

MEMORANDUM
ON
PROBLEMS OF ENGLISH TEACHING
IN THE LIGHT OF A
NEW THEORY

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THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE-TEACHING IN THE LIGHT OF A NEW THEORY.

A MEMORANDUM

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INTRODUCTORY.

1. The problem of teaching foreign languages is no new one, nor is it confined to any particular country. From the earliest times and in most of the countries of the world, foreign languages have been taught and studied. Various procedures have been used at different times ostensibly with a view to effective teaching, and have been embodied in countless "methods," good, bad and indifferent.

2. Apparently, however, educators have always felt that something has been essentially wrong in the various procedures adopted; and indeed most of us will readily admit that there is a striking disparity between the efforts expended by teachers and the results obtained by them, even in the most favourable of conditions. In short, language-teaching methods have

generally proved to be unsatisfactory because uneconomical.

3. Although various reforms of class-room procedure have been effected in recent years as a consequence of what has been called the "Direct Method movement," the majority of us will agree that the results obtained are still incommensurate with the amount of effort expended by teacher and student.

4. The failure to find any adequate solution to this age-long problem is probably due to the fact that the work of designing language-courses has hitherto been exclusively in the hands of "language experts." But philologists, grammarians and phoneticians, who may be experts in their own subjects, are rarely competent in matters pertaining to the psychology of Speech; they may know all about *languages* as such, but are generally ignorant about the mental processes by which people acquire the power of *using* languages.

To-day, however, for the first time, language experts are recognizing the help that psychologists are able to afford them, and psychologists are realizing the service that they can render to the language-course designers. It is only reasonable to suppose that this happy collaboration will result in the placing of linguistic pedagogy once for all on a truly scientific basis.

5. It would be premature to state that psychologists are coming forward in a body to present their views, and it would be an exaggeration to say that there exists any considerable quantity of literature on Speech-Psychology; at the same time

we note that certain individual workers, in an occasional lecture or review article, are beginning to express their views and to make their influence felt. It would be incorrect to say that language teachers as a body are appealing to psychologists for their help, but it is probably within the bounds of truth to assert that language-teachers, course-designers and Educational Authorities are becoming more willing to listen to their views and to give them the attention that they deserve.

6. Indeed the first contributions of the psychologists have already been made; unostentatiously it is true, and with no flourish of trumpets. Uninfluenced by classical tradition, relatively free from the illusions often prevalent among those who have not had the advantages of a scientific training, they have been calmly analyzing the subject, reducing it to its component factors, and determining the various psycho-physical activities involved in the course of the acquiring of one's mother-tongue or of a foreign language.

7. The object of the present Memorandum is to set forth as briefly as is consistent with clearness, the conclusions which we may legitimately form from the new evidence.

8. The evidence upon which those conclusions are based has been obtained partly through my own experience as a teacher and as a student of foreign languages, and partly from the writings and utterances of those who have been exploring the little known strip of neutral territory lying between

Linguistics and Psychology. In this connection I may quote the names of Professor Spearman (University College, London) Mr. Morris Ginsberg (University College, London) Mr. H. S. Perera (Phonetics Dept., University College, London), Professor F. W. Brown (Hokkaido Imperial University), Professor A. Sèchéhaye (University of Geneva) and the late Professor F. de Saussure (University of Geneva).

It is however, only due to say that the conclusions themselves are my own contribution, for the authorities whom I have quoted above may not assent to them nor approve of the use to which I have put their theories and terminology.

"SPEECH" AND "LANGUAGE."

9. It is affirmed by psychologists that that heterogeneous and complex subject vaguely alluded to under the general term "language" is in reality two different and incommensurable subjects. These two subjects, although intimately bound up one with the other must be distinguished one from the other by all designers and users of Language-Courses. Let us provisionally term these two subjects respectively *A*. and *B*.

10. *A* may be defined as: **The sum of the mental and physical activities involved when one person communicates to another (by gesture, articulation or by written signs) any given concept (i. e. thought, notion or emotion).**

11. *B*. **The sum of the conventions adopted and systematized by a socialized mass of users of *A* in order to ensure common intelligibility.**

12. *A*, then, is a set of personal activities and reactions to stimuli, whereas *B* is a set of conventions, a code. A commercial code is not the same thing as the acts involved when transmitting a message by such code; the code of Marine Signals is not the same thing as the acts involved in hoisting the flags; the musical code of notes and rests is not the same thing as the acts performed by the musician; the code represented by a Railway Time Table is not the same thing as the acts performed by one who travels by train. In short, an act (or activity) is not the same thing as the code in accordance with which it is executed.

