II
Language and Intention
The Speaker

The child, the kitten, the cub, the fledgeling arrive to inhabit the same world but they take up residence in vastly different ways. The fledgeling may lie in a nest that its mother has worked to construct, and the cub learn to use a water track that its elders cut through the jungle: but the child is quite likely to be so surrounded by the work of men's hands that for a long time he rarely sets eyes on anything else—excepting of course those hands themselves and the faces that go with them. There is, however, a more remarkable difference even than this: for every item in the human child's environment there exists, side by side with it, a verbal counterpart, and much of his parents' energy is given to the manipulation not of the things but of the words.

The infant is born into a world of daily newspapers and letters of congratulation, news bulletins and Reith lectures, books on child rearing and traffic notices, 'Hey diddle diddles' and 'God save the Queens': and, above all, the buzz of conversation, for, from the very first, people talk at him and to him and about him. He takes little notice of it for a while, but there arrives a time when he too, after a good deal of babbling, becomes a speaker.

It has all started afresh. Language and all it comprises—its registers and dialects, its phonology, grammar, lexis and semantics—is put to use by another individual. It is the use he makes of it that I want to consider here, as briefly as I can.

Language in fact serves his purposes long before he can speak it. After four or five weeks of existence he can distinguish the speech of his mother from all other sounds and invests it with special significance: his response to it is to 'take heart', to stop whimpering. We can only surmise that the sound stands for her presence, even when she is out of sight, and therefore for the possibility of satisfaction in a world which may otherwise be confusing and threatening. That human speech should come to be associated with the activities of the parents, the life of the family, seems to me a fact of great importance. The family is to the infant his whole theatre of operations: and the funda-

mental 'satisfaction of progress' must lie in entering more and more fully into its activities. Before words have any meaning for him he seeks contact with members of the family by babbled 'conversations', by vocalization: and once he can give meaning to a few of the things he hears—'Give it to mummy', 'Fetch Teddy'—the eagerness of his response reflects the same pleasure in contact, the increased contact of actual co-operation through language. When, later, he tells himself to 'Give it to mummy' and 'Fetch Teddy', and obeys his own commands with equal eagerness he is still in a sense co-operating, having taken over with the language the authority-of-the-family with which he himself invested it.

It is during the first year of speaking that he makes the discovery that everything he sees has a name: thereafter, by dint of constant questioning, he learns a great many of these names. When he has increased his resources in this way he begins to chatter to himself as he plays, naming the objects as he handles them and saying what he is doing with them. He has, thus, two kinds of talk at his command: monologue and dialogue, talking to himself and conversational exchange. At first the two kinds are indistinguishable in form, but later they become differentiated; by the time he is about three and a half the tone of voice in which he speaks when he wants an answer is different from that of his monologue, his 'running commentary'. It is the difference in function, however, that concerns us here: the running commentary represents a first stage in a far-reaching sequence of mental developments.

Talking to himself about what he is doing helps him in two ways: first he interprets to himself the situation that confronts him, clarifying and defining it; secondly, he organizes his own activity within that situation. At this stage his monologue is in a strict sense 'a running commentary': he talks about what he is doing for the powerful reason that he is able to use only words about things actually present and actions actually being performed. It is a major step forward when, after about eighteen months of this here-and-now speech, he acquires the ability to use words in place of things, to refer to things not present and actions not being performed.

Freed of this restriction his language becomes a much more powerful instrument for the two purposes I have mentioned. Now his interpretation of the situation is enriched by reference to past situations. Indeed the interpretative function of language appears in its true light as the bringing to bear of the past upon the present. Similarly, in organizing his own activity within the situation, he begins to envisage what might be done, potentialities not tied to the means of achievement actually present: he can speak now of what he will do rather than what he is doing. Moreover the process of putting into words the pos-
sible courses of action reinforces his ability to resist random distractions—those shin-barking obstacles to achievement—and pursue the activity he has envisaged.

Language (or, as we shall see, forms of mental activity derived from language) continues to perform these two functions throughout life: by means of it we interpret experience and regulate our actions. Before we consider the general significance of these functions, however, we must trace a further specific change in the form of the child’s monologue. While his powers of conversational exchange become more and more efficient as communication, able to deal in words with more complex experiences, and with an increasing range of past experience, his other mode of speech, monologue, develops in what might almost appear a contrary direction. It begins to be both abbreviated (a series of predicates, perhaps, with the subjects omitted) and individuated—using words for the meaning they have acquired from particular personal experience, regardless of their intelligibility to a listener. In both respects we may liken such language to the cryptic conversational utterances of two people who know each other intimately and find themselves in a highly meaningful, unambiguous, ‘eloquent’ situation; and then remember that when the child talks to himself he shares a situation with a listener who is very much en rapport.

