose of settling every doubtful case that arises, clearly inadequate. One is too rigid, another too nebulous; one too loose, another too tight. And it is decidedly a makeshift to turn from one to another, as all of us to some extent do, in grappling with difficult problems.

The approach to a solution comes only with the realization that there is no such thing as absolute correctness—for all persons, all places, and all purposes. Our search for what is correct is transformed into a quest for what is desirable, appropriate—hence "good"—

[57] From the chapter "Standards of Correctness," in *Mankind, Nation, and Individual from a Linguistic Point of View.* To this and the following chapter, "Correct and Good Language," the present remarks are greatly indebted.

when we come to understand that the world of language, even the English-speaking section of it, is too vast and too variable for absolute standards to apply. The individual speaker is a member of a much smaller linguistic community, even though he may have difficulty in setting limits to this community. The only kind of correctness that is demanded is compliance with the conventions of this community. But compliance is not the highest goal. Compliance suggests something merely negative. absence of faults, rather than positive merit. Good English must be more than merely free from error. It must also be more than simply intelligible—a still lower goal than correctness. The individual strives, not only to speak clearly and, according to certain conventional standards, "correctly," but also to express himself with force and with grace. It is just here that he has a certain liberty of choice. After all, he is not merely a member of a community, but an individual: he not only adopts, but helps to make, the customs of his community. His influence can be both detrimental and beneficial. It is detrimental not only when it is exerted to keep alive such excrescences, the very "dry rot of syntax," as lead to obscurity rather than clarity, but also when it lends its weight to perpetuate those more labored and more formal manners of speech that the community still theoretically approves even after they have been discarded in good practice. It is beneficial when he as an individual follows those customs that he conceives to be healthful developments in contemporary speech, and even perhaps when he introduces rebellious innovations of his own. There is thus, as Jespersen has put it, "a constant tug-of-war between individual and community, an eternal surging

backwards and forwards between freedom and linguistic constraint." These forces, one leading to regimentation, the other to anarchy, are the centripetal and centrifugal impulses in language. The individual at one moment defers, at the next rebels; through his unique compromise between conformity and liberty, he forges for himself an individual style.

A single and, in great measure, an unanswerable question remains. What guides shall the individual take to assist him in his choice in matters of divided usage and in his personal experimentation with language? There are, alas, no formulas for tact and taste. Perhaps all that can be said is that acquaintance with the past of the language offers a certain measure of protection against the dogmatism that is born of ignorance: no one who acquaints himself, even cursorily, with the history of English is in danger of supposing that a speech that has undergone such radical changes is likely to be standing still now. Nor will such a one be apt to suppose that there is available a tangible external standard, one that will offer infallible counsel in all linguistic perplexities. The value of the best of these guides should not be depreciated. Any adverse criticism of school texts, such as the present chapter contains, does not of course extend to the great grammars of such men as Luick, Jespersen, Poutsma, and Kruisinga. Moreover, since the publication of the first volume of Curme and Kurath's *Grammar of the English Language*, the reproach that English-speaking countries have failed to produce a full and authoritative grammar of their own speech is no longer valid. Such guidance of course is infinitely to be preferred to the varied sources—antiquated school rhetorics, *obiter dicta* by publicity-seeking lexicographers,

newspaper departments on "How's Your Grammar?" and the courses in "English in Six Easy Lessons" that our magazines advertise so lavishly—from which the man in the street may glean miscellaneous bits of dubious information on the nature and use of his speech. What must be here insisted upon, however, is that even the most enlightened of guides have a limited usefulness. The individual's growth in good English is naturally to be assisted by recourse to them. But, in the last analysis, mastery of English comes back to a feeling for idiom on the part of the individual, and, however supplemented by external guides, depends finally upon his own taste, and his own observation of and sensitiveness to good practice.