It follows therefore that the acts of communicating thoughts by language is not the same thing as the language (or language-code) by which the acts are executed.

13. Let us now designate *A* by the specific term "*Speech*" (思想傳達法) and *B* by the specific term "*Language*" (語學), remembering that from now onwards we shall use these terms not in the vaguer, more general and more popular sense, but in the strict technical sense of the definitions given above.

An English child of four years old is generally proficient in English Speech (i.e. he can generally communicate and receive successfully the rudimentary concepts appropriate to

his age), but he has no conscious knowledge of that code called the English Language.

A foreign student of "English" may be profoundly versed in the niceties of that code called the English Language, and yet be most unproficient in those personal activities which are called English Speech.

14. As a positive proof that Language is something different from Speech, let us note that many artificial languages have at different times been invented which have never been used for purposes of communicating thoughts, even by their inventors.

15. We must not be tempted to identify *Speech* with "Spoken Language" nor *Language* with "Written Speech," for the activities of Speech may be manifested through both the spoken and the written word, and the code called "a language" may be used both orally and graphically. Needless to say, the distinction between Speech and Language does not correspond to the useful distinction made between the "Colloquial" and the "Literary" dialects of a given language.

16. It will not suffice to dismiss the distinction between Speech and Language by saying that the former is *Practice* and the latter *Theory*, for we have the Theory and Practice of Speech, and the Theory and Practice of Language. The Theory of Speech is more or less understood by psychologists, and they explain it in terms of mental processes such as

Associations and Circuits. The Practice of Speech is manifested by the child in the nursery or by the pupils of the successful teacher of foreign speech. The Theory of Language is more or less understood and explained by such specialists as Jespersen, Bloomfield or Sapir. The Practice of Language is manifested by those who are engaged in teaching or studying the codes themselves. Each time we are successful in communicating our concepts we are practising Speech; each time we successfully analyze a mode of expression, paraphrase it or build up a foreign sentence by purely synthetic methods, we are practising Language.

A FIRST CONCLUSION.

17. The immediate conclusion that we may now form is that in all ages and in all countries disproportionate attention has been given to the *Language* side of the problem. The larger part of our teaching efforts have been directed towards the explaining of the foreign *code*, and the remaining part to causing our pupils to become proficient in performing acts of *Speech*, either receptively or productively.

18. Go to any bookshop, examine the pages of any book having such titles as "Aids to English," "The English Sentence," "Guide to Students of English," "Short Cuts to English," "Everyday Sentences in English," "The English

Language," "English in Theory and Practice," and you will find that the authors are devoting all or most of their attention to the explaining of English as a code, and ignoring the mental processes which alone will enable the foreign students of English to become proficient in performing English Speech activities. (Let the reader note that such textbooks for the study of English may be written in English or in any other vehicular language).

19. The "French Lesson" in the English class-room, or the "English Lesson" in the French or Japanese class-room, generally consists of a series of explanations concerning the the French or English languages (i.e. "codes"). These lessons are generally given through the medium of the written word, more rarely through the medium of the spoken word. Whether such lessons are well given or badly given, whether the explanations are successfully given or unsuccessfully given, or whether the texts are well chosen or badly chosen does not concern us for the moment. We may assume the teacher to be competent, the explanations to be valid, and the texts to be ideal, but the fact remains that the lessons are generally purely "language" lessons.

The teacher considers them to be so; it is rarely or never part of his intention to drill his pupils into performing acts of Speech; and if he does do so, such Speech exercises are subordinate to the main purpose: the teaching of the "code."

We have no legitimate cause for complaint against such teachers or such teaching; it is the logical outcome of the assumption that the terms "French Lessons" or "English Lessons" stand respectively for "Lessons in the French Language" and "Lessons in the English Language."

20. Hence, if we are desirous of bringing about an effective reform in the teaching of English, French, Japanese, etc. our first step, it would seem, must be towards the clear defining of such vague terms as "English," "French" or "Japanese." If we use the term "English Language" we must be clear in our minds whether we are using the term in the narrow technical sense which excludes "Speech" or whether we mean it to cover "English Speech" and "Language."

PRIMARY SPEECH AND SECONDARY SPEECH.