By the time he is about seven years old this speaking to himself has more or less disappeared. It requires no great feat of the imagination to suppose that the changes we have noted have turned it into ‘inner speech’: that the omitted—or, rather, unspoken—subjects have been joined by unspoken predicates: that the continuing traffic in personal, individuated meanings has left him with verbal symbols that would be less and less useful in public interchange but more and more useful in organizing his own experiences. Speculating further, we can postulate the development from ‘inner speech’ to ‘verbal thinking’, when the forms employed would be still less like the grammatical forms of overt speech and the meanings still less like conventional word-meanings. What began then as one form of language behaviour (a joint activity—conversation), has become two, and the two are very different in character because they serve distinct purposes. I should add that what I have referred to above as ‘speech to (one) self’—the first differentiated stage—is more often and more significantly called ‘speech for oneself’—for reasons that will now be clear.

Speech and verbal thinking continue, however, to operate in close conjunction. In an unfamiliar area of experience a child will need to talk before he can think. And our loftiest speculations as adults are seldom achieved without a good deal of talking, and writing and reading, in addition to, and in very close relation with, our thinking.
We interpret experience, then, and regulate our actions in the course of both our talking and our thinking and it is language that, by its nature, enables us to do so. The most dramatic stage in the development of the regulative function is that we have already described: the child who puts into words what he is doing and what he is going to do increases his persistence and is better able to carry out his plan. That this should be so must in part be due to the power language gained for him when, in his infancy, it represented the security and order of the family. But, as adults, we can still catch an occasional sense that language retains its power to regulate: if we approach an event with misgiving we may well find ourselves preparing for it by putting into words—silently or even aloud—hypothetical courses of action: and caught in an unexpected difficulty we may sometimes be aware that a word comes into mind at the moment of deciding what to do. Examples of other people using language in an attempt to ‘regulate’ what we do are too frequent and obvious to need elaboration. That in the interchange of conversation we can influence each other’s behaviour is clear, and the idea is familiar that we may also use a listener as a ‘sounding board’ assisting us to arrive at some decision, and so setting the course of our further action.

Language begins to operate as a means of interpreting experience from the very first exchange of words between an infant and his mother about what is going on: the shared situation is organized, given shape, by the words spoken in it. It need hardly be pointed out that the experience is at first more fully interpreted for the infant in the mother’s words than in his own: but he continues the process for himself when he speaks his own running commentary on what he is doing. A new phase is entered when he begins to use words about things not present—now in telling his mother what he has done he shares through words experiences which she did not share in actuality. Here the onus for selecting, shaping, interpreting in words is on him, though of course her questions and her comments may supply the main ‘members’ on which he sets up his structure.

It must be stressed that until a child has acquired powers of verbal thinking, it is only by actual speaking that the interpretative process can function for him. Eventually his talking, reading, writing and thinking all contribute to it.

The interpretative function of language is essentially the use of words to ‘give shape to experience’. But there is something unsatisfactory about this description: ‘give shape’ might suggest that I can use words to give any shape I please, whereas ‘interpret’ indicates that the experience itself will set limits. We need in fact a way of describing the process which allows for both these aspects—for the shape we give and for the shape we find. For this reason, risking its offence as jargon, I
shall use the verb 'to structure'. As a noun, 'structure' may refer either to 'a construction' or to 'the relations between elements making up a whole', and we shall import both these senses into its use as a verb.

By means of language, then, we structure experience: experience itself—what is structured—is of course far more than language: it is the sum total of our responses to environment, whether in action, thought or feeling; and all that our senses report. It is difficult for us to realize how much we rely upon language simply to sort the material provided by the senses—difficult because the essential early stages of the sorting were accomplished in infancy. The child who says 'Mummy's chair, Daddy's chair, Baby's chair' has in the common sound 'chair' a tool for classifying—a pigeon-hole or a filing-pin. Without that filling-pin 'chair' as a category distinct from 'table' or 'bed' or 'washing machine' would never be established. Thus, a child learning names is at the same time sorting the objects of his world. As things fall into categories, and categories into a network of relationships, we are able to take into the area of our activities more and more of the environment: we respond to more and more of the world, in other words, by very reason of the fact that it presents itself increasingly as order and not chaos. The uniqueness of every moment of life must imprison us until, with the help of words, we begin to generalize.

The rough analogy of a word as a filing-pin upon which successive experiences are filed has already brought us, in attempting to explain our growing response to the present, to think in terms of an accumulation of past experiences. We must look more directly at this aspect. Clearly it is not the meaningless flux of sense impressions that we accumulate as experience succeeds experience, but organized, interpreted versions of those experiences. (Memory itself is organized, has taken on, so to speak, a narrative form.) The outcome, as the days and years go by, is a highly organized, continually modifying representation of the world as we have found it. And that is the world in which, each as individuals, we continue to live. It constitutes a frame of reference for every new experience, a body of expectations to be selectively aroused, every waking moment, either by some stimulus outside ourselves or by some continuing activity in our own minds. It is probably true to say that we could make no response to a situation to which we brought no expectations: without this interpretative process, experience would remain a largely meaningless flux of impressions.

