

an "over-explanation". (The author's references to the attenuation of ability among students and comparisons with the whole of their age-group can give the latter impression.) This, however, is a negative judgment.

I should now like to correct this by concluding that the book contains an important and provocative thesis which is calmly and cogently

argued, and which suggests some major changes in New Zealand universities. Among these changes one should by no means discount the use of alternative institutions and consequent introduction of further selection for university. However, the main implication is certainly that universities examine themselves first.

English as a Second Language—

— Education For Children Whose Mother Tongue Is Not English

H. V. GEORGE

In New Zealand educational circles, and in many schools, there is growing interest in children whose mother tongue is not English. This paper attempts to review attitudes towards these children and to assess the usefulness for us of professional study of English as a second language.

A Feeling of Concern

What attitudes are current towards a pupil whose mother tongue is, say, Greek? First of all, there is concern at his disadvantage vis-à-vis his classmates whose mother tongue is English. The teacher's words make a vaguer impression, when they are intelligible; he tires and loses contact more quickly when the teacher sets out new material for comprehension; he reads more slowly and at the cost of more effort; he has greater difficulty in showing comprehension and in making his meaning clear; he is less likely to do well in class work . . . to get a School Certificate. It is natural that the first reaction of English-speaking teachers and educationists is one of concern at his obvious disadvantage.

Welcome or Unwelcome

Together with concern at the disadvantage of the child may go the wish that this disadvantage did not exist; in other words, the teacher's real wish may be for the child's linguistic and cultural integration. However natural, this attitude and this desire are, I believe, fundamentally wrong.

H. V. George is Director of the English Language Institute, Victoria University.

I would maintain, on the contrary, that this child's particular language experience is a potential asset to the country, and that the potential asset is squandered if we do not recognise it, and foster it. As for the child himself, he is fundamentally privileged, not disadvantaged.* In short, I count it a basic mistake on the part of educationist and teacher to see the disadvantages as unwanted disadvantages, to see the undoubted problems caused by the presence of this child in the New Zealand school as unwanted problems.

Linguistic Imperialism

We cannot be too conscientious about clarifying our own attitude towards the language situation in which the Greek boy or girl's mind functions. It is not always easy for an English-speaking person to realise that there is such a thing as linguistic as well as political imperialism, and that one's thinking can be coloured by the former even though one is opposed to the latter. It would be idle not to recognise that some teachers are convinced of the superiority of English over the various languages of the Pacific, possibly over all other languages. A teacher has the right to this view; but should be able to see that it is likely to accompany a negative attitude towards the

* This point will not be developed in this paper. I will simply refer here to the spending of some NZ\$100,000 per year in our secondary schools in order to give English-speaking children a pale reflection of a second, contrasting language and culture.

OCTOBER 1968

Comment (36)

23

pupils' mother tongues, that is, towards one half, at least, of the language situation in which these pupils' minds function.

However, our attitude towards these children may reflect not only a conscious or unconscious linguistic imperialism but also a general attitude towards "problems". Do we accept, welcome a problem as a challenge, or shun it as a disturbance? I wish I could be wrong in this, but there is enough casual evidence that some teachers, perhaps especially head teachers, regard problems of non-conformity as unwanted disturbances of equanimity and routine. This is, unfortunately, a relevant remark. Head teachers for whom a boy's long hair occasions a severe disturbance of mental comfort, such as we have witnessed recently, are unlikely to be genuinely sympathetic to linguistic non-conformity.

Consequence of a Negative Attitude

Language seems to be intimately involved in most people's emotional make-up; perhaps primary attitudes to life are likely to reveal themselves in attitudes towards language even when successfully covered over elsewhere. Annoyed, impatient teachers can easily make of these children discontented grown-ups. Good-natured and well intentioned, but condescending, basically uninterested teachers will tend to produce generally considered, and self-considered, sub-standard sub-groups in a community. If a teacher cannot naturally feel respect for, and interest in the child *as it is*, he would do better to allow his real indifference to prevail: recent history is full of evidence that help for "moral" reasons often results in "ungrateful" hostility to the helper.

A Positive Attitude

A positive attitude I would describe as one of respect for and interest in the child. The child's mental and emotional development is taking place through experience in two languages. A teacher who is interested only in the one side, the English one, is not really interested in the total language context in which the child is growing up. A really interested teacher is interested in both sides.

