

## INTERPRETATION AND EXPLANATION OF THE SYLLABUS FOR STD. IX

*[Now that the Structural Approach has been adopted in most of the States of the Indian Union for the teaching of English, there is a widespread demand for a lucid and authoritative exposition of its techniques and procedures. It was with this object in view that Mr. D. H. Spencer, Education officer of the British Council in Bombay, gave a series of talks from the Bombay Station of the All-India Radio. In these broadcast talks, he interpreted some of the difficult points arising from the Bombay Syllabus and explained how the basic structures of English can be introduced and fixed in the minds of the children so as to give them a command of the language. We reproduce below one of such talks, dealing with the syllabus for Std. IX in the hope that it will benefit the teachers of English in the whole country.—EDITOR]*

In two broadcasts last June, I discussed the implications of the syllabus in English for Bombay State with particular reference to Standard VIII. This evening I want to talk about the syllabus for Standard IX and to-morrow evening about the syllabus for Standard X.

The authors of the syllabus have not graded the structures for Standards IX and X in the same way as they have for Standard VIII. An appendix to the syllabus for Standard IX says this: "It should be noted that the structures have been given in groups merely to suggest the range to be covered, and that no fixed order is prescribed at this stage either for the groups or for the individual structures. Authors will be free to grade and group the structures and to work out their own schemes of graded structures. Each book should, however, indicate the scheme it follows. The particular examples of structures given are merely illustrative. Variations of the examples with structures already known (different tenses, personal pronouns, affirmative and negative forms) should be used. The approach to a new structure has to be cumulative and must draw upon the previously known structures."

It follows, therefore, that the textbook authors were given, and have used complete freedom to arrange the order of structures. And

freedom, here as elsewhere, implies greater responsibility. As might be expected no two writers of books currently authorized for Standard IX have followed exactly the same order, and since I cannot analyse separately the order followed in each book, I am proposing only to suggest ways of teaching certain structures, and to show roughly how and where they ought to fit into the general scheme.

Let us start with the tenses. New tenses to be introduced in this year are the Simple Present Perfect, the Continuous Past, the Simple Past Perfect and the Simple Conditional or Future in the past. In addition, of course, the tenses learnt in the first year have to be constantly practised and new uses of them included. Of the new tenses quite obviously the Present Perfect is the most important, because it is the one most commonly used—and, I think we may fairly say—the most commonly misused. A good case can be made out for teaching this tense in the first year, and even before the Simple Past, but we need not go into that now. Obviously the essential thing about the Present Perfect is that it is a Present tense, in the sense that when we use it we are interested not in when the action took place, but in its effect on events now, in its present consequences. The time of course may be suggested by the context, but it is not narrowly defined by an adverb or adverbial phrase of past time. cf. “I have never been to Madras in my life” and “I went to Madras in 1956”. It is this distinction which the pupils must be made to recognize automatically. It helps considerably if the teacher never uses a past tense without an adverb or adverbial phrase of past time *i.e.* he should not say “Did you do your homework?” but “Did you do your homework last night?” Then “Have you done your homework?” is more easily distinguishable from “Did you do your homework?” This use of the tense can quite easily be demonstrated if the teacher performs an action, such as opening the door, and says, as he does it, “I am opening the door.” He can then go straight on, while he is still touching the door and say: “I have opened the door.” Thereafter there are daily opportunities for practising the tense. It can be linked with *how long* to form a variety of questions: “How long have you been in this school?” etc.: and from there it is but a short step to the continuous forms of the same tense: “How long have you been sitting at your desk?” “How long have you been learning English?” Actually the Continuous Present Perfect does not appear in the Bombay syllabus until the third year, but in other syllabuses of this kind it is usually put closer to the Simple tense.

Certain other words can be conveniently introduced with this tense. The adverbs *just* and *already*, for example, and also *since* and *for* with expressions of time: "We have been in this school since 1955 (or for 3 years.)" It may also, of course, convey future meaning after temporal conjunctions, as when we say: "I shall write a letter after I have finished my work". Such words as *when*, *before*, *after*, *as soon as*, were taught in different contexts in the first year. Here is a good opportunity to revise them.

A problem which often arises in the second year is that the sentences the pupils have to learn and say become longer, and at first they will be inclined to stumble, or to miss out words. So far they have had only compound sentences with conjunctions; now they are moving on to complex sentences, and the clauses should be kept as short as possible. Substitution tables on the blackboard help to give the pupils practice in handling these longer sentences.

Noun clauses, adverbial clauses and adjectival clauses all come into this year. Of course, they will be spaced out and introduced wherever they seem naturally to fit in. The key word in that last sentence is "naturally". The textbook writer must avoid forcing the language into a kind of strait-jacket, which means that he must not make jumps from one structure to another of a totally different kind. So far as is possible one structure must lead on to the next. The language must be viewed as a uniform whole, not as a jumbled pile of bits and pieces. In other words, he would not deal with the relative pronoun *who* in one lesson and in the next lesson jump, let us say, to an impersonal construction such as "It is hard to understand". *Who*, referring to persons, leads on naturally to *which*, referring to things, so we would expect to find these two words close together. The impersonal construction might be fitted in later, perhaps after teaching the use of the infinitive, so that one could glide as it were—and please notice that I said glide, not jump,—from "I want to learn English" to "It is easy to learn English."

The Past Perfect, according to the syllabus, is only to be used in Standard IX with Reported Speech. I think probably it is better to introduce it first independently, and in fact one of the textbooks I have looked at does this. As with the Continuous Past the best approach is through a situation in which the tense can be employed quite naturally. F. G. French, in his very useful series of handbooks entitled "The Teach-

ing of English Abroad, " suggests the following method: The teacher tells the class that he is going out of the room for a few seconds; while he is outside each pupil must perform some simple action such as holding his hand up, touching his head, shutting his book, etc. . The teacher then goes outside and returns. He can now ask each pupil: "After I had gone out of the room, what did you do?" The first part of the answer "After you had gone out of the room" may be written on the black-board.

The Conditional or Future in the past may also be introduced in two ways—either through Reported Speech or with *if* and *unless* in a so-called conditional sentence of the type: "If it rained, I should get wet." In this case, as opposed to that of the Past Perfect I incline to favour the approach through Reported Speech. Reported Speech with the reporting verb in the Present Tense will already have been taught; according to the syllabus it should appear first in this year's work but there is no harm, and probably much good, in practising its simplest forms in the first year; no changes of pronouns, tenses or adverbial expressions of time need be involved. "Ram, what colour is this book?" "This book is blue." "Subhas, what does Ram say?" "Ram says this book is blue." In the second year we can put the reporting verb in the Past Tense, but still avoid other changes. In my experience too much emphasis is put on this business of changing pronouns and adverbs in Reported Speech. When such changes are necessary, which is not—in everyday speech, at least—very often, they are perfectly logical, and there is no mystery about them. Indian students tend to find it difficult because in their language there is no distinction between Direct and Indirect Speech forms, but this is no reason to turn the whole business into a complicated mechanical exercise. If someone in class says: "The door is open" and the teacher asks "What did he say?" The answer is just as likely to be: "He said that the door is open" as it is to be: "He said that the door was open," particularly if no one has proceeded to shut the door in the meantime.

I'm afraid I have digressed somewhat from the Future in the Past. After a good deal of practice with the reporting verb in the past, the teacher can say something like this: "Gopal said he would not come to school to-morrow. What did Gopal say? He said he would not come to school to-morrow." As with any new form plenty of practice must be given. Then the conditional sentence may be taught: "Gopal would not come to school to-morrow if it was Sunday". Although we are using

a past tense we are of course referring to the Future ; it might be as well to explain this in the mother-tongue, and also the precise implications of the Conditional Tense.

Another important topic of second year work is the special verbs— anomalous finites if you prefer the modern name—*must*, *have to*, *may*, *can* and *ought to*. *May* could perhaps first be introduced in its meaning of permission, together with requests. “It is very hot. Please open the window.” “May I open the window?” Later on, the other meaning of possibility can be taught, perhaps in conjunction with the word “whether”. e. g. “I don’t know whether I shall go to Poona next week. I may go.”