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Phonetic Symbols, with Key Words

(as in General American pronunciation, except where otherwise indicated)

Vowels

[i:] *bead, feet*
[ɪ] *bid, fit*
[e:] *bait, fade*
[ɛ] *bed, bet*
[ɛ:] *bear, fair*
[æ] *bad, fat*
[ə] *about, villa*
[ʌ:] New England *bird, hurt*
[ʌ] *but, bud*
[a] Scotch *man* (see p. 235)
[u:] *boot, food*
[ʊ] *book, foot*
[o:] *boat, note*
[ɔ] *autumnal*
[ɔ:] *autumn, law*
[ɑ:] *father, fodder*

Diphthongs

[ɑɪ] *bide, buy*
[ɑʊ] *loud, lout*
[ɔɪ] *boil, boy*
[ju] *muse, feud*

Voiced-Voiceless Pairs of Consonants

[b] *bad, cub*	[p] *pad, cup*
[v] *vast, prove*	[f] *fast, proof*
[d] *dug, sad*	[t] *tug, sat*
[ð] *thy, either*	[θ] *thigh, ether*
[z] *zest, is*	[s] *sit, nets*
[ʒ] *azure, measure*	[ʃ] *shoot, hush*
([dʒ] *jam, edge*	[tʃ] *chair, rich*)
[g] *game, rag*	[k] *came, rack*
[w] *witch, weather*	[ʍ] *which, whether* (see p. 227)

Other Consonants

[m] *mist, chasm*
[n] *noon, rotten*
[ŋ] *sing, song*
[l] *look, battle*
[r] *road, throw*
[ɹ] *far, board*
[j] *ye, ewe*
[h] *high, who*

Glossary of Linguistic Terms

NOTE: Certain terms, particularly those that are specifically defined in the body of the book (on the page on which the term is first used), are not listed here and should be sought in the Index of Subjects and Names.

Ablaut. Series of variations of the radical vowel, in the different forms of a group of related words.

Affix. Additional sound or group of sounds that, when put before or after the radical element, changes the meaning of the word or makes a new word.

Affricate. A combination of stop and fricative, especially [tʃ] and [dʒ].

Agglutination. Process of adding affixes to the roots of words, with the result of changing their meaning or use. (*See* pp. 22–23.)

Alveolar. Speech sound articulated with the point or blade of the tongue in contact with the upper gums.

Analogy. The influence exerted by certain formations that have come to be regarded as normal and typical and hence are used as a pattern; a tendency making for standardization and uniformity.

Analysis. The tendency in certain languages to make the simple root-form the unit of expression, with the result that ideas are conveyed by relatively many, but by short and unvaried words; the trend opposite to synthesis.

Anglo-Saxon. The language, or group of related West Germanic dialects, spoken in Britain from the time of the migration of these tribes to Britain until, or shortly after, the period of the Norman Conquest; usually regarded as synonymous with *Old English.*

Aspirate. The puff of air, represented phonetically by [h], that distinguishes, for example, *hall* from *all* and *high* from *I.*

Assimilation. The phonetic process by which a sound is changed to conform to a neighboring sound.

Back (of the tongue). The rear part of the tongue, that opposite the velum when the tongue is in the position of rest.

Back-formation. The creation of a new word through the assumption that an existing word is a derivative of this new, and previously hypothetical, word. (*See* pp. 381–383.)

Bilabial. The type of consonant in the formation of which both lips are active.

Blade. The part of the tongue that includes the point and the region immediately behind it; that part which is opposite the gums when the tongue is in the position of rest.

Breath. Sound produced by the breath stream passing through the open glottis; that is, without the vibration of the vocal cords.

Cerebral R. Same as retroflex *r*.

Close vowel. A high vowel, that type made with part of the tongue in proximity to the hard palate or to the velum.

Closed syllable. A syllable ending in a consonant.

Cognate. A word that is related to another variant of the same root because both are descendants of a common original; the term is also used of languages similarly related.

Colloquialism. An expression characteristic of and appropriate to the informal, spoken language rather than the formal, literary language.

Composition. The process of forming a compound.

Compound. A combination of two words, or of a word and an affix, that constitutes a new word.

Conjugation. The inflection of a verb; or a class of verbs (e.g., *strong* or *weak*) having the same type of inflection.