Requirements of the Teacher

One imagines the teacher who has read so far beginning to feel alarm: "Does he mean that I have to be interested in *Greek*? And I've Maori children and two Samoans and a Gujerati girl in addition! Perhaps I'm supposed to show an interest in their languages too!"

It is not necessary to "know" the languages

in the way the teacher expects the children to know English, though, of course, there is no objection if he does; and it is not a bad thing for the teacher to find out what is involved. But to understand what is going on in the child's mind, it is necessary to know the significant points of difference between the mother tongues and English. This is the first area in which professional help could reasonably be expected. The Department should be making itself able to provide teachers with this basis for work in the range of two-language contexts most encountered in New Zealand. In its least sophisticated form, this help would take the shape of what technicians call a "trouble-shooting manual": "If your child does (x), the reason may be (a). Try (q): If (q) does not remedy the trouble, the reason may be (b). Try (r) etc., etc."

Membership of a Language Community

The Greek-speaking child belongs to a Greek-speaking community. We belong to an English-speaking community. Let us see what these statements mean. Members of a language community share a pronunciation, a grammar, and a vocabulary. These are easily recognisable; and English teachers give attention to all these aspects. However, there is a fourth aspect which is not so obvious. The sounds of the language, the constructions, and the words belong to "populations" of sounds, constructions and words. Now in a human population, the features we can measure (heights, weights, etc.) show characteristic distributions in that population (heights of 5ft. 0in. to 5ft. 3in. being registered for a certain percentage of the population, heights of 5ft. 3in. to 5ft. 6in. for a certain percentage, and so on). It is the same for the populations of sounds, constructions and words. The constituent elements of these populations (the individual sounds, constructions and words) show characteristic features of distribution which may be described statistically. Unless a person maintains a distribution of sounds, constructions and words which falls within the statistical norms of occurrence of these features in the type of English he is using, he will be recognised as a non-member of the community, just as much as if his pronunciation or his grammar are a non-members' pronunciation and grammar.

The Teacher and the School English Course

Now the usual English course for English-speaking children is statistically eccentric. This

does not matter too much for the English-speaking children, for whom the school course is a small part of their total experience of the language, though it does produce a certain number of pupils who "speak like books". And it is perfectly understandable, in a way, that the course should be statistically eccentric. If the area of the English language is represented as a circle, the central part is the part known to all English-speaking children before they go to school. The school course moves from the central area towards the circumference (*tried to get — endeavoured to obtain — strove that he might acquire*), so that very many words and constructions occur in school courses with frequencies altogether higher than their average frequencies.

For a foreign learner, the very opposite statistical distortion is needed. A professional teacher of English as a foreign language trains himself in restriction of the words and constructions he uses, for his task is to establish and reinforce the central area.

We see then that an English course designed for English-speaking children puts at a disadvantage the non-English-speaking child; the New Zealand teacher is not likely to have had training in the vocabulary and structural control needed for teaching foreign children. Here are two further points at which we might refer to professional help.

The Teacher and Traditional Grammar

We have said that the teacher should have some knowledge of the mother tongues of his pupils. Without such knowledge, each piece of English from the teacher is as much a shot in the dark as any presentation of any material would be if made without reference to the pupils' previous knowledge and experience. Serious teaching has to take account whether mother-tongue concepts further, or impede, or are neutral for the development of English skills.

The practical usefulness of parallel knowledge is exemplified, paradoxically, by the grammar which is usually taught in secondary schools in New Zealand — and which lies behind the language concepts of primary school teachers. The purpose of this grammar is to make the teaching of Latin easy, which it does. For this purpose, the names of the features of the Latin language have been given in a fairly consistent manner to their usual English translations, so that language-to-language associations are facilitated. In this way,

English is taught as though it had as many tenses as Latin (it has two), as though had a passive voice, three degrees of comparison, and so on.

Of course, this Latin directed grammar has a little positive value for an English-speaking child learning French; it is a hindrance for a Polynesian child learning English. It would be wrong to give the idea that there is now a single, comprehensive grammar to replace "traditional grammar"; but in some key areas (for instance, the verb-forms) the grammar now available is so superior for work with Asian learners that it is really indispensable.

