Spoken English

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CHAPTER II

INFLUENCES ON ORACY

1. Introduction

The development of the personality is inextricably bound up with the development of language. Language is the basic and essential instrument in the humanising of the species; without it thought above very primitive levels is impossible. Language and man are in continual interaction; change the man in some way and you change the language he uses; change the language he uses and you change the man. On the one hand the process of growth through education and experience causes him to reach out for new language in which to understand and communicate. On the other hand this language contains new thoughts and shades of thought, new feeling and shades of feeling, which help to determine such growth. His ability to direct rather than to be directed by experience, his ability to establish human relationships, are intimately related to his capacity for language; the frustrations of the inarticulate go deep. And it must be borne in mind that "language" in this context is overwhelmingly the *spoken* language; even in the (historically) rare literate societies such as our own this remains true. Without oracy human fulfilment is impossible; speech and personality are one.

Thus the general aim of education to develop the whole person is immediately relevant to the development of oracy, and oracy will be a necessary and important constituent of that wholeness. Like literacy it can be a disease; Barbara (1958) discerns a Demosthenes Complex in which the subject idealises his powers of speech as a neurotic claim to significance, out-talking everyone else. In such a case however the reciprocal aspects of oracy—listening and responding—implying a respect for the other parties involved, are missing. A more common failure would be inability to talk adequately, due to inhibiting inner conflict. Expression of any kind is the result of a tension requiring resolution, sometimes non-verbally. But in articulate societies speech is often the only acceptable form of expression; to be talked to is to need to talk back. When the tension is too great however, the speaker may have difficulty in finding words, hesitate,

dry up completely. Stuttering and other "self-effacing" speech disorders have their basis in neurotic conflict. A good deal of research has been done on the speech defects and disorders of abnormal subjects, but very little on speech and the normal personality. For the majority of people what seems so often to be lacking is a confidence born of experience in speaking in different speech situations; and thus an ignorance of the appropriate content, style, register and conventions to adopt. A matter of "Unaccustomed as I am to public (or private) speaking . . .".

In this chapter some of the influences affecting oracy will be examined.

2. Early Environment

From the moment of their birth normal children have the experience of language and this very early affects their cognitive and orectic development. Thus deaf infants are not merely like normal children except that they cannot hear, and thus cannot speak; orectically they are isolated and frustrated in their attempts to form relationships: cognitively "their progress in conceptual thinking is slowed down by the poverty of the verbal instruments at their command" (Lewis, 1963, p. 75); their progress in generalisation is poor because they tend to learn words with reference to specific situations. Before they are two they are already retarded compared with children with normal hearing, and special treatment, as linguistic as possible, is needed.

The language development of young children has been studied extensively. Surveys of the work are to be found in Carroll (1961, Ch. 6) and Carmichael (1954, Ch. 9), much of it stemming from the work of Piaget. Piaget discerns a need to express quite apart from a need to communicate; the early cries of the baby are made in ignorance that they will be heard. Later the child may talk for pure pleasure without necessarily having an audience. Piaget dubs this *egocentric speech* and subdivides it into the repetition of words and syllables, the monologue where the child seems to be thinking aloud, and the dual or collective monologue where the speakers follow their own lines of thought, associating but not communicating. On the other hand there is *socialised speech* with its adapted information, criticisms, commands, questions and answers, whose aim is to communicate (Piaget, 1928, Ch. I). It should be said that Piaget's estimate of the relative importance, functions, and age of use of

these kinds of speech have been criticised (by e.g. McCarthy, 1930) without upsetting the broad classification.

The prime impulse behind the learning of both types of language usage is imitation. The child finds himself tiny and insignificant in a family ruled by a giantess; there is also a giant, and possibly some lesser giants, or at least some large dwarfs. He strives to become like them to lessen his insecurity, to please them, to gain their notice. He rehearses their noises constantly, even in their absence, and finds great enjoyment in doing so. What these noises mean he will not at first understand; we should be careful not to overestimate the importance of "understanding" in the acquiring of language. He uses the language first, and by so doing finds out what it means. What he does need is experience of it as a listener (his first eighteen months or so are spent doing little else) and as a speaker. The mother who never spoke to her baby because it was obvious he was too young to understand was putting logical before psychological considerations.

