to know exactly what is being said in a scientific book or journal, to comprehend accurately the text, the whole text and nothing but the text, whether the text is a piece of literature, a legal document, a medical journal or, for that matter, a class reader.

A third type is *practical understanding*. This enables the reader to let the text guide his hands. It is important for the garage proprietor who holds the agency for a British or American make of car and who must understand the very detailed and technical instructions which are issued by the makers. It is equally important for the boy who reads a simple pamphlet on the care of his bicycle.

It must not be thought that these three types of understanding are entirely separate from one another. It is convenient to consider them separately, but they are in fact different applications of the same ability—the ability to understand what one reads.

This ability does not develop fully until maturity; but it is the teacher's task to help it to develop by the way he conducts his reading lessons. If he regards the reading lesson as a soft option and encourages his pupils so to regard it; if there is no more than casual reading with a few factual questions; or if reading is confused with speech training or grammar: then pupils will never be able to read other than superficially and a great deal of valuable time will have been wasted.

How then does a teacher train his class to understand what they read according to the ways described above? He trains his class by asking them carefully prepared questions on what they have been reading; by demonstrations; and sometimes by drawings and diagrams. This can best be illustrated by describing two specimen reading lessons in detail.

[*To be concluded*

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On Teaching and 'Un-Teaching'

H. V. GEORGE

A CONSPICUOUS feature of courses and teaching is the assumption that only correct forms are being established, and that the pupils are learning only when formal exposition is in progress. When we watch *all* the English of a lesson, and assume that the pupils may be learning *all* the time, the pupils' mistakes cease to be inexplicable, and at once appear to be—as in logic they must be—as much a consequence of the teaching as the correct forms are. In fact, every lesson consists of varying proportions of the following: imprinting correct English; imprinting nothing; imprinting incorrect English; cancelling previous imprinting of incorrect English; and cancelling previous imprinting of correct English. In addition, looking to the future, each lesson may help or invalidate later teaching. Of these features, perhaps the most interesting to the course designer are the cancellation of previous imprinting of correct English and the invalidation of subsequent teaching, for these are his particular pitfalls. A good name for them is 'un-teaching'.

It must be admitted that un-teaching is not the prerogative of people who do not know English well, nor of the proponents of bad methods. I will give some examples.

Example 1. A good teacher speaking good English had gone through a story with a not too good class. She wrote in a column on the blackboard about a dozen significant nouns from the story and said, 'Look at these; let us go over them together; in a minute I shall cover the board and ask you to write in your books as many as you can remember'. The words had been well chosen, and most of the children recollected most of the words. So far, so good; in fact, excellent. Yet un-teaching was already under way, for some of the nouns were plural and some singular. Next, the teacher uncovered the board and, after reviewing what had been done, wrote an adjective in front of each noun in her column, and gave the same instructions again. Each adjective matched its noun, and indeed had been associated with that noun in the story. However, the whole of the lesson after this was, in a very important respect, un-teaching. A plural noun—e.g. *birds, flowers*—may stand alone, and it may be preceded by an adjective—*joyful birds, lovely flowers*; but a singular noun—e.g. *princess, house*—cannot stand alone except as a dictionary item, and it cannot be preceded by an adjective unless both are preceded by an article—*a beautiful princess, a big house.* The teacher who paralleled *lovely flowers* and *big house* was un-teaching article usage; her lesson was plainly, 'Do not put an article before plural countable nouns, and *do not* put an article before singular countable nouns'.

The reader will probably wish to say that when we teach *to school* we are equally un-teaching. Indeed we are; and soon obtain our just return in *to classroom, to hall*, and so on. We can risk *to school* only when standard usage is very firmly imprinted: till then, it is much more sensible to say *to our school.*

Example 2. Some verbs have irregular Simple Past forms. Here are some sentences from an exercise for practising them (the

instruction is, 'Read the following in Past Tense', and the instruction does not exactly *teach* article usage!):

I break a cup.
Birds fly high.
He tears his coat.
I choose a book.