It will be clear that though each of us must build his representation, his picture of the world, for himself—and each individual picture will be unique—we do not do so alone. The young child's talk with his parents is, as we have seen, crucial for the help in structuring experience that he receives from it: and how much we can later compensate for a failure at this point we do not yet know. To a very large degree, in
any society, we build in common a common world picture. If the topic of any conversation can be said to have an existence at all, it exists as the relevant parts of the world picture of each of the participants—and the effect of the conversation will be to modify in some degree those parts of the picture both in ourselves and in our fellow-talkers.

It is this process of building in common that most clearly distinguishes man from other animals: their response is to the stimuli of the immediate environment, while man responds to a representation of the situation made in the light of past experience—a representation that is susceptible at all stages to the influence of other people. Thus animals learn from experience, but from their own experience: through language man learns from the experience of other men, present or absent, living or dead.

In the young child’s picture of the world as it seems to him there is much that further experience will correct. A new experience may require the modification of whole areas of the structure, for gathering experience is no mere process of rolling a snowball over fresh snow. Many of the adjustments required may be achieved in the actual process of responding to the new situation, but there will be others which will be too deep-seated to be so readily achieved. If the experience is not to be rejected he needs in some way to go back over it and work upon it: and the rejection of experience means that the required adjustment is not made and the child is left with a false picture, erroneous expectations.

Fortunately, the child is already in the habit of going back over past experiences, re-enacting them, improvising upon them, for the sheer fun of it. Make-believe play is at its zenith at the stage of existence when deep-seated adjustments are most frequently demanded: how much of this play is to be explained as merely for the fun of it and how much as a means of coming to terms with past experience, it is impossible to say.

In re-enacting the experience in his own terms, as a game, freed from the obligation to respond socially that holds in real situations, the child adjusts his expectations to conform more nearly with what the actual world has manifested. Speech will normally play an important part in the game: what is said will often represent indeed the essential substance of the readjustment that has been made.

We can in fact parallel all that we have said about make-believe games in the realm of speech without re-enactment. The child in his talk will draw upon past experience, improvise from it, spinning long yarns of imaginary events around the briefest encounters, for example, with a bus conductor or a door-to-door salesman or a neighbour. All this is for the joy of it, but it is itself a process of extending (if on a somewhat ‘provisional’ basis) his world picture by incorporating
own view of other people’s views of the world: it is at least a first step
away from his exclusively individual angle of vision.

But the same kind of talk—talk with no practical purpose, talk as
play—is available also when the need arises to come to terms with
intractable experience. Small children’s tales about witches constitute
a recurring example of such talk: hearing so often in the witch’s speech
the tones of a scolding mother one cannot doubt that the utterance
serves a purpose in adjusting the child’s picture of the world to include
the phenomenon of an angry mother.

Whenever we go back, in mind or in talk, over past experiences,
to understand them better or to accept them more fully or simply to
enjoy them again, we are as it were in the role of spectators of our own
lives. When we gossip about other people or read biographies or novels
or plays, we are in a similar way spectators of other men’s lives, real or
imaginary. Let me distinguish then two roles: as participants we live
life, we interact with people and things, we take part in the world’s
affairs in some way or other: as spectators, we ‘stopped the world’ in
order to ‘get off’. The need to act and decide are marks of a partici-
 pant’s role: a spectator, freed from this need and looking to no practical
outcome at all, is able to respond more fully to the forms of
experience—the pattern of events, the network of personal relations,
the configuration (if it may be so called) of the emotions that lie be-
neath both the events and the relationships; free to respond also to the
forms of the language which, at its most successful, are an integral part
of the total construction.

In most of our speaking and writing, language exercises a social,
communicative function. When we write or speak or read or think in
the role of participants, language has for us both a regulative and an
interpretative function, and the two interact at all points: when we
write or speak or read or think in the role of spectators, it is the inter-
pretative function that is dominant.

I have considered some of the ways in which a child uses his own
language to further his own development. I have done little more than
elaborate the statement that he uses it to structure his experience. In
conclusion, it seems to me that when the child comes to school his
work in the subjects of the timetable, whether it be environmental
studies, or science or history or geography, will encourage him to con-
tinue this structuring process in those areas in which impersonal, ob-
jective, socially approved bodies of common knowledge exist. But
when these areas, which in the child are areas of shared curiosity, have
been removed, what is left is all those experiences in which children
differ most from each other—an area that may be roughly described as
‘personal experience’. Moreover, it is in this area that all experience is
integrated, becomes part of the individual’s world picture. It seems to
me that to look after this area is the primary task of the English teacher. I do not see him then as a teacher of literature: for this defines his function in extrinsic terms: rather I believe that the process of structuring personal experience demands the writing and the reading of what is essentially literature—language in the role of spectator. Again, it is certainly true that for the purposes of his own social and intellectual development a child needs to extend his linguistic powers, and the English teacher must regard this as a part of his responsibility. It seems to me, however, that acquiring skill in language must be secondary to achievement through language—and what is to be achieved through language in English lessons is the organizing and interpretation of the child’s personal experiences and their extension in an organized way. This demands of the teacher as full an understanding as possible of what language is and the way it works.
Words and a World