In linguistic terms the speech of young children is very interesting. Stern (1927) and others have counted the parts of speech children employ at particular stages; the noun comes first, followed by the verb, and the others later. The first structure appears to be *noun (subject)/verb* ("Daddy go"). Compound and complex sentences first appear in very small numbers at 2 years of age. Eighteen months later some children, with favourable language environments, have acquired the chief varieties of sentence structure. The following is a transcription of Helen, a girl of 3 years 5 months, who was asked to talk about her imaginary (girl) companion known as Sweetheart, and the utterance recorded on tape.

All right. Now for gin (1) with we want to know all about Sweetheart's Mummy and Daddy. Now, this is the tune of it, Now, this is the tune of it, Now this is the tune of it.
(*Sings*) Da da da da
Can we go to Bunting?
No we can *not*. (2)
Now I want you to tell me where Sweetheart lives.
Well she lives here because her Mummy—her old Mummy and Daddy are not coming back. (3)
Where are Sweetheart's Mummy and Daddy?
They're at the doctor's so for (4) having some new ones from Father Christmas. (5)
Why is she having some new ones from Father Christmas?
Well because her old ones are dead. (6)

Won't they get better?
No, I'm afraid not. (7)
What's the matter with them?
Well they've got bad backs.
Where did you say Sweetheart lives?
Well she lives here because her old Mummy and Daddy are very late. (8)
Is Sweetheart here now?
Yes, she's lissing—listening to this tape recorder.
I can't see her.
Well, if she's hiding under David's white cricket stand, (9) we know. (10)
I've lifted it up look, but I can't see her.
(*Laughs*) She's there look! (11)
I can't see her.
You *can!* (12)

This utterance exhibits several interesting features. The girl is handling the adverb clause of reason not as a formula but as a free utterance; she places three different explanations within the same structure (3, 6, 9); she uses a result clause correctly (5) and apparently a conditional clause (10). What happened in this last case however was that she came to the pause represented by the second comma, and hesitated before finishing rather lamely with "we know". To her the utterance did not make sense, but she had embarked upon a pattern signalled to her by "if" and felt compelled to conclude it. Similarly where she does not know the appropriate word she fills in with a substitute rather than have the utterance fail; thus *for gin with* (1); *for* instead of *she* (4); *stand* instead of *sweater* (9). Considerable voice variation is employed; the song is sung; there is amusement (11) and sadness of tone (7); definite word stresses appear on *not* (2) and *can* (12). Whether these features are typical of three-year old children or not it is clear that the *process* of language learning will be applicable to all children at some stage. It reinforces what was said above about language preceding understanding. (Students of linguistics are now beginning to take an interest in children's acquisitions of "phrase structure grammar" before using transformations of the kind discussed by Chomsky. See e.g. Harwood, 1959).

Thus the story of the five-year old boy who said, "Pass the salt!" is unlikely to be true. His amazed parents cried, "You've never spoken a word in your life before." He replied, "There's never been no salt before." To produce such a dramatic effect this boy would