21. From now onwards in the course of this memorandum I shall say comparatively little concerning the teaching of Language, and shall confine myself to the neglected Speech aspect of the problem.

22. Assuming my reader to have grasped the idea of Speech as opposed to Language, I must now proceed to distinguish between what I shall term respectively *Primary Speech* and *Secondary Speech*.

23. *Primary Speech* I shall define as: "*Speech Activities*

as usually practised by the young child in the course of his normal linguistic development without organized pedagogic training (i.e. without reading, writing, translating, analysis, synthesis and other similar acts of reason)"; and *Secondary Speech* as: "Speech Activities as not usually practised by the young child in the course of his normal linguistic development, but which are initiated and developed by systematic pedagogic training (i.e. reading, writing, translating, analysis, synthesis and other similar acts of reason)."

24. To realize this important distinction and to understand why the terms *Primary* and *Secondary* are appropriate, it will be necessary to examine what are called "Speech Circuits."

25. An act of speech consists in communicating a concept from one brain to another. If we use the simplest and the most primitive circuit (i.e. the *Primary Circuit*) the following is the psycho-physical mechanism:

26. A *concept* is produced in the brain of a given person (whom we shall call *A*). He wishes another person (whom we shall call *B*) to become aware of his concept. (In simpler terms, *A* wants to make a communication to *B*.) The concept is identified in *A*'s brain with something called an *Acoustic Image*.

27. The acoustic image is the imagining that one hears or articulates one or more words. When you "think of a word" you form an acoustic image of that word; the process of

thinking itself is the associating of a succession of acoustic images to the corresponding concepts. According to psychologists, a concept is inseparable from some sort of acoustic image. You cannot think of the animal called "a cat" without imagining that you hear or articulate the English word spelt CAT, or the French word spelt CHAT, or the German word spelt KATZE, or the Japanese word spelt NEKO, etc. This fusion of the concept and of an appropriate acoustic image is so intimate and so natural that most of us fail to realize that an acoustic image has been formed at all. But a few experiments will soon convince us that the acoustic image is an indispensable concomitant to the concept. When you "say something to yourself" or "think something to yourself" you are simply forming acoustic images.

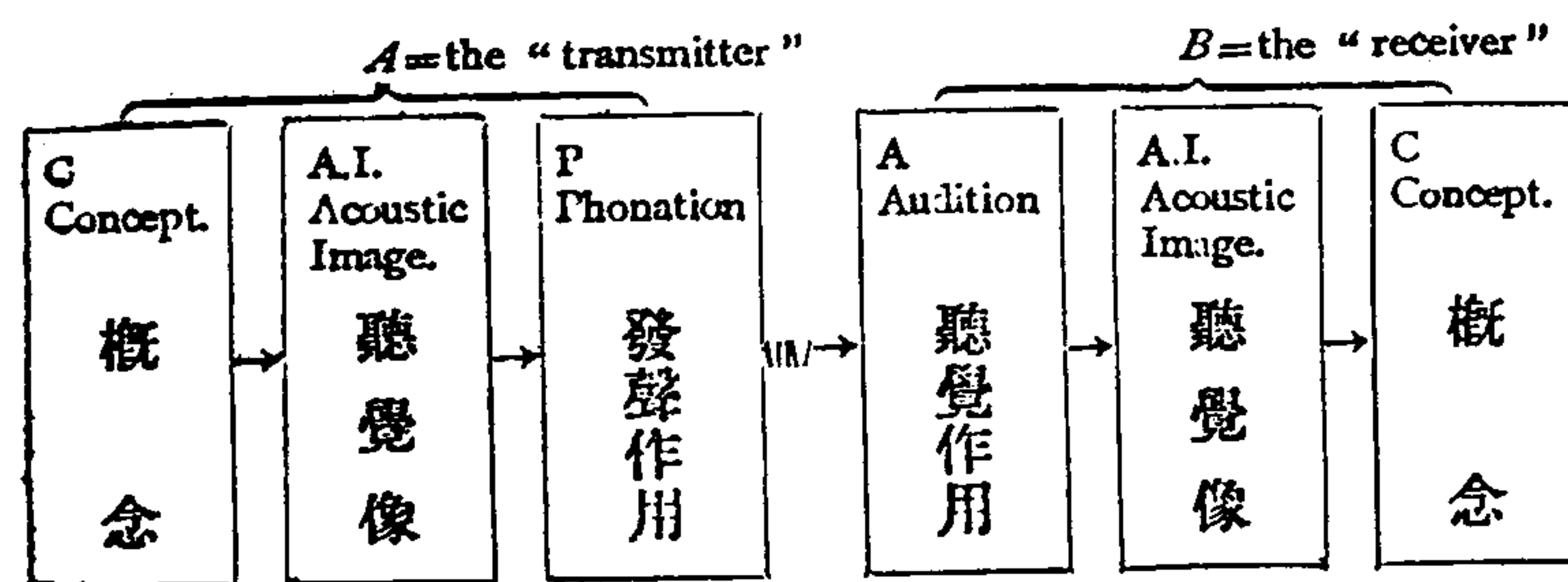
28. *A* forms the acoustic image appropriate to his concept, and at the same moment "*phonates*" it; that is to say, he converts his acoustic image into muscular activity; his vocal organs function and he makes certain articulate noises in accordance with some particular language code. The concept and the acoustic image are psychic activities; the phonation is a physical activity; it creates sound-waves.