As human beings we cannot escape the influence of language. It pervades all we do; the activities of every waking hour bear its stamp and it shapes more or less directly the material of our dreams. Perhaps it is principally for this reason that we find it as difficult to answer the question, 'What do we use our language for?' as we would to satisfy the child who says, 'What are people for?'.

We might catalogue situations and kinds of utterance and try to give a particular answer as to what each is for—small talk at the tea party, chat in the laundrette, the sermon on Sunday, a monograph on lepidoptera, or Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. But what would the answers have in common? What major features would shape an answer to the general question?

More promising perhaps to consider what effect language has upon a young child's behaviour when first he acquires the ability to use it. The small child who learns to speak begins to live in a new way. Hitherto, all that he has done has been a contribution to the family activities, its corporate existence; now he begins to contribute more of what he is than what he does could reveal. But, to feel the justice of the claim that he 'begins to live in a new way', we have to think not of the family's point of view but of the child's; and from his point of view, this contribution of himself through speaking bears the aspect of 'becoming' rather than of 'revealing'. In speaking he discovers more of what he is than he could discover in action. And since he has at first no inner dialogue with which to operate, all this discovery, this 'becoming', is spoken aloud for all to hear.

The change does not, of course, take place overnight. In the course of a year or eighteen months, two notable stages mark its progress. The first is the discovery that things have names, and that this is a fact about the world—in other words that everything may be assumed to have a name. Most children at this stage play what has been called 'the naming game', but is perhaps more usually a 'touching and naming game'. Here is the performance of an eighteen months old girl at
breakfast time: 'Bun. Butter. Jelly. Cakie. Jam. Cup of tea. Milkie.' To understand its significance we must imagine the game being played in the middle of a great sea of the un-named and hence (with some exceptions) the unfamiliar, the as yet undifferentiated. After the speaking of names has conferred a new status upon what was already familiar by use, the learning of new words adds fresh conquests—fresh objects are 'possessed' as they are differentiated. Then as further instances crop up and naming occasions are reduplicated, the word becomes a means of building up a category. ('Shoe. Another shoe. Two shoes.'—again at eighteen months.)

The second stage is reached when naming has progressed so far from touching that words begin to be used about things not present, and about events not actually taking place; and when words, in this way, come to be used in place of things they take on a much more powerful role. The naming game, in fact, represents a process of 'bringing into existence' the objects of the immediate environment, the here-and-now. But when the second stage is reached, the objects that have been named, but are no longer present, are brought in to assist in classifying what is present and relating it to the familiar. (On first meeting strawberries at two and a half: 'They are like cherries'—and, tasting them, 'They're just like sweeties'—and, finally, 'They are like ladybirds'.) What is being called into existence at this stage is an abiding world, a world that stays there when we move away or go to sleep—a world that provides prospect and retrospect as well as a here-and-now.

There is a paradox at the heart of all this. The words are old: they constitute a language that served the child's grandfathers and great-grandfathers before him. But every occasion for speaking them is a fresh one: in use, whether by child or grandfather they are on all but the most routine occasions not indeed newly minted, but newly meant. And the paradox is at its sharpest with the infant for whom there is no back-log of experience of what the words may in speaking be used to do.

Thus it is that in young children's efforts we recognize more clearly the nature of the process: how speech is generated not only to suit the situation—each new situation as it arises—but also to influence it in accordance with the speaker's needs and purposes. In other words he speaks to do more than meet the demands of the situation upon him—he speaks to make something of it for himself. What he makes of it, the direction of his curiosity, the tenor of his interpretation, the tentative constructions he places upon events—these in the course of his speaking reveal something of the sort of person he is becoming. He declares his individuality. And by a gradual process over a period of years he discovers his own individuality reflected in the responses other people make to his declarations.
To put the matter directly, all this amounts to saying that in speaking we represent the world to ourselves, and ourselves to other people. 'To represent' here means to 'make a representation', in the sense that we make a representation of a chair when we draw a chair, or a representation of the neighbourhood when we draw a map; in this sense also, that when we catch sight of a familiar face, what we have seen has matched something that we must have carried with us from previous seeing, a 'representation' of a face: and when our ears catch a familiar tune, the sound that has just been made must chime with an inner 'representation' of a sound we had heard on some previous occasion.