There is no very obvious place in the syllabus for introducing *must*. It is not, however, difficult to teach in the right situation. You may begin with sentences of this kind: “When we are hungry, we must eat”, “When we are thirsty we must drink.” If you light a match and wait until the flame has nearly reached your fingers, you can say: “The match is burning my fingers ; I must drop it”. When the bell rings at the end of the lesson you can say: “The bell is ringing ; I must go now.” An important point of course, not only with *must*, but with the other verbs in this class, is that they can have both present and future meaning. For other tenses of *must* we use *have to*. There is in actual fact some slight difference of meaning, or at least a difference in the outlook of the speaker, between *must* and *have to*, but it is not significant enough to worry about at this level. What is important, however, is that *must not* should not be considered the opposite of *must*. “I don’t drink coffee” is the opposite of “I drink coffee” but “I must not drink coffee” is not in the same category ; it is a negative command, or a prohibition. The opposite of “I must drink coffee” is “I needn’t drink coffee”, which has two alternative forms in *don’t need to* and *don’t have to*. The form *haven’t to* is I think ambiguous ; it may be taken as a substitute for *must not* but certainly then its force is weaker, and it is in fact only rarely used for prohibition. *Have got to*, incidentally, is a colloquial express and not used in formal language.

All this, obviously, is confusing for the pupils and these verbs need to be taught with great care and patience and, if I may use the word here, with tact. *Can* indicates ability, deriving either from physical power or mental skill. “I can speak Hindi”, “I can swim five miles”,

etc. In colloquial style it is also often used instead of *may* to indicate permission. "Can I leave the classroom, please?" "Yes, you can". And there is a third, quite important use of *can* which has to find a place in the syllabus somewhere: its uses with verbs which are not normally used in the Continuous Present tense, such as *see*, *hear*, and *understand*. We do not say: "Are you hearing the wireless?" but "Can you hear the wireless?" Not "Are you understanding me?" but "Can you understand me?"

*Ought to* implies a moral obligation or duty. *e.g.*, "Your hands are dirty; you ought to wash them", "You ought to read some English every day." There is an alternative form *should* which is a little weaker in meaning than *ought to*, and it is worth pointing out that in this sense *should* is used for all persons, and has nothing to do with the should/would conditional forms.

I have dealt here with these five anomalous finites in one breath, so to speak, but naturally in the syllabus they would be spread out; and, moreover, in the second year we are only concerned with their use in present and future time, which involves no change to form; we are not concerned with their use in past time. *Had to*, *might*, *could* as well as the use of these finites with the perfect infinitive as in *must have done*, *may have done*, etc., is rightly left to a later stage.

In the second year pupils will be asked to do a good deal more writing than was either possible or desirable in the first year, and it may not be inappropriate to end this talk with a few remarks on composition. Only after practice and repetition have produced familiarity with the structural patterns of a language should a pupil be asked to make his own sentences and to learn to write compositions. Free composition must be preceded by exercises of a kind which help the pupil to acquire the habit of writing connected sentences. Such preparatory exercises might be graded something like this: first, the copying of single sentences from book or blackboard; second, the substitution of single words in sentences, or the filling in of blank spaces with suitable words; third, the composing of sentences from a simple substitution table, in which all combinations are bound to be correct; and fourth, the composing of sentences from a complex substitution table, in which selection is necessary, though the word-order will always be correct. Exercises of this sort can be used to reinforce the learning of every new structure that is more than a simple

step forward, that involves what we might call a major learning effort. I doubt very much whether really free composition is advisable in the second year; better by far to guide all written work, so that the chances of pupils making bad mistakes are reduced to a minimum. Just as a normal class needs a great deal of practice in seeing and copying written sentences before it can write independently. I am not trying to imply that spoken and written sentences are different from each other—though I may remark in parenthesis that there are more differences than we might imagine between the spoken and written forms of the language—but simply that while both skills are new to the children they need to be practised separately at first. A good second-year text-book will contain plenty of exercises of this kind, and the teacher himself can easily invent more.

In discussing these few teaching points from the second year syllabus I have tried to show how the text-book writer looks at them when he is trying to fit them into a coherent, graduated scheme. So this is perhaps the right place to say that there is not as yet, and may well never be, a final, definitive order of structures. I mean there is no order which all teachers would agree about. There are always alternatives—not many perhaps, in the first year, but quite a lot in the second year, and more still in each subsequent year.\*

D. H. SPENCER

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\* By courtesy, AIR, Bombay.

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