The teacher now has before him the suggestions that he should know the characteristics of several foreign languages, that he should be able to control his vocabulary and the constructions he uses, and that he needs a new grammar. It will be human enough to wonder whether there is no alternative, no easy way.

Alternatives: (i) "Picking up" a Language

One reads advertisements of courses which guarantee to produce learning without effort, in which the learner "picks up" vocabulary, grammar, the "real" accent. If there is any truth in this "picking up" business, could we not avoid much disagreeable effort by creating conditions in which the non-English-speaking child will learn of himself, through motivated imitation?

The teacher probably suspects as he asks this question that it represents wishful thinking. His suspicion is justified. Having attracted customers by offering effortless learning, the language schools I know proceed to extract a greater, a more concentrated effort than many of their learners ever made in their lives before — good luck to them! Of course, learning a foreign language costs effort. For each person, the reward bears a relationship to the effort; and to the efficiency with which the effort is made, and directed.

(ii) How Sub-Standard Languages Arise by Contact

The idea that adjusting the language environment is all that is required should be dismissed as illusory; but we must also examine the probable consequence of following this idea. Let us look at a learning context somewhat like that of a Greek child in a New Zealand school. English-medium schools in Malaysia have Chinese, Indian and Malay

pupils from the age of five or six. English is the playground language as well as the language of the classroom. When a child begins school, he starts an official English course in the classroom, and an unofficial one in the playground. The classroom English course is planned, and goes step by step. Playground needs, however, cannot be expected to correspond to any course plan. The child wants to talk about yesterday and tomorrow when he needs to; which is several months before they appear in the official course. So a playground language develops, an interesting language, in which drastic inroads are made upon the redundancies of official English. The 20-odd vowel system of official English is reduced to the 6-vowel system of the playground, nouns and verbs appear only in the stem form, conjunctive relationships are expressed through juxtaposition (*He come: I no come*) and so on. An interesting language, but *not* a help (to put it mildly) to the teacher of official English, who, as often as not, wages a losing battle against it. In this "natural" language situation, native English-speaking children accept the unofficial English: "Zaleha says *he* for a girl as well," observes a six-year-old English girl. "Did you tell her?" "No, it doesn't matter."

In fact, it is difficult to understand the quite widely held belief that simply living in the country where the language is spoken will, without effort on their part, produce perfect French speakers, perfect English speakers and so on. Living in the country gives opportunity and motivation for effecting communication; but this, obviously, need not be at a high level. On the whole, New Zealand English-speaking children speak adequately for the requirements they perceive: as we know, this does not necessarily mean that they speak well. It is just the same for foreign learners. Individual learners, particularly those who do not often speak their mother tongue with others, may acquire a native speaker's ease (such as this is) in the use of the language that surrounds them, but contact without skilled teaching more often results in, and then keeps alive, a sub-standard version of the acquired language. The larger the group of foreign-language speakers and the stronger their community feeling, the more likely it is that the sub-standard version will establish itself. After a generation or two, the mother tongue may be forgotten and the sub-standard version of the replacement language may have become

the language of family or sub-community. This, of course, is a major handicap of the United States negro. It may become the handicap of the New Zealand Maori or any other close language group. It is probably needless to re-emphasise how pertinent is the attitude of the English speakers, particularly the teachers, in the contact relationships.

The Child's Intellectual Growth

For a person with such considerations in mind, it is disheartening to meet officials, teachers, especially research workers, who are occupied only or mainly with the social *background* aspects of foreign language speakers in the schools. Schools have to be concerned with the intellectual development of children; not, of course, only with this development, but certainly with this development. There is no real dichotomy here: the intellectual development is a primary sociological factor.

Let us put first things first. It is of some interest to know how many brothers and sisters the Greek-mother-tongue child has, and whether his father talks to mother and aunts in Greek; but we have far more need of knowledge about how foundation concepts and thinking processes are acquired (or not) in brains that function with two languages. We need to know how much overlap develops between the languages, where each specialises, how much mutual influence there is, how much mutual interference.