The sentence *I broke a cup* is fully comprehensible: one person broke, on one occasion, one cup. The originating sentence is so strange as hardly to be possible: *I break* (habit? demonstration?) *a* (one? the same one?) *cup*.

The sentence *Birds fly high* has to be accepted at least as 'Exercise-English'; but what can be the meaning of the converted sentence *Birds flew high*? If we read the first sentence as *Birds* (indefinite plural, *any* birds) *fly* (Simple Present Neutral, a general statement), then from the converted sentence we must conclude that the general statement was once valid, but no longer is!

Of course, the author has looked only at one part of his sentence, the verb, and assumed that he was teaching verb-forms only. Nevertheless, the one acceptable present-tense sentence is *I break cups* (habit, several cups, one or more on each occasion), and presenting the sentence *I break a cup* is un-teaching. Similarly, the only acceptable past-tense sentence is *The birds flew high* (definite birds at a definite time), and presenting the sentence without the definite article is un-teaching.

Example 3. The reader may speculate on the un-teaching implicit in the following (elementary) exercise in the 3rd person ending of the Simple Present. The instruction is, 'Read quickly in the singular'.

They *build* houses that *cost* a lot of money.
Animals *find* shelter when it rains.
Birds *build* their nests in the summer.

In the first sentence, we have to change *cost* to *costs* and *build* to *builds*; *build* requires the change of *they* to *he* and *costs* imposes the change of the plural *houses* to the singular *house*. Let us suppose a student advanced enough to realize that he has now to insert *a* before the singular *house*. We have:

He builds a house that costs a lot of money.

This, however, is far from being an elementary sentence. It is indeed quite a sophisticated way of saying,

The type of house he builds is expensive,

he being a contractor or regular builder of houses. For a learner at the stage of working through an elementary exercise on the 3rd person singular *s*, *a house* ought always to have the more usual meaning, *one individual from the class of objects named*

'*house*'. If the building of a house requires considerable time, the progressive form would be required, to give

He is building a house,

That, in fact, is the only sentence with these elements which a beginner should see in print, and at that level any other sentence is un-teaching; yet we have seen it would require a very attentive and moderately advanced student to arrive at this from the original, and the nominal purpose of the exercise would have had to be abandoned. On this level of thoughtfulness, the same student would probably arrive at *that costs a lot of money* for the second clause, for he would know that we do not generally use the progressive form of *cost* when we indicate prices, and he would want to reject a sentence such as *It is costing five shillings*. However, we would probably decide for the progressive form here too, to represent the accumulation of expense: *He's building a house that's costing a lot of money.*

The above sentence offers more complications than most, but transformation of one part of a sentence frequently results in a change of meaning which is, more often than not, unnoticed and uncontrolled. The sentence beginning *Animals find . . .* and its transformation *An animal finds* are exceptional in that the transformation leaves the meaning entirely unaltered. In either case, the level of linguistic awareness involved in the article usage when the sentences are transformed is far beyond the level presupposed in an exercise in adding *s* to the stem to make the 3rd person Simple Present form. We know that, over some part of Europe and the greater part of the Middle East and Asia, students do these exercises and teachers accept them with no attention except to the specified purpose, so that the students are drilled in: *He builds house that costs . . ., Animal finds . . ., Bird builds its nest . . ., etc.* Quite possibly some readers from these areas will feel that the author of this article is an over-particular person requiring an impossible standard. This is not so. The main cause of concern is not the faulty article usage itself, but the enormous waste of time and the consequent frustration among learners; for it almost goes without saying that in the same course we shall find a most earnest teaching of article usage. We have to see the faulty article usage, not just as what it is, but as the result of a frustrating, time-wasting process of careful imprinting and careless cancellation.

All the examples so far have come from the work of teachers and writers whose own knowledge of English is not in question. When relatively unskilled teachers are at work, and we hear within seconds of each other the sentences *If that tree falls on the road . . .* and *If that tree is falling on the road . . .* we realize at once that something is wrong. When in the first book of an English course we have the sentences *I stand near the blackboard,*

I sit on my chair, etc., and then in the following week's lessons *I am standing*, *I am sitting*, etc. we must realize that the course designer is no less responsible for confusion than the teacher whose English is uncertain. In one popular course the Past Progressive is explained in these terms: 'an action was going on, or continuing, at a time when something else happened'. The examples include a sentence denoting habitual action (*He was always doing that*), a reported Present Progressive (*I told you I was going*), and a sentence calculated to remove any distinction between Simple Past and Past Progressive (*If A was doing something B did the same*).