Language then is one way of representing experience, and before we can appreciate its particular role we must look at the importance of the process of representation itself. Learning in its broadest sense might be described as turning the unfamiliar into the familiar—not in a random way as my last examples might suggest (the chance heard tune, for instance) but in such a way as to relate one familiar item of experience with another. I knew a dog who grew very excited if he found a member of the household sticking stamps on to a letter: not only was the process familiar to him from past experience but it had been related, by experience, with another familiar event—being taken for a walk, and of course it was the anticipation of this that excited him.

Whatever might be said about dogs, it has been claimed that human beings internalize their experience of the world in the form of a representation of the world: and that whereas the lower animals respond directly to the stimulus of the actual environment, human beings react not directly but via this representation. The fruits of our past experience of the world are there in a coherent or organized form to assist our interpretation of what confronts us at a particular moment of time, the present. As I stick the stamps on a letter I too may anticipate the walk to the post-box, but I am likely to have in addition a far more complex and far-reaching set of anticipations taking into account such things as the appearance and personality and situation of the person I am writing to, and the probable outcomes of the news I have communicated. Moreover I can choose at any moment to think of that person, to recall his circumstances, to clarify my anticipations of his likely responses: it seems very unlikely that the dog can do anything at all like thinking quietly to himself 'It would be nice if someone were to write a letter and take me to the post'—he requires rather something in the present environment to set off the chain of expectation.

A representation lasts in time in a way that events themselves do not. One consequence of this we have seen—that we store experiences (to put it crudely): there are two other important consequences. First, we may work upon the representation: given the fact that our picture of what the world is like is subject to modification—as well as
extension—by every new experience, we add now the notion that we may deliberately go back over experiences in order to make sense of them. That is to say, we work upon the representation to make it more orderly, more coherent. Secondly, a matter of the greatest importance, other people may work upon it too. The small boy who tells his mother what has been happening to him at school, goes back over the experiences, works upon the representation: but the representation is also very much affected by what she says in response. Thus, though each of us builds his own representation, what is built is in very large measure the picture of a world in common. We become experienced people in the light of other people’s experiences as well as our own: the unfamiliar becomes familiar to us by virtue in part of our confidence in what other people have heard and seen and done.

We build in large measure a common world, a world in which we live together: yet each of us builds in his own way. My representation differs from yours not only because the world has treated us differently but also because my way of representing what happens to both of us will differ from yours. We are neither of us cameras. Admittedly, we construct a representation of the world we both inhabit: on your screen and mine, as on the sensitive plate in the camera, is reflected that world. But we are at the same time projecting on to the screen our own needs and desires. In this sense then, we build what is for each of us a representation of the world and at the same time is to each other a representation of a different individuality, another ‘self’. More literally, it is by knowing in what terms I think of and respond to the objects and people and events of my environment that you know what sort of a person I am.

We interpret the present instant in order to turn what it offers us to our own advantage: that is to say we ‘make something of’ the situation (in one sense) in order to ‘make something of’ it in another sense. Past, present and future are interwoven here: we interpret the present by referring it to our representation of the world as we have experienced it, by bringing, in other words, the past to bear on it. Our purpose in doing so is to choose the appropriate response: in other words, to anticipate future events. Let me only add that as more and more of the world becomes familiar to us, the context into which we fit new experiences, by which we ‘place’ and interpret new experiences, becomes more complete and more effective as a basis for our predictions. Contrast the two-and-a-half-year-old confronting her first strawberries with the botanist identifying a rare plant.

Language is only one way of representing experience, but as such it plays a key role because it becomes the means of organizing all the other forms of representation. It is for this reason that it has already found its way into our discussion of the representation-making process. First, it is as we have seen a way of classifying. The naming and
touching game shows words in the closest possible relation with the use of the senses. To take one example of the importance of this, what is potentially a vast number of different colour sensations must be grouped under the word ‘red’ and this group related to other potentially vast groups under the words ‘blue’, ‘green’ and so on, before a child’s colour experiences can enter significantly into his expectations about the world. In all his activities, words become the filing pins upon which successive encounters with objects and events are filed. (We must add a reminder that the language-using-cum-exploratory activities interact to feed each other at all points: that a child is stimulated to activity by the enticements of the world to his senses: and therefore that an environment rich in such enticements plays an essential part in the growth of his powers.)

Secondly, by reason of its own complex internal organization language can be used to impose, as it were, a grid upon the multiplicity of sense impressions. Built into language are relations of likeness, of oppositeness, of sequence, of hierarchy, of consequence; and as a child learns to operate the language systems he applies these relations to reduce to order the multiplicity of things in the world. He does not merely imitate sounds and so arrive at speaking; he learns to operate a system. Thus at first ‘flower’ may be simply another name for ‘daisy’ and ‘animal’ another name for ‘dog’ but in due course he discovers he can use ‘flower’ to say things about buttercups and daisies and an immense number of other such objects. (And also that there is no satisfactory answer to the question ‘What kind of a tail has a dog?’ for the same sort of reason that he would not even ask ‘What sort of a tail has an animal?’) At a later stage he discovers that what seems wide on one occasion may seem narrow on another, and then he can begin to make sense of the fact that even the very, very narrow thing has width, just as the lowest things have height, and the lightest things weight: and that he can sensibly ask ‘How heavy is your bag?’ when it looks very light and ‘How old is the kitten?’ when it must be very young. In other words, he finds (but not in so many words) that oppositeness is a relationship that language systematically caters for.

