

**VARIETIES
OF
ENGLISH**

Practice in
Advanced Uses of English

H.L.B. Moody

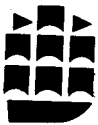
Varieties of English

Practice in
advanced uses
of English

What I do is me: for that I came

G. M. HOPKINS

H. L. B. MOODY



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Foreword

The purpose of this book is to provide a collection of material for the study and practice of the English language in educational establishments of many kinds but all at the stage somewhere between the end of 'secondary' and the beginning of 'tertiary' or 'higher' education.

As this book appears at the beginning of the eighth decade of the twentieth century, all who use it will be aware that many developments have been taking place both in the understanding of language as a characteristic product of human culture and in the processes involved in language learning. We have attempted to take full note of all significant recent developments without sacrificing the values and merits of some earlier techniques of study. Much of the ferment in the field of language teaching in recent years has been centred upon the earlier stages; but it was for example significantly recorded at a conference of teachers of English Language held in London at the end of 1967: 'Perhaps we were in danger of not giving enough training for the higher levels of language learning'.

This book, which was planned some time before the conference expressed that opinion, is an attempt to provide for that very need, and may be useful not only in the sixth forms of secondary schools, but in teacher training colleges, and in various types of introductory language courses in universities.

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Introduction

A SURVEY OF BASIC PRINCIPLES

What is English? There may at first seem little need to ask this question. All students will have experience of 'English', as a subject in the curriculum, as a series of appointments in the timetable, with either more or less happy associations. If we face the question more rigorously – What is *English*? – we can only answer that 'English' is a language. An adjective serving as a noun, it refers to the English language, that language which over some 500 years has been evolved by the inhabitants of part of that small island off the west coast of Europe known as England, working in unplanned collaboration with those who have come to it from elsewhere, and with those who have gone out from it to other parts of the world taking the language along with them. Now in fact the inhabitants of England, even including other groups which constitute the United Kingdom, are only a minority of those peoples throughout the world who depend on 'English' as their principal, or at least a very important second language.

'English', therefore, is a *language*. What do we mean by that? It is no part of the plan of this book to be theoretical, abstract, or purely analytical. We shall hope, as Wordsworth said in 1798, 'to keep our readers at all times in the company of flesh and blood'. There is no doubt an important place for the detailed study of language as such at various levels and to various depths, but this book makes no claim to compete in this field. The following brief survey, however, is necessary to indicate how all the work offered and suggested in this book does spring from, and relate to, a fundamental appreciation of the nature of language.

All human beings have developed techniques of communication by means of language: and different communities have developed their own particular species (Urdu, Arabic, Hopi, Greek, French, Chinese, English, etc.). A language fundamentally is the system of possibilities available to its users of employing

significant noises and patterns of noises produced by the organs of speech (the lungs, vocal chords, hard and soft palate, tongue, teeth, lips, nose and so on). Derived from the spoken forms of language, in many cases there are more permanent systems of written or printed signs which to varying extents record, and are based upon, the spoken forms. These sounds or signs, and the combinations of them, by a long process of tradition and learning, are used to refer to the objects, persons, ideas, and their relationships, which concern all human beings in the processes of conducting their lives both individual and collective. More generally, the use of language, we say, is to facilitate communications, to promote understanding between language-originator and language-recipient, and to enable useful, appropriate, and efficient action to take place.

We all know how long it takes to learn any language well – whether our own native language or that of another community. This is not because human beings are naturally ‘slow of study’ so much as because every language is an instrument of considerable intricacy and precision; indeed, in view of this, it is almost miraculous that, by the time an average child is about six years old, he has to a certain extent perfected the use of an extremely complicated system of communication symbols. A language, we see on further examination, is not just a haphazard stream of symbols; it is essentially systematic: that is to say, it operates according to series of recognisable laws and customs; beyond that, even, it can be seen as a system of systems, and those can conveniently be described at the following levels:

- 1 The sounds used in speaking (phonology)
- 2 The individual ‘words’ (lexis)
- 3 Significant variations in the form of words (e.g. cat/cats, die/died) (morphology)
- 4 The combination of words into significant patterns (syntax)
- 5 The combination of patterns (e.g. sentences) into longer utterance (cohesion)
- 6 The association of words and word patterns with ‘meaning’ (semantics)

These constitute the basic elements of a language. But even when we have learned to operate the ‘central core’ we realise that this is by no means all that is necessary to be in full ‘possession’ of a language. Every language has developed means for the differentiation of distinct functions and occasions, and our knowledge of a language is incomplete until we can recognise, interpret and *originate* all the more subtle and complex signals it permits,

in relation to the varying needs of our personal, social, political and professional involvements. In this connection, students of language now recognise such language variations, or 'sub-languages', as:

- Dialect: specialised selections of words and forms of expression, distinctive of social or geographical groups
- Register: 'dialects' associated with particular functions or professions (e.g. journalism, science, religion)
- Collocation: the tendency of words to occur in regular and consistent associations (e.g. 'happy' with 'event' in relation to the birth of a child: 'satisfaction' with 'customers', in relation to shop-keeping, etc.)
- Style: the possibility of variations upon the normal forms of language for special purposes of emphasis, persuasion, emotional effect, etc.