It seems to the writer that the very poor return for a large number of hours of school English in many parts of the world is understandable only in terms of un-teaching. Perhaps by being conscious of the process, course designers and trainers of teachers might be able to remedy a certain amount of it. Certainly many courses could be pruned of low frequency items (the occurrence of Past Progressive to represent a habit is extremely rare), there could be greater care to give adequate separation of learning items likely to be confused, and there could be a greater quantity of specific practice material carefully checked for un-teaching characteristics.

Spelling Rules

W. FRIEDERICH

IT IS GENERALLY believed that English spelling and pronunciation do not correspond. It is said that the pronunciation of a word cannot be inferred from its spelling, and vice versa that the spelling of a word cannot be deduced from its pronunciation. In this general form such statements are untrue. It is, of course, true that many spellings are arbitrary, but even in these there are regular parallels between what is said and what is written. A large number of English words (nouns, adjectives, verbs) are subject to changes of form, and it can be definitely said that general rules can be based on these changes. Since spelling mistakes frequently occur in connection with these morphological changes, it is useful to state such rules fully and clearly. Another frequent source of mistakes has to do with the parallelism of certain prefixes and suffixes. Here again it is desirable to state the facts.

It will be seen, then, that English spelling is less arbitrary than it is assumed to be.

1. MUTE *e* AT THE END OF WORDS:

At the end of a word so-called mute *e* is dropped before an ending that begins with a vowel sound; it is retained before an ending that begins with a consonant sound: hate+ed=hated, polite+est=politest, live+ing=living, dyed (to dye), hoed (to hoe), continuing, ablest (able), user, bony (bone), bluish, likable, excitable, valuable.[1] But: hate—hateful, excite—excitement, awe—awesome, likely, changeling, rueful, atonement, solely.

Exceptions:

(a) *e* after *c* (pronounced /s/) and g (pronounced /dʒ/) is kept before *a* and *o*: change—changeable, manageable, courageous, noticeable.

(b) *e* is retained in certain words which might otherwise be confused with others: sing—singing, singe—singeing; die—dying, dye—dyeing; lineage (descent)—linage (rate of lines).

(c) *oe* or *ue* retained before *-ing* and *-y*: canoe—canoeing, hoe—hoeing, shoe—shoeing, tiptoe—tiptoeing, glue—gluey, blue—bluey.

(d) *e* is dropped in the following words: due—duly, true—truly, whole—wholly, awe—awful, nine—ninth, argue—argument.

(e) *e* is retained in the following words: mile—mileage, to queue—queueing, acre—acreage, age—ageing, eye—eyeing (U.S. aging, eying).

2. THE TREATMENT OF *y*:

(A) After vowel letters *y* remains unchanged no matter whether the following ending begins with a vowel sound or a consonant sound: play—plays, playing, played, player, playable; destroy—destroying, destroyed, destroyer; joy—joyful, joyous; gay—gayness. Exceptions: gay—gaily, gaiety; lay—laid; pay—paid; say—said; day—daily. Similarly: inlaid, re-laid, repaid, gainsaid.

(B) After a consonant *y* is changed to *i* before endings which begin with a vowel or consonant sound, and the combination *y*+*s* is spelt *-ies*: deny—denied, deniable, denies; pity—pitied, pitiable, pities; noisy—noisier, noisiest; twenty—twentieth; noisily, bodily, plentiful, merciful, accompaniment.

Exceptions:

(a) *y* is usually preserved before the endings *-dom*, *-hood*, *-less*, *-like*, *-ship*: puppydom; babyhood (but nouns derived from

[1] Such forms as likeable, moveable, rateable, sizeable (instead of likable, movable, ratable, sizable) are frequently found in British newspapers.