Let us, in the third place, observe the fact that we habitually use language as a way of going back over experience, a way of working upon our representation of events. If we brood over something that has happened, our thinking has some of the characteristics of an inner dialogue and certainly it will take the form it does as a result of our past experiences of talking. (As Charles Morris explains it, we may not be using language symbols, but we shall certainly be using ‘post-language symbols’.) But very frequently we in fact engage in talk as a means of going back over events: nothing is more familiar than the kind of gossip that goes on among participants after the ‘big event’—the play, the party, the open day, the match, the wedding. There may
well have been plenty of talk while they were still participating: but this is a different kind of talk because, no longer participants, they are in the role of spectators. Participants respond to ongoing events—they are 'responsible': spectators have no such responsibility, but are free to savour the past events in a quite different way. They will enjoy the behaviour of their party guests, for example, in a way that they could not while the guests were still behaving. They will savour and enjoy even the hardships and anxieties of the match—or 'the march'—in a way that they certainly did not enjoy them at the time.

The distinction between participants and spectators very roughly corresponds to a distinction linguists have made between two uses of speech. In the first, the participant form, speech and action are so closely complementary as to be often interchangeable. Interaction between two people—in a shop, for example—may be thought of as a chain of items any one of which may be speech, or action, or speech with action. The shopkeeper may say, 'Can I help you?' or he may merely stand opposite you in an expectant way: you may say, 'I'll take this, please' or pick up a bar of chocolate and give him the money. If you ask him, 'Have you a half-pound block?' he may say 'I'm sorry I haven't' or he may say 'Yes' and hand you one, or he may simply hand you one. Again, looking at another example in a slightly different way, if you have a bulky parcel to take through the door, you may manipulate the door somehow yourself, or you may use speech as a way of keeping the door open—by somebody else's agency.

You may agree that even in the simple examples given, speech may be seen to be used to organize our behaviour, to regulate both our individual and our co-operative activities. It would be more fully so, of course, when a group of people were engaged on a complicated joint enterprise. Such use of language by participants constitutes one way in which we construct a representation of experience and continue to adjust it—in our stride—as we come across the unexpected. Edward Sapir has suggested that it is from such uses 'in constant association with the colour and the requirements of actual contexts' that language acquires its 'almost unique position of intimacy' with human behaviour in general.

In the second of these two uses of speech, that corresponding to the role of spectator, language is used to refer to, report upon, and interpret action, rather than in substitution for it. Freed from the responsibility for action and interaction, we speak above all in order to shape experience, to interpret it—to work upon our representation of the world. I want to distinguish three ways in which we may do this—though in doing so I must observe that in any one conversation it is likely that all three ways will be used to some degree. If I go back as a spectator over my own past experiences in conversation with you, then
you are also in the role of spectator. It may well be that my incentive for doing so at all is to share these experiences with you, to savour them, enjoy them with you: at the same time I am shaping and interpreting them and your comments will be helping me to do so. But the experiences I relate will sometimes be ones in which what happened was too unlike what I anticipated for me to adjust my world view, my body of expectations, while I was participating in them. In this case there is a positive need for me to go back and adjust, to 'come to terms' with the past events; and while in such situations you as a listener may sometimes be no more than a sounding board, you may of course sometimes be the major influence in bringing about the adjustment required. That is the first way of using conversation in the role of spectator: the events are those of my own experience and I shape them in order to share them. The second use could be illustrated from the same situation, seeing it from your point of view: let us, in all modesty, turn it round. Suppose as our conversation continues, you take up the role of spectator of your experiences and invite me to do the same. I am still engaged upon the shape of the world as I know it, but as I respond to you I shall be extending my picture to include in it some things that I have not experienced but you have. Of course, I cannot take over your experiences as though they were my own: inevitably it is still my own experience that I am working on: as I listen to your story I recombine elements of my own past experiences into new structures that correspond to the shape of your experiences. My representation is extended by this multiplication of its forms. My ability to anticipate events rests in this way partly upon the shape that experience has taken for other people.