A further essential stage in the learning of a language is to discover how to use it as a method of building up sequences of organised and logical thought. To perform these activities efficiently, learners need to be aware also of how processes of 'thinking' can be perverted or destroyed by various kinds of abuse and misuse of language, as for example attaching greater precision to particular words than they normally bear, allowing the meaning of words to change imperceptibly in the course of an argument (e.g. in how many different senses has the word 'we' been employed in this introduction up to this point?), or permitting the contrastive nature of language (black, white: good, bad) to oversimplify complex problems.

A certain proportion of our language usage is, and ought to be, spontaneous and unconscious, involving rapid automatic responses to familiar kinds of stimuli; and, while this is particularly true in the case of a 'mother tongue', it is the aim of second- or foreign-language teaching to assist the development of the same facility in any other language that is being learned. On the other hand, there is also a very important additional stage in the mastery of a language, especially for people who occupy the roles in a community associated with the idea of being 'educated': that is, the deliberate and thoughtful use of the language in the pursuit of certain public aims and purposes. On these occasions, the user of the language is concerned with such things as the precise formulation of objectives, the selection of material and forms of expression, all the skills of explanation and persuasion, which have been studied since the time of the

ancient Greeks under the title of rhetoric. Language at this stage is no longer a set of conditioned reflexes, of behavioural responses to 'stimuli': it partakes rather of the nature of 'art', the skilful manipulation and adaptation of a means of expression to particular and highly specific ends.

We can now define the purpose of this book as being to facilitate the systematic study and employment of the English language in some of its principal varieties, and for some of the principal purposes for which it is liable to be used by any educated person. It is, of course, perfectly feasible to plan a book concentrating on any of the single, separable 'styles' of English (e.g. commercial, scientific, legal, even military), and a number of books have in fact been produced on such lines. In an institution of higher education, however, we suppose that the aim should be to give not just one, or a few, kinds of specialised training, but, in the best traditions of 'liberal education', a training of the 'general powers' of the mind, an insight into the connections and relations between various forms of specialised knowledge, and a facility in recognising and employing the full range of expression which language permits.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The book is divided into two parts:

Part I *Passages for interpretation and analysis.*

Part II *Passages for comparison.*

On the whole students should work through Part I, before going on to a Part II.

PART I

This consists of twelve sections of five passages each. The general nature of each section is indicated by its title and briefly discussed in a short introductory note. No assumption should be made that all the five passages in a section are closely comparable. While there are means available nowadays for making a more logical, systematic analysis of language, it would be unrealistic to suppose that all language falls clearly into distinct and separate categories. Almost any extended utterance which is produced in response to the exigencies of particular situations will tend to shift from one type of language activity to another quite unpredictably. Nevertheless, while embodying incidental differences, each of the sections of Part I seeks to illustrate one of the principle functions or varieties of language. Sections 1-6 are more concerned with 'functions', Section 7-12 with 'varieties'.

Each passage is provided with study questions, divided into two groups, A and B. Group A ('Interpretation') in each case is concerned with the 'message', and helps to draw attention to all aspects of what the writer has sought to communicate. This will at the most basic level be 'factual', but must also concern relationships, qualifications, arguments, attitudes, allusions, and so on. Group B ('Analysis') is more concerned with recognition and appreciation of the *means used* to convey the message, and will invite consideration of language in accordance with modern methods of analysis, while drawing upon earlier methods of appreciation where these are appropriate. The kind of analysis we aim to develop is one which is comprehensive and flexible enough to deal with *any form of language utterance*, including of course any piece of literature, but embracing also such things as daily journalism, advertisement copy-writing, government

decrees, political speeches, ordinary conversation, and scientific papers.

It seems logical that Group A questions should be considered before Group B. It was one of the old vices of literary studies to encourage 'appreciation' of texts which had not always been clearly, or in detail, understood; and oddly this tendency may seem to be condoned by some modern schools of language analysis which, at certain levels, give prime place to 'structure' and seem to imply that 'meaning' is of less consequence. This of course would be inappropriate in a work which is intended to be above all educational.

A point of incidental interest is that, while all the passages in Part I have been selected primarily to illustrate various aspects of language, many of them are quite notable pieces of writing in their own right and will give access to a wide range of topics, problems and authors of general interest.