As far as the grammar schools and even the public schools were concerned English as a subject eventually made its way in. It was never spoken English however, but one rooted in reading and writing, in which heads were down to reap the reward of the coveted certificates of the new mass examinations. Despite the school play, itself a "literary" product, education has been predominantly a matter of reading and writing; and in any case most of the plays used in teaching are handled in the form room as literary texts. That literacy, in the wide sense, is important is not open to doubt. What is questionable is the assumption of so many schools that it is sufficient. This was precisely the question never asked. On the contrary twin buttresses were erected to make existing practice unassailable. These buttresses were the Theory of Grammar and the Theory of Literature. The Theory of Grammar held that the performance of a large number of grammatical exercises disciplined the mind, and improved ability to write composition. Both these beliefs have been known to be false, the former at least since the 90s when William James carried out his transfer experiments, the latter since 1903 when the pioneer research worker J. M. Rice published his findings. But this did not prevent the Theory filling text-books and examination papers with such exercises for the next sixty years, and leaving little time for the writing which is part of true literacy, and less for the oral skills. The Theory of Grammar was quite simply fallacious. This could not be said of the Theory of Literature; literature is important in education, but the exaggerated claims for it as the famous stone which changeth all to golden lads and girls show no psychological knowledge of the way children learn and the extent to which it is possible to modify their attitudes. The Theory claimed support from such dicta as Arnold's famous one: the quality of a man's life depends largely on the quality of what he reads. By narrowing, qualifying, defining, one can find some justification for this statement; equally one could do so for—The quality of a man's life depends largely on what he eats. But such statements fail to take into account the whole complex of influences which affect personality; they fail to recognise that the quality of a man's life is determined primarily by his human relationships from the moment he is born. And these relationships are established and maintained through speech. If literacy is important, oracy is more so. But the effect of both the Theory of Literature and the Theory of Grammar was to reduce it to insignificance.

This was the position until the last four or five years when the extent of our neglect of the spoken word has slowly begun to be

have needed to practise his sentence structures, as well as hearing them. It may be however that this is what actually happened; the boy secretly conversing with himself and with his companions, but concealing the fact from his parents in order to gain their especial attention and concern.

3. Education

It is sad to relate that the history of formal schooling in this country shows literacy and oracy at enmity, a state of affairs which has persisted down the present day.

In the period of the fifteenth-seventeenth centuries, when, by all accounts, a rich oral tradition existed in the country, many grammar schools were founded. Their emphasis was on literacy, and classical literacy at that. The foundation statutes of many grammar schools forbade the use of the vernacular during school hours: "Lastly, whatever they are doing in earnest or in play, they shall never use any language but Latin or Greek" (quoted in Compton, 1947). But at least at this stage boys were encouraged to speak some language. By the late seventeenth century Latin as a living language, useful in business and diplomacy, had largely disappeared. It was taught as a literary language, with the methods considered appropriate, and has been taught so ever since. Nothing replaced it in the oral sphere. In the nineteenth century, as the concept of universal elementary education gradually emerged, it was seen in terms of the Three Rs, and Rhetoric was certainly not one of them. In the British and Foreign Bible Society's schools, because of the large numbers to be coped with, an attempt was made to eliminate verbal commands, even by the teacher, the children's movements being directed instead by a small hand bell. If the pupils used their tongues it was not for spontaneous utterance, but in order to recite a piece of verse, or more likely a psalm or catechism, previously learnt by heart. As we saw in the Introduction incitements to a freer use of the spoken word began to come in the official reports of the earlier twentieth century, but the situation was bedevilled by several false concepts, notably that of "bilingualism". It was not recognised that variations beyond a certain area of language and accent are only possible to the trained actor, and only one of these is "him". A more certain way to produce Poshall and Redgrove accents on the one hand, and split personalities on the other, it is difficult to imagine. From this point of view it is fortunate that the official recommendations appear to have been almost completely ignored.

recognised. One of the tasks ahead is to make a hitherto unachieved synthesis between oracy and literacy as facets of education.

4. Social Environment

Many workers have discovered correlations between social class and educational attainments over the last thirty years. A general explanation is that this has been brought about by the stratification of ability in the levels of class as a result of greatly increased social mobility. But "ability" is only one factor involved—another, the nature of the language used, has received very little attention. Overwhelmingly this will be the spoken language.