Both these uses might have been regarded as ways of improvising upon my representation of the world: however the word applies more obviously to the third category of use. When in conversation we talk not about what has happened but what might happen, we open the way for a whole range of activities. I may speculate about what may happen to me with a close eye on actual possibilities—as might be the case if we were planning a joint undertaking. But in day dreaming the relation between what is imagined and what is likely to happen may be a very remote one: and of course we do carry on conversations which are a sociable form of day dreaming. The 'might-be' and the 'might-have-been' are pleasant topics of conversation and cover a whole range from sober, fairly realistic wish formulations to the extravagant fantasies of a Walter Mitty or a Billy Liar. Though the pleasure of improvising in this way upon our world representation may lie in the abandonment of any concern for the relation to reality and so for the predictive value, I would still see in such improvisations (in a world in which the strangest things sometimes happen) some connec-
tion with our urge to anticipate events or create the fullest context for whatever may occur. I see them, then, as a kind of testing out to the limits the possibilities of experience.

It should be added here that, if we accept as a rough definition of 'literature', 'the written language in the role of spectator', the literature we write may fall into any of the three categories we have considered and the literature we read may fall into the second or the third.

Thus, while it is true that we use language to shape experiences even as we participate in them, the shaping more typically takes place as we go back over experience in the role of spectators. Freed from practical responsibility, we are able to savour the feelings that accompanied events rather than act upon them, attend to the pattern of actions and circumstances, evaluate against a broader framework than we were able to apply in the course of the actual experience. Do we give this shape, or do we find it? The question must remain an open one: it seems probable that the structure of our world-picture reflects both order in the universe and our own particular way of representing the world—the shaping force of our own inner needs and desires.

To speak of language in the role of participant and in the role of spectator is to make a broad division in terms of the relation between the speaker and the situation. I want now to look more closely at language itself and suggest a three-fold division.

A great deal of talk is of the kind that Sapir called 'expressive'. It tends to tell us as much about the speaker as it does about the subjects of his talk. It is speech that follows the contours of the speaker's consciousness, a kind of verbalizing of the self. Often it will be intelligible only to someone who knows almost as much about the situation of the speaker as he does himself. Sapir suggests that as expressive speech sheds its more personal, unique, individual, subjective features and refers more explicitly to the actual world, it turns into 'referential' speech—the speech by which we participate in the world's affairs—informing people, explaining things, arguing, persuading, asking questions and so on. I want to add another 'wing' to Sapir's diagram; if expressive speech remains in the centre—a matrix, speech not subjected to the kind of pressure that makes it referential—then I should put referential (or transactional) speech on the one side, and 'poetic' or 'formal' speech on the other. This is also arrived at by subjecting expressive speech to particular demands, but they are demands of a different kind. They concern the formal characteristics of the utterance, and in particular its coherence, unity, wholeness. As speech, it is rare; the nearest examples will be occasional utterances in the course of successful dramatic improvisations: and this may serve to suggest the nature of the demands I have referred to—they are the kind of demands any artist makes upon himself in order to produce an object, a work of art.
Writing is of course rooted in speaking, though the two processes are very different. Because writing is premeditated utterance, because there is a time gap between its utterance and its reception, the shaping process I have been writing about may be fuller or deeper or sharper in its effect than it normally is in speech.

It seems probable that children's first attempts at writing will naturally rely heavily upon their speech experience, and will be of a kind we should classify as expressive: and that with more experience we shall find it differentiating in the two directions, both towards the referential and towards the poetic. Let me in conclusion suggest that the following extracts indicate better than I could explain the transitional categories that very much good writing in the Primary School will fall into. The first is by a ten-year-old boy: the practical task in hand has shaped his writing in the direction of the referential:

*How I Filtered my Water Specimens*

When we were down at Mr. Harris's farm I brought some water from the brook back with me. I took some from a shallow place by the oak tree, and some from a deep place by the walnut tree. I got the specimens by placing a jar in the brook and let the water run into it. Then I brought them back to school to filter. . . . The experiment that I did shows that where the water was deeper and was not running fast there was a lot more silt suspended as little particles in the water. You could see this by looking at the filter paper, where the water was shallow and fast there was less dirt suspended in it.

There are, as you see, expressive features interwoven with the referential: it was an oak tree, and it was a walnut tree—he knows because he was there—for him this was a part of what happened but they are features of his landscape rather than features of the experiment he sets out to describe.

The next example I can only leave with you. It is a catalogue by a seven-year-old girl—a kind of writing we are familiar with. But in this case I believe the rhythms she set up in the writing began to exercise some control over what she wrote: the writing, I suggest, moves towards the artistic, towards the language of poetry.