29. These sound-waves cause the diaphragm of *B*'s ear to vibrate, and *B* is aware of sounds. This is the act of *Audition*. If *B* is a foreigner unfamiliar with the sounds of *A*'s language, the matter will probably end there; *B* will have *heard* but

will probably have been unable to form any acoustic image; he cannot represent to himself what he has heard. If *B*, although a foreigner, is acquainted with the sounds of *A*'s language, the act of audition will evoke in his mind an acoustic image.

30. If however he is not acquainted with *A*'s language, the matter will end there; for the acoustic image will have failed to evoke any concept. He will say: "I hear a word or some words, but they convey no meaning to me." But if *B* is not a foreigner, or if, although a foreigner, he knows *A*'s language, the acoustic image will evoke in his brain a concept, and this concept will probably be the same as (or very similar to) the original concept produced by *A*'s cerebral activity. The speech circuit is complete.

31. Let us recapitulate the psycho-physical operations involved in this simple and primary speech circuit by means of the following diagram:



THE SIX PRIMARY SPEECH HABITS.

32. The young child, without receiving any specific training or instruction, becomes proficient in performing the Act of Primary Speech. He phonates nonsense-words because it gives him pleasure to do so; he comes to form acoustic images by dint of involuntarily listening to others or to himself. He likes listening to nursery rhymes and stories; he finds that if he makes certain vocal noises, his wants are attended to more promptly than if he did not make them; and so he comes to associate rudimentary concepts with rudimentary acoustic images (both phonated and unphonated). He associates the concept *hungry* with the word *hungry* when he is hungry, associates the concept *dog* with the word *dog* when he sees a dog, associates the concept *bed* with the word *bed* when he is put to bed, etc. etc.

33. The question now arises: is it desirable or possible to cause school-children to become proficient in performing such primary acts of Speech?

The general concensus of opinion is that it is both desirable and possible. (See Jespersen, Passy, Sweet, Goethe, Storm, Atkins and Hutton, Kittson, etc. etc.). In the course of this memorandum I shall suggest that not only is it desirable and possible but that it is essential and indispensable.

34. A further question arises: assuming the desirability and possibility, how can we cause school-children to acquire such proficiency?

35. I suggest the following answer:

The young child invariably forms six speech habits. Thanks to these, and to these exclusively, he becomes proficient in performing the acts of Primary Speech. Let us therefore term these "The Six Primary Speech Habits," examine them, and show how each of these habits may be acquired by the older child in the class-room (or even by the adult in the course of his tuition).

PRIMARY SPEECH-HABIT No. 1. **"ORAL OBSERVATION."**

36. Students of Speech must form the habit of observing speech-material with their ears. Spoken Speech-material may be roughly defined as: sounds and intimate sound-groups, tones and intimate tone-groups, syllables and intimate syllable-groups, words and word-groups ranging from the most intimate word-groups to longer word-groups including sentences.

37. The average student, at the present time, forms this habit very imperfectly or not at all, being tempted or encouraged to replace it by *visual* observation, or being tempted and encouraged to confine his oral observation to isolated words.

PRIMARY SPEECH-HABIT No. 2. **"ORAL MIMICRY."**

38. Students of Speech must form the habit of mimicking with the vocal organs the speech-material as it falls from the lips of the teacher. They should do this aloud (=phonate it) or mentally (=form the Acoustic Image), not only at the moment of hearing (=Audition), but also, if possible, from memory.