On the surface it seems likely that certain patterns of social behaviour are more favourable to oracy than others. Family life, with its converse between different ages and sexes, is one important source of language experience. In many working homes the members never meet together as a family, for a meal for instance—shift work for either or both parents, school and canteen feeding, effectively keep them apart. Patriarchal assumptions are still remarkably strong in some working class groups, so that when the father is at home the children are often kept quiet by the mother: "Your Dad's got to have his quiet." If television is watched continually in the house, there will be plenty of noise but no conversation. Younger children watch avidly; older children may go out rather than watch at all. Thus when children do talk it will be predominantly with their peers, which is regrettable even though the parents could perhaps offer very little as language models. Language deprivation is not of course confined to working class groups. In an independent boarding school known to the writer the boys are away from home most of the year, and have very little converse with adults outside the authoritarian school relationships; again their main oral practice is with their peers. They are not very orate.

Group communication, whether it be amongst members of one social class, one sub-group, one trade or profession, one set of peers, is both easy and limited. It is easy because there are many common assumptions amongst the members, a common vocabulary and even grammar, and (this is very important) no necessity to express ideas which go beyond what the language is capable of. Thus Playground English is marked by short sentences and ejaculations; words used for their emotive rather than their intellectual significance; a high proportion of current clichés; blanket terms, expressing approval or

disapproval (*super*, *fab*); stock characterisations (a *nit*, *birk*, *nutcase*, *creep*); private vocabulary, the significance of which is known only to members of the group. The special characteristics of group languages of this kind often make them difficult for the outsider to follow, especially as they may use words with a different connotation. Thus in Liverpool a man may refer to his wife as "the tart" with no derogatory significance whatsoever. Amongst certain fairly closed groups of men (less often of women) the normal process of "phatic communion" may take the form of oaths and insulting remarks to one another, all in the best of humour.

Such languages will be perfectly adequate for the purposes the group requires them for. There is no point whatsoever in teaching children "Please take your foot out of my ear" for use in the playground where "gerroutovit" would be the appropriate word. But outside the situations for which they are intended, they will be unsuitable and unable to communicate effectively. The problem in education comes when children only possess a form of English which is incapable of coping with abstract ideas and logical connexions, with the nuances and intonations which are important in human relationships above a fairly primitive level. The senior English mistress of a large working class grammar school reports that fights occur amongst her girls because they have not the language to settle their differences verbally; and that a fair proportion of the differences occur because of simple phonological misunderstanding ("She's taken it wrong Miss. That's what I said but I didn't *mean* it like that!").

An interesting study of language in relation to social class has been carried out by Bernstein. With the "working class" he associates a *public* language, with the "middle class" a *formal* language. In the former case "the original linguistic relationship between the mother and child exerts no pressure on the child to make his experience explicit in a verbally differentiated way (Bernstein, 1961, p. 171) because communication will be "immediate" in terms of "changes in volume and tone accompanied by gesture, bodily movement, facial expression, physical set" whilst the language used will contain "a high proportion of short commands, simple statements and questions, the symbolism is descriptive, tangible, concrete, visual, and of a low order of generality, the emphasis is on the emotive rather than the logical implications". In the latter case, the middle class *formal* language will "mediate" between impulse and expression, and will be "rich in personal, individual qualifications, and its form implies sets of advanced logical operations; volume and tone and other non-

verbal means of expression take second place" (Bernstein, 1958, p. 164). An illuminating anecdote is offered. To a young child's repeated *why?* the public language answer will be "Because I say so"; the formal language answer will more often be an attempt at explanation, though of course the authoritarian answer will necessarily be used on occasions. A child possessing only public language will be at a grave disadvantage at school where middle class assumptions operate, where formal language is used, where the ability to see relationships and distinctions, to understand causal connexions are at a premium, abilities which are developed by an early explanatory use of language and the further curiosity this stimulates.