Consonant. A sound characterized by contact or narrowing of parts of the resonance chamber.

Cuneiform. A type of ancient writing, as that of Persia and Assyria, in which the characters consisted of wedge-shaped marks.

Declension. The inflection of a noun, adjective, or pronoun; or a class of nouns, and so forth, having the same type of inflection.

Dental. A consonant articulated with the tongue in contact with the upper teeth; in a looser sense, the term is sometimes

applied to alveolars like [t] and [s] as well as to true dentals (or pre-dentals) like [θ].

Derivation. The formation of a new word by an addition to the radical element or by a change in this element.

Derivative. A word developed from an older or primary form.

Devocalization. The change of a voiced into a voiceless sound.

Dialect. The local or sectional form of a language, often as compared with a standard or literary form.

Digraph. A combination of two letters—e.g., *th*—that represents only one sound.

Diphthong. A continuously gliding vowel sound, which begins with one position and ends with another.

Dissimilation. The phonetic process by which two neighboring sounds that were once identical are made unlike.

Doublet. One of a pair of words, in a single language, differently derived from the same origin; for example, *priest* and *presbyter* are etymological doublets.

Dual. A third number, in addition to singular and plural, that in some languages is given separate forms in various parts of speech.

Etymology. The branch of linguistics that deals with the origin or derivation of words.

Euphemism. (Not to be confused with *euphuism.*) (*See* p. 440.)

Euphony. Pleasantness of sound.

Explosive. A consonant articulated with a puff of air after closure or stoppage.

Flection (or *Flexion*). Same as *Inflection.*

Fricative. A consonant produced by air forced through a narrowed passage.

Front (of tongue). The part of the tongue opposite the hard palate when the tongue is in the position of rest.

Fronting. Change in vowel or consonant that involves a position farther front in the mouth.

Germanic. One of the branches of Indo-European; in this sense, synonymous with *Teutonic.*

Glide. A transition sound that leads up to, or away from, a definite speech sound.

Glottis. The opening between the vocal cords.

Guttural. A back consonant, preferably called velar.

High vowel. (*See* Close vowel.)

Homonym. A word that is phonetically identical, or virtually so, with another word of different meaning.

Homophone. A word, or part of a word, that duplicates in sound another word, or part of a word.

Ideogram. A pre-alphabetical symbol, originally pictorial, that represents the meaning rather than the sounds.

Idiom. A syntactical pattern peculiar to a certain language and hence often untranslatable, in literal equivalents, into another.

Incorporation. The process of joining derivative elements to the radical of a word, with the result that the several parts of a sentence are virtually fused into a single word.

Instrumental. A declensional case, the distinctive endings of which are partly preserved in Old English, that expresses such concepts as agency or means.

Intervocalic. Said of a consonant between vowels: e.g., the *d* of *medial.*

Isogloss. The line drawn, in linguistic geography, between two places that differ as to any phenomenon of speech.

Isolating language. A language that consists of invariable and usually monosyllabic roots, and in which therefore the relation of the words in a sentence depends more upon position than upon form.

Koiné. A form of language, usually written rather than spoken, that is intelligible to users of related but somewhat different dialects and is employed as a common medium of communication.

Labial. A consonant in the formation of which the lips are active.

Labio-dental. A lip-tooth consonant; one articulated with the lips, or one lip, in contact with the teeth.

Larynx. The voice-box, or enlargement of the upper end of the windpipe, that contains the vocal cords.

Lateral. A consonant in the formation of which the current of air is divided or diverted by the tongue in contact with the palate.

Lax vowel. A vowel articulated with a relatively low degree of tension in the tongue and associated muscles.

Liquid. A vowel-like consonant, especially the lateral and trilled or rolled sounds, but sometimes including all the semivowels.

Low vowel. (*See* Open vowel.)

Medial. Position within a word, as distinguished from initial and final.

Meliorative change. (*See* Elevation of meaning [in Index].)

Metaphor. A figure of speech in which a word suggests or symbolizes an idea by the use of comparison or analogy, rather than by directly or literally stating the idea.