39. The average student at the present time, being generally averse to mimicry (except as a joke), and not being specifically encouraged to mimic, forms this habit very imperfectly or not at all.

PRIMARY SPEECH-HABIT No. 3. **"ORAL MECHANIZING."**

40. "Mechanizing" means: performing a succession of movements repeatedly always in the same way until the succession of movements can be performed successfully without the performer giving any attention to what he is doing. If a pianist can execute a piece of music successfully while he is reading the newspaper or is carrying on a conversation, he may be said to have "mechanized" the piece of music.

41. Students of Speech must form the habit of mechanizing Speech-material, i.e. becoming able (by dint of repetition) to produce accurately, and without giving attention, chains of syllables, on reception of some appropriate stimulus.

42. The average student at the present time, being averse to monotonous repetition, being ignorant of its purpose and value, and not being specifically encouraged to do so, confines his mechanizing efforts to single words. He will mechanize such a word as *impossible*, but does not mechanize such word-groups as *it is impossible for me to go*. He is generally encouraged to replace *the mechanizing of word-groups* by *the improvising of word-groups*. See Secondary Speech-Habit No. 14.

PRIMARY SPEECH-HABIT No. 4.

"FUSING ACOUSTIC IMAGE AND MEANING."

43. Students of Speech must form the habit of fusing each word or word-group (long and short) with the concept to which it is assumed to correspond. The sight of a *pencil* should evoke the word *pencil*, the word *book* should evoke the concept of a *book*; the activity represented by the sentence *I get up* should evoke the words *I get up*, etc. etc.

44. Such fusions may be effected in various ways and in varying degrees. The average student, at the present time,

tends rather to fuse the foreign word with his native word, to neglect fusing it with its concept, and to consider the isolated word as the ultimate semantic unit, ignoring the word-group altogether.

BASIC SPEECH MATERIAL

45. The four Primary Speech-Habits set forth above, are sufficient for the purposes of acquiring what I shall now term "Basic Speech-Material." (In former works I have called this "Primary Matter" or "Memorized Matter." As the term *Primary* is required for other purposes, and as I now feel the term *Memorized* to be inappropriate, I propose to replace them by the new term "*Basic*.")

46. "Basic Speech-Material" is any Speech Material (see definition under Speech Habit No. 1.) which is learnt (i.e. memorized, learnt by heart) as it stands without modifications or additions, as when we have learnt to say and to use one or more sentences in a language which otherwise is quite unknown to us. One who confines his linguistic efforts to the successful memorizing of useful and authentic foreign sentences and who is content to use them exactly as he has heard them, will be unable to commit any errors of grammar, word-choice etc. but his powers of expression and understanding will be confined to this necessarily limited stock.

47. I have heard of a missionary in India who could preach one sermon and one sermon only in the Urdu language. He had memorized it from end to end, and so that sermon constituted his sole stock of Urdu Speech-Material (at any rate as far as preaching was concerned), and that was Basic Speech-Material.

A pianist who has learnt to execute (well, badly or indifferently) one single piece of music, but who is otherwise ignorant of piano-playing, may be said to possess Basic *Piano-playing* Material only, and that confined to one piece of music.

DERIVATIVE SPEECH MATERIAL.

48. When however we are expert enough to modify in some way a given piece of Basic Speech-Material, we are composing "Derivative" Speech-Material. Let us assume some person, otherwise unacquainted with English, to have learnt by heart the sentence *Where are you going?* That sentence is a piece of Basic Speech-Material. He learns subsequently that *were* is the past tense of the verb of which *are* is the present tense. He may then "derive" *Where were you going?* (a sentence which he has neither imitated nor so far mechanized). Or he may learn the word *when*, and risk the sentence *When are you going?* or perhaps *When were you going?* Or he may learn the word *coming*, and

risk *Where are you coming?* *When are you coming?* *Where were you coming?* or *When were you coming?* Or he may learn the word *they*, and risk *When are they going?* *When were they coming?* etc. etc. These sentences will be "derived" from the Basic sentence *Where are you going?* and will constitute "Derivative" Speech-Material. One who is too impatient to observe, mimic, mechanize, and fuse to meanings Basic Speech-Material, and who is over-keen on extemporizing Derivative Speech-Material, will form bad habits which are not Primary Speech Habits, and will run serious risks. He may learn the word *he* and may produce *Where are he going?* Or he may learn the word *live*, and may produce *Where are you live?* In other terms, a use of Derivative Speech-Material disproportionate to the quantity of Basic Speech-Material acquired will result in what is called "Broken English."