Bernstein has made a notable initial contribution to work in this field of language and social class, and his long term project promises some valuable results. Clearly we need to know more from specific experiments (scarcely any experimental evidence is offered in the two papers referred to). It might be that the two language usages are polar only in ideal terms and that in practice there are comparatively few groups with a "pure" public use; we do not *know* the size of the groups concerned. This is one reason why it would be better if the middle class/working class description disappeared. In fact the terminology evolved is in general obscure; one can see how *public* and *formal* come to be employed whilst feeling that they are unnecessarily confusing, and out of line with other usages in linguistics (Joos's Formal style for instance); a "public" language after all is a sort of private language; a "formal" language is in fact informal in the sense that it is adaptive and flexible. Even so the general questions which have been raised are important. It might be that many working class groups use a highly developed formal language; it might be that working class groups from a living oral culture (Irish, West Indian) exhibit quite different characteristics. It might be that middle class groups where there is a resort to authority display public language characteristics. Regional differences might be more important than class differences. The differences between formal and public language might have some relationship to those between written and spoken English. Again it will be important to know how far early public language experience "sets hard" so that pupils becomes incapable of learning in formal situations, because of his "culturally induced backwardness". Bernstein writes:

> This is by no means to say that a *public* language speaking pupil cannot learn. He can, but it tends to be mechanical learning and once the stimuli cease to be regularly reinforced there is a high probability of the pupil

forgetting. In a sense, it is as if the learning never really gets inside to become integrated into pre-existing schemata. (1961, p. 175)

This seems unduly discouraging, especially as no evidence whatsoever is offered for it. It takes into account neither ability nor motivation. To sharpen the point: do we really know enough to be able to say that a child of high ability, brought up against a public language background, will not be able to operate in the formal language? This is in effect what is being maintained. Certainly however the transition is not easy to achieve.

The ability to think in both public and formal language is no guarantee of true oracy, though a prerequisite of it. Oracy is to some extent specific, and in any particular speech situation will depend to some extent on any or all of several factors. One is knowledge of the subject at issue; one talks with more confidence when one knows what one is talking about. Another is the relative prestige of speaker and listener: a child talking to an adult, an employee to an employer, a social inferior to a social superior—may find the situation inhibiting. In *She Stoops to Conquer* Marlow became tongue-tied with a girl who was his social equal and could only talk to her when he thought she was the maid. A third is the feeling the speaker has about the attitude of the listener; if he thinks he disapproves, is contemptuous or uninterested he may find utterance difficult. In such circumstances his speech may be marked by hesitance and apology—*er, er*; *you know*; *sort of*; *by the way*; *incidentally*; *of course*; *don't you think*; *see what I mean* (though of course such features are not *necessarily* signs of nervousness). A fourth factor is a knowledge of the appropriate conventions; in a public speech there needs to be awareness of the correct procedure; but in any utterance there is a certain style (as defined in Chapter I) and perhaps register which is suitable.

A particularly good illustration of this last point is the pre-symbolic talk used in *phatic communion*. On all kinds of occasions people indulge in talk which is not intended to mean anything very much, but fulfils certain psychological functions, language here being "a mode of action rather than a countersign of thought". Malinowski, who coined the term, writes: "Each utterance is an act serving the direct aim of binding hearer to speaker by a tie of some social sentiment or other" (Ogden and Richards, 1946, p. 515). In such communication talk may be about health, the weather, the occasion or immediate surroundings ("What a nice room/party/dress, etc."). These are generally acceptable subjects in this country, whereas the exchange of obscenities, or the discussion of each other's

income, permissible amongst some groups, are not. Such subjects are usually those upon which immediate agreement is possible, and thus with strangers lessen anxiety and advance contact; with acquaintances they may serve to keep open the ties of communication—to show that friendship still exists. To an outsider presymbolic utterance often seems ridiculous—so much "small talk". Teenagers are often contemptuous of their elders' form of it ("Why ask how she is when you know already?"). Its importance should not however be underestimated (Hayakawa (1952) equates its function with that of large-scale ritual utterances such as ceremonies and church services). Not only does it serve to establish and maintain relationships but it is so often a preliminary, in specific situations, to symbolic language usages. It is, in other words, a necessary part of oracy.

5. Broadcasting

Despite the infuriated complaints of Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells in the correspondence columns of the quality press, it seems likely that the mass media and particularly the BBC have had a beneficial effect upon our speech. They presuppose a certain standard of utterance, for communication is essential. They have made available a large variety of speech models; one may contrast this with the situation fifty years ago when the only ones available were those in the immediate environment of home, school or work. The type of English they use is Standard English, which is thus displayed on a large scale.

In this context it is appropriate to develop a little what was said in Chapter One (sect. 2.2.1) about Standard English, for the term is the subject of much confusion. Standard English is a "dialect" of the language. It has the same structure and vocabulary whatever accent it is spoken in. Thus the present sentence would be Standard English whether it were read aloud by a Welshman, a Yorkshireman, an Australian, or someone with a foreign accent. It is a generally used dialect of English. In contrast the following is in a dialect of English not generally used:

> Hoo come in and axed mi to fotch yon cheer t'th'ingle and ceawer mi down.

This is Lancashire dialect ("She came in and asked me to fetch that chair up to the fire and sit me down"). It differs from Standard English. In vocabulary some words occur in SE with a different

meaning (ceawer/cower); some do not occur (hoo/she: axed/asked). In grammar certain forms (hoo come: ceawer *mi* down) would not occur in SE. It is worth noting that such local dialects are not a debased form of the standard language. Historically they are every bit as old and authentic. But one dialect has been chosen as standard over the centuries in the interests of general comprehensibility; that of the south-east midlands.

The mistake often made is to think of Standard English as an *accent*—the particular pronunciation associated with the public schools, the older universities and the BBC on official occasions. In fact the appropriate name for this is Received Pronunciation (RP). It is often thought of as being *the correct* pronunciation (Disgusted is always on the look out for any variation from what he believes to be the norm). In linguistic terms this is nonsense; communication is the touchstone—no accent is intrinsically any "better" than any other. In terms of social prestige however RP holds highest place and reflects the class structure in this country. This is a phenomenon peculiar to England. In USA for instance while there are certain unacceptable pronunciations of the language there is no *one* acceptable one: White (1960) describes three general norms—Eastern, Southern, and General American. In this country one or two other accents share RP's prestige. One of these is a form of Scots, rich with romantic overtones going back to the Jacobites (but that this has not the prestige of RP to the Scots themselves would seem to be indicated by the number of lairds who use RP). There are also southern Irish, associated with soft-spoken literary figures and the Blarney stone, and certain foreign accents (the Englishman cannot begin to guess the social class of the speaker). It is noteworthy that none of these are English local accents, and that northern Irish and Welsh are not amongst them. They are the First Class accents. The Second Class consists of English regional accents, amongst which there is a hierarchy whose exact placings are however difficult to define. The Third Class consists of town and industrial accents—Brummidgham and Black Country, Liverpudlian (despite the Beatles), Cockney. That accents should carry such social (and hence psychological) disadvantages in this way is not a desirable state of affairs.

It is interesting to note that very many English people who have not heard their voices on tape imagine that they have RP whilst their neighbours have an "accent". Even when they have heard themselves the prestige of RP is so high that they are often unwilling to admit to themselves that they deviate much from it. In one of a programme

of Speech Image Tests being carried out by Birmingham University Education Department children of the secondary school range listened to a spectrum of five voices (similar in respect of age, range and tone) pronouncing a sentence in a variety of accents: XRP (a "county" accent): RP; a modified local accent; a broad local accent; an out-region but in some ways similar local accent. Experiments and results are as yet incomplete, but preliminary tests indications are that girls claim to be nearer the RP norm than they are; and that scarcely any admit to the broad local accent which many possess. Boys on the other hand are much more realistic in their choices. It might be that they play with recorders more than girls; but it is more likely that the results are to be accounted for by a difference of self-image; they feel less need to conform, and equate a broad accent with toughness and group solidarity.