At the end of each of the twelve sections will be found a further set of questions, suggestions and exercises, Group C, concerned with 'Production'. Study of a language in any meaningful sense, must surely imply not only *recognition* of various features, but the ability to *use* the language oneself. *Using a language* has the twofold commitment of being able [a] to receive any messages it may be used to transmit, accurately and in whatever degree of complexity they may involve, and [b] to transmit messages of any degree of complexity and in such forms of language as are socially acceptable. Group C has been devised so that students may have plenty of opportunities for active writing of many kinds, linked quite closely with the various topics of Part I.

PART II

Whereas Part I is organised according to systems, Part II is more empirical. In the early stages of any study it is helpful to be shown the principal elements, the main outlines, the chief possibilities. If the study is one which is to have any relevance to the encounters of actual life, it must at a certain stage allow the student to fare forward without props or guide-lines, taking on and evaluating whatever comes his way. Although Part II contains a number of passages of poetry as well as prose, all these exercises can be satisfactorily attempted with the help of a knowledge of the resources of language examined in Part I.

FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF INTERPRETATION, ANALYSIS AND PRACTICAL PRODUCTION

INTERPRETATION

Advanced students will be inclined to suppose that they know well enough 'how to read', but there is plenty of evidence to show that even advanced students often fail to 'read' with adequate efficiency, whether with regard to 'comprehension' or to 'speed'.

Words At the word level it is of great importance to ascertain the meaning referred to by particular words, in relation to the particular context. Most words in a language, as any good dictionary makes clear, are capable of being used in many different senses, and it is essential to recognise the appropriate one as soon as possible. It is well to remember the saying 'There are no synonyms', as each writer in the course of an extended discourse tends to invest even familiar words with additional layers of meaning from his own personal thoughts and interests. Consider for example what happens to the word 'style' in the following extract:

Finally, there should grow the most austere of all mental qualities; I mean the sense for style. It is an aesthetic sense, based on administration for the direct attainment of a foreseen end, simply and without waste. Style in art, style in literature, style in science, style in logic, style in practical execution have fundamentally the same aesthetic qualities, namely, attainment and restraint. . . . Style, in its finest sense, is the last acquirement of the educated mind; it is also the most useful. It pervades the whole being. The administrator with a sense of style hates waste; the engineer with a sense for style economises his material; the artisan with a sense for style prefers good work. Style is the ultimate morality of mind.

from *The Aims of Education*, A. N. WHITEHEAD

Starting out with the idea that 'style' is in the first place something to do with the senses, a matter of aesthetics, the author develops a train of thought which leaves us with the perception of 'style' connected with a great diversity of activities ending up as a concept of 'morality'.

Grammar Beyond the recognition of words individually, it is equally important to follow up faithfully the syntactic or

grammatical structure which the writer has employed to embody his 'thought'. When reading 'easy' material, we are hardly conscious of its 'grammar' as it seems entirely natural. However, if a passage is difficult, or not immediately comprehensible, it is essential to trace out the grammatical structure which alone can guide us towards the intended meaning. For example, in any difficult sentence, it is essential to discover the Subject-Predicate nucleus, which helps us to distinguish firstly the topic under consideration and secondly what is being said about it. When we are sure of the basic aim of a sentence, we can then go on to observe the kind of relationship among the subordinate parts, whether in phrase groups

(e.g. 'The President of the World Bank's new leather briefcase')

or in the clause structure

(e.g. 'If these conditions are fulfilled, and provided that financial resources prove to be adequate, some progress may be expected').

While taking note of the structure of complex sentences, it is also important to give due weight to the many significant qualifications which may be introduced by other aspects of the language. In the previous example, we would note the difference of meaning between 'some progress' and 'progress', and between 'may be expected' and 'is expected' or 'can be expected'. Some of the most fundamental distinctions in language are of course registered by some of the most apparently commonplace words, such as *can/could*, *ought/must*, *is/seems*, *thinks/knows*, etc. We have probably all seen examples of the way in which brief quotations, e.g. in newspaper headlines, by suppressing the full grammatical structure of a thought, can often entirely misrepresent it.

Cohesion Apart from correctly interpreting the signals of meaning in individual sentences, it is important to observe the way in which sentences are organised into connected discourses. We need to detect for example what kind of relationship exists among the sentences, e.g. whether they illustrate a general statement, whether they follow a line of narrative or demonstration, whether they are discussing the 'pros and cons' of a topic, whether they set out to prove a particular conclusion. We have to pay particular attention to the various kinds of 'connective words', such as *next*, *also*, *but*, *nevertheless*, *or*, *whereas*, *provided that*, *unless*, and so on, but we shall also remember that many connective features do not appear at the beginnings of sentences or clauses. Furthermore we must be aware that the relationship between sen-