Metonymy. A figure of speech in which an object or idea is named by something frequently associated with it.

Middle English. The English language in its later medieval stages, approximately from 1100 to 1500 (*see* p. 39 and p. 51).

Modern English. The English language since approximately 1500; often divided into Early Modern English (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) and Late Modern English (beginning with the eighteenth century).

Monophthong. A vowel that is pronounced without change of position and, hence, that remains constant in quality throughout its articulation.

Morphology. The department of linguistic study that deals with forms, especially inflections and derivational forms.

Mutation. (*See* Umlaut.)

Mute. Said of a "silent" letter, one that does not represent a sound; also formerly used to designate what are now preferably called the stop consonants.

Nasal. A sound in the production of which the nasal passages are open; the nasal consonants are [m, n, ŋ].

Nasalization. A modification of the quality of a vowel brought about by using the nose as a resonator.

Neologism. A newly coined word not yet a part of the recognized vocabulary.

Neutral. Said of an unstressed vowel of colorless quality, especially [ə].

Onomatopoeia. The naming of a thing or action by an attempted reproduction of the sound associated with it. (*See* p. 360.)

Open syllable. A syllable ending in a vowel.

Open vowel. A low vowel, that type made with the tongue depressed and the jaws relatively wide.

Orthography. That phase of linguistic study which treats of spelling.

Palatal. A sound in which the tongue arches toward the hard palate; the term is sometimes applied to the blade as well as the front consonants.

Palatalization. The approach or approximation to a blade sound; for example, the shift from [k] to [tʃ] in O.E. *cirice*, Mn.E. *church*.

Pejorative change. (*See* Degeneration of meaning [in Index].)

Person. One of three relationships—called respectively first, second, and third—that represent the speaker, the one addressed, and the person or thing spoken of; or one of the pronominal or verbal forms that indicate these relationships.

Personification. The metaphorical attribution of human qualities to animals or things.

Pharynx. The part of the alimentary canal between the oral cavity and the esophagus.

Philology. The study of thought and culture as embodied in literary monuments; in a narrower sense, the study of language (but for this sense, the term linguistics is now preferred).

Phoneme. A group or family of related sounds, the variations in which represent minor differences, often due to varying phonetic conditions, that occur within the speech of a single speaker or a single uniform dialect; these variations are considered to be non-distinctive and hence are not indicated in a broad phonetic transcription.

Phonetics. The department of linguistics that deals with the sounds of speech.

Phonogram. A symbol that represents a sound or a group of sounds.

Phonology. The study of speech sounds; but the term is often differentiated from *phonetics* by applying it only to the sound system of a particular language, dialect, or period.

Pictogram. (*See* Ideogram.)

Pitch. Difference in musical sound that is brought about by varying the frequency of the vibrations producing it.

Plosive. (*See* Explosive.)

Point. The tip of the tongue; or a consonant in the production of which the tongue-tip is in contact with the upper teeth, the gums, or the hard palate.

Pre-dental. (*See* Dental.)

Prefix. An affix placed before the radical element in a word.

Preterit-present. The type of verb that is a preterit in form (and older use) but is now functionally a present. (*See* pp. 144–145.)

Quantity. Length or duration of sounds.

Raising. That type of phonetic change in which the tongue assumes a higher position.

Reduplication. The process by which one of the sounds in a word is repeated as part of an additional syllable.

Referent. A term used in semantics to designate the object or situation, in the real world, for which the word serves as label.

Resonance. The vibrating quality of a voice sound.

Resonance chamber. A general term for the cavity of the mouth and the nose.

Retroflex R. The type of *r* made with the tongue tip raised and bent back.

Rhotacism. The tendency to change *s*(*z*) to *r*.

Root. The central part or basic element of a word, and the unit common to all cognate words in related languages.

Rounded sounds. Sounds articulated with rounding of the lips; the term applied to such vowels as [u:], [o:], and [ɔ:] and to the consonants [w] and [ʍ].

Runes. Characters of the alphabet used by the Teutonic peoples from about the third century A.D. (*See* p. 269.)

Sandhi. A phonetic modification that many words assume in familiar syntactic patterns; thus the articles *a* and *the* are usually given the sandhi-forms [ə] and [ðə] rather than the absolute forms [e:] and [ði:].

Semantics. That branch of linguistics that deals with the theory of meaning and with the growth and change that the meanings of words undergo; these two divisions of the field have been called "static" and "dynamic" semantics.

Semasiology. Same as Semantics.

Semi-vowel. A term sometimes applied to the sonorant consonants [l, m, n, ŋ] because they are capable of forming syllables, and sometimes to the glides [r, w, j] because they most nearly balance vocalic resonance and consonantal narrowing.

Short. A term used of vowels of brief duration, and of syllables which contain one of these vowels.

Sibilant. One of the "hissing" sounds: [s, z, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ].

Slack. (*See* Lax.)

Sonant. A voiced consonant.

Sonorant. That type of consonant that most nearly approximates vocalic sonority and hence is often syllabic.

Sonority. Degree of audibility.

Speech. The spoken, as opposed to the written, language. *Speech* and *language*, however, are sometimes differentiated in other ways (cf. references on pp. 6–7); and recently *speech* tends to be used of the art of vocal expression, with particular reference to pronunciation.

Spelling-pronunciation. An artificial pronunciation dictated by the spelling.

Spirant. (*See* Fricative.)

Stem. The base or theme of an inflected word; the stem is sometimes the same as the root, but is more often distinguished from it by the addition of a formative suffix.

Stop. (*See* Explosive.)

Stress. Emphasis or dynamic accent.

Strong noun or adjective. A noun or adjective, in the Teutonic languages, that once had a stem ending in a vowel.

Strong verb. That type of Teutonic verb that forms its preterit and past participle by ablaut gradation rather than by the addition of a dental suffix.

Surd. A voiceless consonant.

Syllable. A unit of utterance, or division of a word, with its own "center" (usually a vowel) that forms its most audible peak, or point of greatest sonority.

Syllabic consonant. A consonant, especially one of the sonorants [l, m, n, ŋ], that can form a syllable without a vowel.

Synecdoche. That type of metonymy in which the whole is substituted for the part, or the part for the whole.

Syntax. The department of linguistic study that deals with

sentence structure and the use of forms in connected discourse.

Synthesis. The tendency in certain languages to build up morphologically complicated words, with the result that ideas are conveyed by relatively few but long terms; the trend opposite to analysis.

Tense vowel. A vowel articulated with a relatively high degree of tension in the tongue and associated muscles.

Tenuis. A voiceless stop.

Trial. An additional number (besides singular, dual, and plural) that in certain languages is distinguished by separate forms for noun, pronoun, or verb.

Trilled R. The sound made by the rapid vibration of the tongue-point just behind the upper teeth.

Triphthong. A vocalic combination of diphthong and following vowel, pronounced within the same syllable.

Twang. A nasal tone pervading the speech of an individual or a region.

Umlaut. The modification of an accented vowel through the influence of the vowel (usually the *i*-vowel) of the following syllable.

Unrounded sounds. Sounds articulated with the lips spread rather than rounded.

Uvula. The soft appendage that hangs from the rear end of the velum.

Uvular R. A variety of *r*, such as the "Northumbrian burr," characterized by vibration of the uvula.

Velar. A back consonant, that type formed by the back of the tongue in proximity to the velum.

Velum. The soft palate.

Vocalization. The process by which a consonant is made into a vowel.

Voiced consonant. A consonant produced with the vocal sounds vibrating.

Voiceless consonant. A consonant produced without the vocal sounds vibrating.

Vowel. A musical tone made by regular vibrations of the vocal cords, and modified by varying the size and shape of the resonance chamber.

Weak noun or adjective. A noun or adjective, in the Teutonic languages, that once had a stem ending in *-n*.

Weak verb. That type of Teutonic verb that forms its preterit by the addition of a dental suffix rather than by internal change.

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