

AMERICAN  
ENGLISH  
IN ITS  
CULTURAL  
SETTING

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*Donald J.*

*Lloyd*

AND

*Harry R.*

*Warfel*

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FIRST EDITION

## ★ PREFACE ★

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THIS IS A BOOK for all those who have tangled with the English language in school or out and have come away bruised. It is a book for anyone who needs to understand English and how it works in American society. It is a book for the slow, halting reader or for the good reader who wants to be better. It is a book for the unwilling, inarticulate writer or for the competent writer who wants to be a stylist. It is a comprehensive treatment of English speech and writing in terms of modern studies of language, a display of our language in terms of the various uses we make of it, and a practical, orderly procedure for moving to a command of English in speech or in writing to serve any need of expression. It is, in short, the intelligent person's guide to his native tongue.

The twentieth century has brought us much knowledge about language in general and about English in particular that has shattered centuries-long traditions and turned a brilliant new light on all the processes of language and language-learning. Research findings have tumbled over one another as individual scholars and teams of scholars have refined their methods into analytical tools of unimagined precision, and turned a cold scientific scrutiny on that mystery of the ages—the means by which men and women in human societies communicate with each other. We could not list here in any reasonable space the colleges and universities—let alone the individual scholars—engaged in bringing this new knowledge into being. At Michigan, Indiana, and Cornell, teams of investigators work together, and in the city of Washington alone the Institute of Languages and Linguistics of Georgetown University, the American Language Center of American University, and the School of Language and Linguistics of the Foreign Service Institute of the Department of State have made massive advances in our understanding of language and of English. The support of this work has been

among the finer accomplishments of the great foundations through grants to both individuals and institutions; and the American Council of Learned Societies must be honored for seeing, in the days before our entry into World War II, the coming need for language experts and for drawing them together in projects which developed into the great language and area programs of the Army Specialized Training Programs. Today, though badly starved for funds, the ACLS continues to press the study of language and of language teaching in cooperation with colleges and universities, individual scholars, and the Department of State.

Linguistic knowledge has developed so rapidly that it remains almost unknown outside the company of the experts; though it has begun to affect second-language teaching to some extent, it has scarcely touched the teaching of English. Yet it has its meaning for us, too, who use English as natives and wish to move to an easy and effective command of our native tongue in speech and writing as efficiently as possible. The authors of this book are not linguistic scientists and do not pretend to be; our object has been to master the findings of the specialists and apply them to the problems of reading and writing English. We feel that it is the right of every American citizen to know in detail what his language is and how it works; we feel that it is his right to handle the language for all his purposes cleanly and efficiently in the expression of what he has to say.

In this book we have drawn together all the knowledge about English which seems to us to bear on the learner's problems; we have shaken the mass of research results through the teacher's grid and excluded everything, no matter how interesting, that does not seem to us to bear on those problems. The result is a comprehensive display of English in relation to the society that uses it, in relation to language learning, and in relation to the individual whose force in society and whose very sense of well-being is tied to his understanding of English and the effectiveness of his reading and writing. We have tried to bring the commonplaces of advanced study of language within the range of any person with the equivalent of a high-school education, and offer a step-by-step procedure by which he can move from where he is to the limit of his native ability.

This book may be used by any reader working by himself. It may be used in the freshman composition class, where its materials have been worked out and tested in actual teaching over a number

of years. It may be used in advanced classes for teacher-training candidates and by working teachers who wish to bring their approach to the language into line with the best modern knowledge, since the display of the language is thorough enough to serve any normal needs. It may also be used by any person who has to deal with language as part of his work—the doctor, the lawyer, the psychologist, the business writer, and even the creative writer who needs to be briefed on the shape and functioning of this instrument. It is a translation from the jargon of the specialists into standard written English—a humane introduction to that most human of all activities, human language: American English in its cultural setting. We have tried to make sure that the reader will reach the end of the book with a concept of language acceptable to the best modern students of language, and be able to proceed by orderly, rewarding steps to a control of reading and writing and to a personal distinctive style of his own.

DONALD J. LLOYD

*Wayne University*

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*University of Florida*

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## *First Words*

**L**ANGUAGE IS THE MEANS by which men and women reach searching fingers toward one another, understand one another, ward one another off. It is the prime vehicle of our conduct as members of a human society; it is the basis of our writing and the instrument of our literature. Each person who hopes to apply his full powers to his relations with other people in business or professional life must look to his language and to his reading and writing. These are the means by which he takes in the knowledge on which he builds his career and makes that knowledge effective in his work.

Effective command of the English language is the use of speaking and writing with conscious control of their effect on the people we address, and the use of our ears and eyes to bring into our minds the full intention of people who address us. In these processes language should be a channel through which messages flow with the least friction and the most significance. The processes are easy and within the capacity of any normal person; reading and writing are not mysteries revealed only to the bookworm and the genius. Anybody can learn to read and write well, once he understands the working of his native speech.



In the pages to follow we offer the story of our language, a story every American is entitled to as part of his birthright. In Part I we tell how and when the English language came to America and spread to every corner of the continent, where it came from, and what it was like when it came. We describe its part in the boom that has gripped Western European civilization since the discovery of America. We relate English to the persons and communities which use it. We distinguish speaking as a creative act from speech, its product, and the process of writing from what is written. Most books about language are books about words, but this is a book about the patterns and structures that give words their meanings. Part II is an orderly display of the language system, a step-by-step exposure of the way it works in use. This display lifts the habit-patterns by which we speak and write to the level of consciousness so that we can examine them, and it provides exercises by which the reader can drill them and make them available for conscious control. Part III displays our vocabulary in terms of the sets and classes we sort words into. Part IV dissects the sound-signaling mechanisms of our speech; Part V describes the means by which we translate the speech sounds that die on the empty air into the writing that lives on paper. Parts II and IV are the core of the book on which all the rest depends; Parts III and V spell out their meaning in detail.

In the final section of the book, Part VI, the arts of reading and writing which constitute literacy are developed step by step for practical use. The pattern approach to the display of the language is here extended to the use of the eye in reading and of the hand in writing, to vocabulary building, to the problems of usage. We describe the nature and use of the dictionary—the reader's guide and the writer's friend. We treat the use of language in business where efficiency and accomplishment hinge on effective communication. We treat the use of language in the literary world as the base for a form of art, and sketch an approach to literature grounded in the structure of our language. In the final chapter, building on all that has gone before, we offer a guide to a personal writing style, distinctive, individual, and effectual.

This book is meant to be read for delight and understanding. We recommend taking it lightly. The reader should aim at a general comprehension of the entire matter which he can apply to his own reading and writing. The fruit of his grasp of this story of the