49. We may here note that there are three ways in which Basic Speech-Material is acquired:

(1). The tedious but very effective plan of daily repeating a given number of foreign authentic sentences provided to us by some competent teacher, while comparing them occasionally with an adequate translation in our own language. This is the only plan available for the beginner who rarely has the opportunity of hearing the language spoken or of using it himself in actual speech.

(2). Hearing a foreign sentence repeated so often that we

acquire it even involuntarily. This is the first method generally adopted by the young child. If the students hear their teacher say a foreign sentence on a sufficient number of occasions, they will tend to learn it by heart whether they want to or not.

(3). Successfully composing and using Derivative Material on several occasions so that the repetition converts the Derivative Material into new Basic Material. This procedure is generally only possible in the case of the more advanced student, and only then if he has been well trained in the Primary Speech Habits.

50. The first four Primary Speech Habits, I repeat, are essential for the successful acquisition of Basic Speech-Material.

PRIMARY SPEECH HABIT No. 5.

"COMPOSING DERIVATIVE SPEECH MATERIAL."

51. Students of Speech must form the habit of composing Derivative Speech-Material from the Basic Speech-Material that they have acquired by dint of Oral Observation, Oral Mimicry, Oral Mechanizing, and Fusing Acoustic Image and Meaning. They form this habit by means of specific exercises which train them to modify their Basic Material in accordance with the usages of the language they are studying. By so doing they will become expert in composing new sentences by

analogy with previously learnt sentences. If the exercises are appropriate, and the lessons well given, this analogical construction will soon be executed by the student unconsciously and successfully.

52. The average student at the present time, not being encouraged to form this habit, tends to ignore it and to replace it by Secondary Speech Habit No. 14. (Improvising Speech-Material by the help of Dictionary and Grammar Book).

PRIMARY SPEECH HABIT No. 6.

"IMMEDIATE REACTIONS TO ORAL STIMULI"

(in connection with the Primary Speech Circuit).

53. The five primary speech habits described above do not form a complete recipe until we add to them the habit of Immediate Reactions to Stimuli.

54. Students of Speech must form the habit of responding *immediately* to various stimuli. They must observe immediately, must mimic immediately, must so fuse the words to their meanings that one evokes the other immediately, must become so expert in analogical constructions that they can immediately form Derivative from Primary Speech-Material. The young child reacts immediately or not at all. Students must learn, for example, to answer questions without hesitation or delay; they must be prepared to name an object immediately

it is shown to them; they must learn how to perform the operation of substitution not only accurately but promptly. As for mechanizing, the production of a succession of syllables without a break is an essential part of the process.

55. The average student of the present day tends rather to reflect and to calculate before he reacts; he is rarely encouraged to react promptly, for the necessity for prompt reactions is not evident to those who have not given serious attention to the nature of speech activities as distinct from the study of the language itself as a code.

HOW TO ACQUIRE THE PRIMARY SPEECH HABITS.

56. We must now enquire by what procedure it is possible within the limitations of the class-room to cause students to acquire the Six Primary Speech Habits.

57. The answer is simple: *these habits may be acquired by means of specific and appropriate exercises.* These differ from the time-honoured exercises which aim only at the learning of the language (i.e. "code"), or, at best the learning of what we shall examine later as the Secondary Speech Habits. Primary-Speech-Habit-Forming exercises aim at nothing but the successful and rapid formation of Primary Speech Habits. If, at the same time, they result in a certain acquaintance

with the "code" we may consider this as a useful by-product. As matters stand to-day in the average school, other exercises than these are given, and whatever Primary Speech Habits are formed are formed accidentally, and as a by-product.

58. Those who are pessimistic enough to doubt whether it is possible within the limitations of the class-room and of time to inculcate the Primary Speech Habits, should ask themselves whether, to their knowledge, specific exercises to this end have ever been given a fair trial.

59. What are these specific exercises? It would seem that they may be divided into seven groups:

1. Ear-Training Exercises,
2. Articulation Exercises,
3. Repetition Exercises,
4. Reproduction Exercises,
5. Substitution Exercises,
6. Imperative Drill,
7. Conventional Conversation.

These seven groups however are mostly *oral*.

EAR-TRAINING EXERCISES.

60. These exercises (first devised by Professor D. Jones) are designed to cause students to observe sounds and to distinguish one sound from another. Briefly the procedure is as follows:

