The Use of ENGLISH

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With Supplements by

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Second Edition

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Preface to the Second Edition

Even in the six years since the first edition was published, there has been considerable achievement in the study of the English language. In a serious attempt to reflect the new and important work that has appeared in this period, a thorough revision has been carried out which has resulted in extensive alteration and expansion. For example, the greatly increased study (particularly in Europe) of the impact of English on other languages has meant a considerable extension of Chapter 2, and the fruitful resurgence of grammatical research—especially stimulated by M.I.T. and one or two other leading centres—has led to the expansion of the material suitable for more advanced students by the inclusion of a new chapter (Chapter 12) and by the enlargement of other parts; Supplement I has been extended to take account of the increased interest in writing systems. And of course English has continued to add speedily to its enormous word-stock, new dictionaries have appeared, there have been new departures in lexicology, stylistics, phonological theory, and general linguistics as a whole. Within the limits of a single volume, we have sought to reflect, not least by supplying a new bibliography, what seem to us the most significant of the new developments; and we have been determined that in its new guise (totally reset in a somewhat more economical format) this book should be worthy of the reputation it has won among students of English language and literature as well as of linguistics.

In preparing the new edition, my co-authors and I have drawn gratefully on the valuable comments of Barbara M. H. Strang, John Lyons, Y. Olsson, M. A. K. Halliday and other friends and colleagues, especially in Britain and the United States; we are very conscious also of our debt to those who, in all parts of the world, have contributed to the present edition

through their reviews of the first. Particular thanks must be expressed to past and present associates of the Survey of English Usage at University College London (Valerie Adams, David Crystal, Derek Davy, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, Joan Mulholland, Jan Svartvik), many of whose ideas, communicated in the course of daily contact, are otherwise silently incorporated in the pages that follow. Finally, three exemplary native informants, Jean, Eric, and Robin Quirk, have been shamelessly exploited (as only a family can be) for their invaluable help in criticism, checking, and proof-reading.

R.Q.

University College London,
March 1968.

Preface to the First Edition

The Use of English began as a series of talks commissioned by the BBC and broadcast in the summer of 1961. On that occasion, as in the subsequent revision and expansion of the material, I enjoyed the co-operation of my colleagues, A. C. Gimson and J. Warburg, so that a wide coverage could be given to the many important aspects of the language and so that differing viewpoints might be presented on the complex instrument that is English. The aim has been to stimulate a mature and informed approach to our language, so that we can understand the nature of English, be encouraged to use it more intelligently, respond to it more sensitively, and acknowledge more fully the implications of its international use today. In short, this book seeks to satisfy our natural curiosity about language and to supply just such knowledge of the mother-

tongue as R. G. Latham claimed (a century and a quarter ago) should be the familiar equipment of every educated person.

Nothing beyond such 'natural curiosity' and an ordinary working knowledge of English will be required in order to begin profitable work on the book. On the other hand, the range of the subject is vast—as is the range of the language itself. We have tried to provide for those whose interest may be limited to the practical everyday use of English as it impinges on the lives of us all. But we have tried to provide also for those whose interests will extend rather further. There is material in every chapter, as well as in the exercises at the end of every chapter, which will readily carry such students into advanced work both on the subtler use of language (as in literature) and on the contributions that modern linguistic science is making to the study of English. Moreover, in the Supplements, we have been able to give to topics of great importance a fuller and more specialised treatment than might have seemed appropriate in the body of the book.

One need hardly say that this volume does not attempt to be definitive or to provide a description of the manifold uses of English. It would be futile to have such aims in writing a book of these modest dimensions. What is more, it is only recently that scholars have begun to realise just how immensely complex the uses of English are. The present book sets out some provisional observations and suggestions, many of them made in the course of work upon the Survey of English Usage which is being conducted at University College London and which will eventually yield more precise and detailed information on the nature, use, and range of English than is at present available.