Another set of tests ask the children to assign jobs to particular accents. Stereotypes come thick and fast (a Welsh accent is nearly always given to a miner for instance). But what is more interesting is how few children assigned professional or "educated" jobs to accents other than RP. Although the majority of educated people in the country to-day have local or modified local accents of one kind or another the children's responses showed no awareness of this. This despite the fact that in provincial towns very few of the professional people with whom they come into personal contact—teachers, doctors, dentists, use RP. It is clear that they must gain these misleading impressions from the mass media, and particularly from broadcasting. Broadcast plays are accent-type cast with predictable monotony: middle class—RP; working class—local accent. Further the BBC has in the past always lent the great weight of its authority to RP, so much so that one of the common names for it is "BBC English". The effect of this has confirmed in the popular mind the impression that RP is the "correct" accent of English, and that all others are in some ways inferior.

This is very unfortunate. It means that the majority of people in this country, however vigorous, clear and effective their speech, are in the position of having Second or Third Class accents. The disabling effect of this might well be one of the root causes of inoracy. A general diffidence is induced, which is bad; the attempt to compensate results in a Poshall and Redgrove accent, which is worse. It would be absurd to blame the BBC for what stems from the hierarchical speech structure of English society (though it is interesting to speculate what the position would be now if it had accepted a

range of accents from the beginning). The one experiment made by the Corporation was during the war, when the national news was read by a Yorkshireman. This was however doomed to failure from the start for the reader was a well-known comedian and character actor; his newsreading was excellent, but the experiment was discontinued, and Disgusted and Champion of the King's English rejoiced. Of course nowadays regional announcers are used in the provinces; and a fair variety of accent is heard on national programmes, particularly in television journalism. But in the crucial case—the national news—which to the public at large is the "voice of the BBC"—RP is the rule. Fortunately there are definite signs that greater toleration is emerging; announcers of South African and Australian origin are employed for this purpose. It is greatly to be hoped that this tolerance will extend also to announcers whose speech has English regional flavour; if South Africa why not South Wales, South Dorset? In the 30s the BBC did a great service by creating high standards in the use of the spoken word. In the 60s it could perform an equally great one by making it clear that these standards are not a matter of accent but of communication.

6. National Stereotype

We come now to consider the effects of the national self-image(s) on speech behaviour. Clearly these must be very important, but so little is known about them that what follows must inevitably be largely speculative.

On the whole speech is not highly prized in England. Words which indicate facility in speech tend to have unfavourable connotations; *garrulity* certainly, but also *glibness*, *fluency*, even *eloquence* in certain contexts, *the gift of the gab*. Silence is golden, eloquence silver only. The Englishman will sit in a railway carriage for a journey of hundreds of miles without saying a word to his fellow passengers. Understatement is regarded as a virtue; anything more is "line-shooting".

This national image seems to have several sources. One is the polite tradition of the eighteenth century, exemplified in the work of Chesterfield, where large areas of demonstrative behaviour were out of court. Another is the hierarchical assumptions of rank and family precedence which put children at the bottom, and trained them with such precepts as "Don't speak until you're spoken to", and "Children should be seen and not heard". A third source, certainly, is the strong

tradition of English Puritanism, in which social gatherings for pleasure were frowned upon, and "idle conversation" was a vice: "But let your communication be Yea, yea: Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil" (*Matthew* 5, 37). And we may associate with this the nonconformist mercantile attitudes: the three brass monkeys sat on the mantelpieces of many homes and silently symbolised their message: *Hear all, see all, say nowt.* A fourth source would seem to be the English public schools which have of course had an influence out of all proportion to the numbers attending them. The effects of the Spartan model on these schools has yet to be studied thoroughly, but it was clearly immense: the few words, and the stiff upper lip come from Sparta; laconic utterance was prized, and the word *laconic* of course means Spartan. These schools were single-sex, and so removed from their pupils one of the most enjoyable motives for conversation. The boys were also removed from competition with the girls who might well have been found to be more orate than they; as it was they were able to feel that oral facility was fit only for girls. This is a common assumption to-day among men; women are not thought to converse, only gossip.