A Research Programme

It would not be difficult to study vocabulary and vocabulary growth; and the growth of concepts behind the words. The mathematics teachers need to know how the concepts of mathematical operations are shared between the languages. Most teachers would have profit from a study of the reasoning processes, perhaps particularly to discover whether or how the elements in an exposition (e.g. statement, illustration, ornamentation, evidence, condition, objection, reason, repetition, parenthesis) are recognised. Primary school teachers need to know how the self-regulatory role of speech is performed, whether social regulation through English remains linguistically and operationally distinct from earlier or contemporaneous regulation through the mother tongue. The language teachers need above all to know the extent of linguistic sophistication likely at each age, how con-

sciously and to what extent material is transferred from mother tongue to English and from English to mother tongue.

Above is a programme of research. There is also need for straightforward observation and classroom experiment. In a classroom with a group of non-English-speaking five-year-olds the teacher may be attempting to form an arithmetical concept through an expression (e.g. "the blue rod and the green rod together") intended, by means of the child's previous language experience, to relate the new with the familiar. She finds the expression acting as an obstacle instead of as an aid. Is she to try to establish the concept with English words taught just for the purpose, is she to use non-linguistic means, how can a knowledge of the mother-tongue structure be used? A professional teacher of English to foreign children can give advice, but this needs putting into forms in which it, and the analysis behind it, may be tested, and falsified or verified through experiment in the classroom.

The Practical Side

How practical are the proposals suggested above? I am familiar only with work at the University in Wellington. Within the space of a few years, the Department of English has built a strong language division, and now a variety of courses is available from Stage II to post-graduate levels. This means that a steady supply of soundly trained honours graduates is available. At the moment, as far as I know, nobody is making a point of exploiting the special knowledge of these people. At Wellington too, there is an English Language Institute, with a diploma course in teaching English as a second language. This Institute is exploited almost but not quite exclusively by the Department of External Affairs, training overseas teachers. The writer has a fair knowledge of the field overseas, and it seems to him that local potential is good by any standard of comparison. The proposals are practical. We have serious local problems awaiting attention. Can we afford not to exploit our potential now?

APPENDIX

Summary of Propositions

The following propositions have been advanced:

1. The child whose mother tongue is not English is basically a privileged child.
2. His privilege becomes a social handicap when the teaching of English is unskilled, or is associated with indifference to or prejudice against the mother tongue.

3. Investment in these children is not a regrettable duty but a profitable venture.

Survey of Professional Help Needed

Professional help could be useful:

1. In provision of elementary comparative analyses, showing the teacher where the language difficulties of children with various mother tongues are likely to lie; and in provision of suggestions for helping the children,
2. In training in vocabulary and structural control, presumably via the Teachers' Colleges,
3. In provision of a non-Latin-oriented grammar,
4. In furthering a programme of research.

The profit

Advantage may be expected as follows:

1. We assume a two-way benefit, personal and social, through the children who are our main interest.
2. The teacher who follows up a genuine interest in his foreign-language speaking pupils has embarked on a course of personal profit and enhancement of his professional status.
3. A genuine interest at the Teachers' Colleges would bring a beneficial revision of some parts of the programme:
 - (a) An elementary acquaintance with the structure of Maori and Chinese and comparison with that of modern European languages would represent a welcome inroad on our linguistic isolation,
 - (b) Practice in vocabulary restriction was the basis of Professor I. A. Richards' work with post-graduate English students at Cambridge, and is a salutary intellectual discipline,
 - (c) Use of a sensible grammar is overdue; Latin having ceased to be the main element in the secondary school curriculum.
4. Shortly before the Second World War, the writer was acquainted with a Yorkshireman, a "traveler" in wool. Since his work took him all over Europe, one expected he would have some knowledge of several languages. "They . . . speak English. If they don't, we don't do business," was his bald rejection of what he took as an unflattering imputation. The United Kingdom is struggling out of this attitude. Before the war war too, the United States was eager for the assimilation of all foreign immigrant groups. Today these groups are encouraged to retain their identity, and their efforts to maintain their mother tongue, through newspapers, for instance, are subsidised. Apart from the foreign language teaching in schools and universities, the United States carries on a vast programme of research, sponsored from Defence funds* Interest in our children who do not speak English as a native language is in every sense to our national advantage.
5. Of course, a programme of research is valuable not only for its results but also in the training of the researchers.

* In the 1966 fiscal year, under Title VI, Section 602 of the National Defense Education Act, approval was given for 54 contracts, worth NZ\$2,100,000, "designed to improve instruction in modern foreign languages". (*The Linguistic Reporter*, Supplement No. 17, August 1966).