It would be impossible to do justice in a concluding paragraph to the many who have directly or indirectly contributed to this book. There is special pleasure in acknowledging the stimulus provided by Professor A. H. Smith, whose firm but friendly insistence, indeed, caused the book to be written. But warm thanks are due also to my colleagues on the Survey of English Usage (Anne P. Duckworth, J. P. L. Rusiecki, J. Svartvik) for lengthy discussions which have clarified many

points; to Jean Rowntree and Rosemary Jellis of the BBC for much of the original conception of the work; to Roy Yglesias for guidance at every stage of the writing; to George Perren for numerous suggestions; to Donald J. Taylor, who has given a wealth of advice, especially on the exercises; to the lively students both in London and in Durham whose response to earlier versions of several sections has led to improvements in many respects; to scholars in English studies and linguistics all over the world, whose help and influence can to some inadequate extent be seen in the notes and in the bibliography; Jean and Eric Quirk for their devoted and skilful help in checking quotations, correcting typescript, and many another task cheerfully undertaken for all its tediousness. But of course no helpers, named or unnamed, are responsible for the blemishes that nevertheless remain.

R.Q.

University College London,
February 1962.

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1: *From 'Small Reach' to Large*

LET us begin by considering the following proposition:

1 Most people who were born in Sweden are Swedish and speak Swedish.

We may fairly claim that this is a statement of fact and that the exceptions allowed by the wording, 'most people', will not be very numerous: some thousands of Lapps in northern Sweden are Swedish citizens but have their own language, and of course a child may be born in a foreign embassy in Stockholm without becoming Swedish or learning Swedish. We note in passing that it is rather neat that the names of country, citizenship, and language should all be linked with a common root. Let us now re-arrange this proposition to make a new one:

2 Most people who speak Swedish are Swedish and were born in Sweden.

Here we realise at once that the qualification 'most' is more obviously necessary: Minnesota and Finland spring to mind. There are a million Swedish speakers in North America, most of them born there and holding United States or Canadian passports. There are half a million Swedish speakers who were born in Finland and who are Finnish citizens. For all these people, the links between the names for country, nation, and language become obviously less relevant, and in fact the 'nation' meaning of *Swedish* splits into two, genetic and political: 'of Swedish background' and 'owing allegiance to Sweden'. Even so, the second proposition is also a statement of fact, and we need

scarcely consider other exceptions such as university students in Germany or Britain who learn to speak Swedish as part of their studies.

Now, what has all this to do with the use of English? The answer is twofold. First, as with 'Swedish', the word 'English' is the name both of a language and of a nationality and is linked with the name of a country, England; but there is the important difference that, since England is not a political entity (as a part of Great Britain or the United Kingdom), 'English' corresponds only to the genetic half of the two national meanings of 'Swedish'. Secondly, if in propositions 1 and 2 we replace 'Sweden' and 'Swedish' by 'England' and 'English', we find that they are no longer both true. The first proposition remains true enough, of course, but the second is now wildly out: most people who speak English are *not* English and were *not* born in England. Not only has the 'national' sense of 'English' no official political meaning: the 'language' sense of 'English' (importantly, as we shall see) has no necessary link with the genetic sense either.

Proposition 1 can be framed and found valid for the names of many countries, peoples, and languages. 'If he is French, he speaks French'—and we may go on doing this in turn with 'German', 'Swedish', 'Spanish', and many others. But such a correspondence does not always hold, and an attempt to follow through with this experiment for a few minutes will help us on the road to getting rid of the identification of nation and language which causes a good deal of trouble in the world. One soon comes up against examples like 'If he is Swiss, he speaks—?', 'If he is Welsh, he speaks—?', 'If he is Belgian, he speaks—?', 'If he is Canadian, he speaks—?'.

So far as 'English' is concerned, therefore, the truth of proposition 1 simply points to one happy fact for the people of England which is by no means paralleled in all countries:

one way in which the national life of England is not complicated as it is in many places. But the truth of proposition 1 is unfortunate to the extent that we are inclined to identify the name of our language with the name of one of the races using it: to think of English as the private property of the English. In other words, we are in danger of taking the second proposition as a corollary of the first.

With the names of many languages and peoples, this order is sound enough. There are probably not a great many exceptions to the generalisation 'If he speaks Welsh, he is Welsh'—though, as we should have noted already, there would be many exceptions indeed if we were to say 'If he is Welsh, he speaks Welsh'. On the other hand, if we try proposition 2 with French, we see that this would be a very risky deduction, since parts of Switzerland, Belgium, Canada, and other countries are French-speaking without owing national allegiance to France. And of course, many of us in Britain and America speak French without being French. A few interesting and highly informative minutes with a good encyclopedia are all that is necessary to fit us for arguing the probability or improbability of proposition 2 in relation to such languages as German, Finnish, Irish, Portuguese. For example, we may find that 'If he speaks *Hausa*, he is a *Nigerian* or a *Sudanese*'—and this of course would be excluding numerically smaller possibilities such as 'anthropologist' or 'former colonial civil servant'.

The desire to use language as a sign of national identity is a very natural one, and in consequence language has played a prominent part in national movements. Men have often felt the need to cultivate a given language to show that they are distinct from another race whose hegemony they resent. At the time when the United States split off from Britain, for example, there were proposals that independence should be linguistically acknowledged by the use of a different language from that of Britain. There was even

one proposal that Americans should adopt Hebrew. Others, again, favoured the adoption of Greek, though, as one man put it, things would certainly be simpler for Americans if they stuck to English and made the British learn Greek. In the end, as everyone knows, the two countries adopted the eminently practical and satisfactory solution of carrying on with the same language as before. For nearly two hundred years now, they have shown the world that political independence and national identity can be complete without sacrificing the enormous mutual advantages of what has remained in all but some trivial details a common language.

More recently, we have seen in Ireland, a thorough-going attempt to make *linguistic* independence an emblem of political independence. In Czechoslovakia during the years before the Second World War, the fact of linguistic identity between residents of Sudetenland and Germany contributed powerfully to the events leading up to Hitler's annexation of the area. Since 1945, Israel, Norway and Yugoslavia are among the countries witnessing far-reaching developments in establishing a language which can identify the nation. At the same time, Afrikaans and English have continued to emphasise the division between races in South Africa, and in several parts of the Indian subcontinent there have been serious troubles arising from attempts to establish political entities where there are linguistic entities. Language riots in Louvain caused the fall of the Belgian Government in February 1968. Language again is an important factor in the problems which confront Italy in the German-speaking South Tyrol. Like religion, language is clearly a powerful unifying—and dividing—force.

As we have seen, however, there is nothing about language as such that makes linguistic identity conterminous with national identity. 'If he speaks French, he is by no means necessarily French.' French is not the private pro-

perty of Frenchmen, and still less is English the private property of Englishmen.

This should be obvious when one reflects that English is the mother-tongue in Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and many other areas of the world. Yet many of us still half-consciously feel that when anyone other than an Englishman uses English, we have a special right to criticise his usage because he has been privileged to handle something which is in the Englishman's gift. We feel that he must necessarily look to us for a 'standard', because it is 'our' language. Quite frequently, in fact, such feelings are not merely half-conscious: they may be given full expression. Not long ago, an Englishman ended a letter to the press with the following uncompromising sentence:

> If other nations wish to borrow or adopt our language, it is up to them, but let it be understood that the language remains fundamentally ours. (*Daily Telegraph*, 4 July 1955.)

It is high time that such narrowly parochial and naïve notions about English were firmly scotched. They do not even remotely correspond to linguistic realities and they can do nothing but harm to the cause of human relationships and international harmony. There is no copyright in the use of English and we cannot demand of users in other countries that they pay royalties of obeisance as though the language carried a British patent.

It is unreasonable to regard any language as the property of a particular nation, and with no language is it more unreasonable than with English. This is not to say that English is used by a greater number of speakers than any other language: it is easily outstripped in this respect by Chinese. But it is the most *international* of languages. A Dane and a Dutchman meeting casually in Rome will almost

automatically find themselves conversing in English. The crew of a Russian airliner approaching Cairo will use English to ask for landing instructions. Malayan lecturers use it as the medium of instruction when addressing their Malayan students in Kuala Lumpur.

Such examples are striking and significant because they show that the use of English in the world has no immediate connexion with the economic or political supremacy—past or present—of an English-speaking country. To people in Africa or Pakistan or Chile, English is the obvious foreign language to master, not merely because it is the native language in Great Britain and the United States, but because it provides the readiest access to the cream of world scholarship and to the bulk of world trade. It is understood more widely than any other language.

These points are made crystal-clear in the British Council's Annual Report for 1960-61:

> It has been customary to speak of teaching English as a foreign language, often merely to emphasise that the process is by no means the same as teaching it to those who already have it as their mother tongue. More recently, the term English as a second language has been employed to describe English taught or learnt for practical and necessary uses of communication—whether to serve as the language of instruction in education, for specialised studies, or as a *lingua franca* among those to whom English is an acquired tongue. The distinction is important: for example, English in France or Germany is still largely learnt for reasons comparable to those for learning French or German in Britain—as a foreign language, as a humane discipline and as an introduction to a foreign culture. In many countries, however, the place of English in education may be more important, and indeed more fundamentally necessary, because it is either the medium of education itself or a necessary link with resources beyond the borders of the country where it is learnt. When it is used

thus as a second language English is not necessarily the vehicle of distinctively British or American cultural values; it may well be the means of expressing those of the country where it has been adopted. The educational use of English as a second language today varies from the level of the university to that of the primary school; its social or economic functions range from the needs of internal administration to those of external trade.

In June 1965, the United States Government issued a policy statement showing a striking similarity of view and commitment:

> English has become one of the most important world languages. The rapidly growing interest in English cuts across political and ideological lines because of the convenience of a *lingua franca* increasingly used as a second language in important areas of the world. Demands for help in learning English are, therefore, widespread. The United States ought to respond to these demands. English is a key which opens doors to scientific and technical knowledge indispensable to the economic and political development of vast areas of the world. An increase in the knowledge of English can contribute directly to greater understanding among nations. It can also be the means of assuring access to a treasure house of man's knowledge about himself—about his political experiments, his philosophies, and his inner human needs.

(The statement is reprinted here from the Spring 1966 issue of the U.S. Government publication, *International Education and Cultural Exchange.*)

The importance and the international status of English today come home to us particularly clearly when we compare the use of English in Shakespeare's time. In 1600, 'He speaks English' and 'He is English' were very close to being interdependent statements: *if* the one, *then* the other. English was almost unknown outside the British Isles—and

by no means universally spoken within the British Isles, as Richard Mulcaster tells us in 1582: 'our English tung is of small reatch, it stretcheth no further than this Iland of ours, naie not there over all'. The number of English speakers in the world when Shakespeare was writing has been estimated at five million. The increase during the intervening years to the present is quite phenomenal. There are now something like 250 million people for whom English is the mother-tongue or 'first language': and this of course means, for the most part, their *only* language. If we add to this the number of people who have a working knowledge of English as a second or foreign language (many Indians, Africans, Frenchmen, Russians, and so on), we raise the total to about 350 million.

Such numbers are naturally difficult to estimate, and they must in any case embrace a wide range of competence. At one end are those with a native-like command of English, and at the other those with only a slow and painful reading-knowledge or even only a smattering of the language adequate for coping with tourists' needs. To say that one 'speaks' a language may well relate more to the latter end of the range than the former, as any of us may testify who have been asked 'Do you speak French?' Certainly, if we answer 'yes', we know full well that 'yes' would have meant something very different if the questioner had asked whether we spoke English.

The increase from 5 million to 350 million speakers has not come about because of any special merits in the language itself, but because of increases in the influence exerted by the *speakers* of English. It is to an important series of historical events that we must look in order to understand the development of English, and, although this is not a book to deal with history, we may pause to glance at one or two significant points.

Mulcaster explained the 'small reatch' of English in

1582 (the year Shakespeare married Ann Hathaway) by saying that 'our state is no Empire'. But he was writing at the beginning of the settlement of America by English speakers—the greatest single event which has given English the enormous number of users it has today. Jamestown in Virginia was settled in 1607, and the Plymouth colony in Massachusetts was founded in 1620. In addition, Mulcaster pointed out that there was no valuable learning written in English that might stimulate foreigners to learn the language. We recall that as late as 1620 Francis Bacon felt it necessary to write in Latin when he was laying the foundations of modern science in such works as the *Novum Organum Scientiarum*, with its emphasis on the need for careful observation of natural phenomena: 'Naturae enim non imperatur, nisi parendo'—'For we cannot *command* nature unless we *obey* nature.'

But Bacon's successors in the sciences wrote in English and soon made Mulcaster's remarks obsolete in this field too. Within three or four decades of Bacon's death, the Royal Society came into being, and it was in English that such foundation Fellows as Robert Boyle formulated and published fundamental theories. We are all familiar with Boyle's formulation of the law about gases; here is his less well-known definition of chemical elements, modern for all its three hundred years:

> I mean by elements certain primitive and simple, or perfectly unmingled bodies which not being made of any other bodies . . . are the ingredients of which all those called perfectly mixed bodies are immediately compounded, and into which they are ultimately resolved.

From Boyle to Newton (who died in 1727); from Newton to Joseph Priestley (who died in 1804). By this time there was a great deal of such valuable learning in English as Mulcaster had missed in his time, and in consequence—