The laconic nature of English utterance is paralleled in the nonverbal aspects of communication. Clearly there is a good deal more involved in communication between two or more people than the words used. People complain "You can't really talk over the telephone"—though talk is in fact the one thing you *can* do in that situation. But the complaint is a just one; the telephone operates between narrower frequencies, and thus many of the overtones of the voice may disappear; and certainly it excludes the possibility of visual signals. Cantril and Allport (1935) compared responses of audiences present at lectures to those of audiences listening by loudspeaker and reported that the latter "seemed to have a slightly dulling effect on the higher mental processes" (p. 157) partly because of the lack of reciprocity between audience and speaker; they noted, amongst other things, that "the finer shades of emotional expression" were missed by the second group. If we can assume that the amplification system was not faulty this would indicate that these nuances were given visually to the first audience. There can be no finality about this conclusion however for it was also reported that better recall of a story was obtained with the reader in the room, even though he might be out of sight of the listeners. It seems as if the mere presence of a speaker is an aid to communication, perhaps because the listeners feel personally involved.

Some study has been made, e.g. by Wolff (1945), and Ruesch and Kees (1956), but in fact very little is known about these non-verbal aspects of communication. They may lie in the room itself, in the dress or stance of the speaker, as well as in the facial and bodily movements he makes. Such movements may have no communicative intention as far as the speaker is aware but may be signs of confidence or nervousness; finger twisting or uneasy shifting for instance. More consciously they may be some facial expression, which comments on the way the speaker wishes his words to be taken: a wink is the crudest of these. They may be larger gesticulations of the head or arms. The extent to which all gesture is culturally determined is not generally realised. In Ceylon traditionally a nod means *no*, a shake of the head *yes*. The smile of a Japanese is not necessarily a spontaneous expression of amusement but a requirement of etiquette. Westerners who have been trained to appreciate one set of signals often find orientals "inscrutable" because these signals are lacking. The Englishman finds the Italian "excitable" because his expansive illustrative gestures would be used by an Englishman only in a state of extreme distraction. Some interesting observations on gesture are made by Abercrombie (1956).

Non-verbal expression of the second type (e.g. by smiling) would be felt desirable by most English people to-day, and part of the ability to express oneself well. Gesticulation by hand or arm seems to be limited to a few specific situations, the clenched fist to emphasise a point in oratory, or in a different way to threaten a passing motorist; the jerked thumb in hitch-hiking. Systematic study of the use people make of gesture in ordinary conversation would be valuable. Observations by the present writer suggest that, ironically enough, the most common gesture is not an aid to communication, but a sign that communication has broken down; it is the twitched fingers, or the fast circular finger movement made by people who are fishing for words and cannot find them.

7. Summary

In the foregoing it has not been possible to deal exhaustively with all the influences on oracy. Any one of them as indicated in the section headings would provide material for many books, for indeed we are really at the beginnings of serious study in many cases. In so far as it is possible to summarise the main conclusions of this chapter they are as follows:

(i) Speech and personality are one. To develop oracy, basically one develops personality (Sect. 1).

(ii) Language experience is crucial. The young child's use of language *precedes* his understanding of it (and this has implications for all language learning) (Sect. 2).

(iii) The *quality* of language experience is crucial; quantity, though necessary, is not enough. The wrong language experience may result in a culturally induced backwardness (Sect. 4).

(iv) Formal education, by its stress on literacy, has often been inimical to oracy. A synthesis is needed (Sect. 3).

(v) The national self image has not encouraged oracy (Sect 6).

(vi) Broadcasting has encouraged oracy in providing models of usage on a vast scale. It has discouraged it by withholding acceptance from the majority of English accents (Sect. 5).

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