Class I had Monday off and Tuesday off and all the other classes had Monday and Tuesday off and we played hide-and-seek and my big sister hid her eyes and counted up to ten and me and my brother had to hide and I went behind the Dust-bin and I was thinking about the summer and the butter-cups and Daisies all those things and fresh grass and violets and roses and lavender and the twinkling sea and the star in the night and the black sky and the moon.
Language and Representation

From many diverse sources has come the idea, the hypothesis, that the importance of language to mankind lies not so much in the fact that it is the means by which we co-operate and communicate with each other as in the fact that it enables each of us, as individuals and in co-operation, to represent the world to ourselves as we encounter it: and so to construct—moment by moment and year after year—a cumulative representation of 'the world as I have known it'. In infancy the representation is made in talk; as for example this four-year-old who represents to herself, at the moment of encounter, the objects and events that engage her as she plays with her toy farm—to which had recently been added some model zoo animals:

I'm going to have a zoo-field... now we've got more animals... three more, so I think we'll have a zoo-field (Whispering) Well, now, let's see... let's see how it feels... Get this pin now—there, you see. Haven't got a case... should be a zoo man as well... Look, must get this zoo man, then we'll be all right. Really a farm man, but he can be a zoo man... Depends what their job is, doesn't it, Dad? (She goes off and fetches him.) There now, you see... What do you want... Well, if you could look after these two elephants... I'll go and see about this... this panda. Well, all right. He squeezed out, and he got in. Shut the gate again... He said Hello... He said Hello. Dad, what I want to know is if the bear sitting up and the mother can fit in the house... Spect she can though...

The bear... Dad, I'm going to call the fellow Brumas, the polar bear fellow. Look, the man and the lady are talking. The man's looking after the elephant and the lady's looking after the polar bear. They're talking over the wall... You didn't see any polar bears, did you?

When a person's standing it's taller than when it's sitting... when an animal's sitting it's taller than when it's standing. Spect

it's because they've four legs. It's because of the legs . . . your legs go up on the ground, don't they? But really an animal's front paws is really its hands, isn't it? When he sits up (i.e., the polar bear) he's as tall as the lady . . .

Daddy, are we in our house, Daddy? (Yes.) Well, why shouldn't the polar bears be in their house?

Her chatter constitutes a verbal representation of the things she sees and the things that happen—in this case mainly the events she causes to happen. Some of the more general formulations may be important elements in her cumulative representation of the world (as for example her conception of 'home' in the final comment quoted): all may be seen as facilitations at some level of subsequent encounters. On one occasion, over a year earlier, when she turned reluctantly from her engrossment with that same toy farm she said: “Oh why am I real so I can't live in my little farm?”—a representation that surely would persist and evolve through the years.

We continue of course to use talk as a means of representing the world: and that would serve to describe a great deal of the chat and the gossip that most of us devote our time to so generously. But we use writing also, and we use thought—going over in our minds events of the day, for example—and those two processes would not normally be possible to us unless we had built their foundations in speech.

I have arrived at this point, as many others have done, from a desire to understand the nature of language and how it works for us. What I have now to go on to—or back to—is a realisation that language is only one of a number of means by which we represent the world to ourselves; furthermore, that what makes us unique among the animals is not our ability to speak per se, but our habit of representing experience to ourselves by one means or another. We do so in terms of our own movements, in terms of our perceptions, and probably, more fundamentally still, in terms of our feelings and value judgments, though this remains a speculation and a mystery; and we do so in language.

We have no difficulty in recognizing the distinction between the process of looking at a face and the process of calling that face to mind, nor in realising that the two are in some way related. Our ability to call the face to mind is what allows me to talk about a representation of the world in terms of perception; the effects of my looking have not been utterly lost when I close my eyes or go away; what I have perceived I have 'represented to myself', and I may go back to the representation long after the face has disappeared from the range of my looking.

Being a man of parts, I can play 'God Save the Queen' on any ordinary piano on request (though three parts of me still wants to call it 'God Save the King'). If, however, you asked me to play the chords that
accompany, say ‘send her victorious’, I should not be able to do so without actually playing, or rehearsing in mind and muscles, the phrases of the tune that lead up to it. I have the representation—the fact that I succeed in doing as you ask me would prove that; but it is a representation largely in terms of my movements (in relation to my perception of the piano-keys) and only minimally in terms of the appearance of the notation on the page. Hence I need to go through the repertoire of movements in order to re-capture it.

Piaget and Bruner have shown that young children represent the world to themselves first in terms of perception-cum-movement—and I put it that way to indicate that the two are inseparable; and later also in terms of visual imagery, or in perception freed from movement; and that the simultaneity of visual representation compared with the serial nature of perception-cum-movement results in a better organised system of representing, a more effective filing system for experience.

These two modes of representation are well-established before the third, the linguistic mode, comes into operation. When, at about two years of age, a child begins to speak, so achieving this third system, his talk is used as a means of assisting the modes of representation previously acquired; that is to say the modes of movement and of perception. In fact, his language is at first tied to the ‘here and now’, limited (with a few notable exceptions) to speech about what may be seen and handled in the immediate situation. It is speech-cum-action, or as Luria calls it, ‘synpraxic speech’. Its function as such is to facilitate activity in the here and now, activity in terms of movement and perception. Parts of the monologue of the four-year-old we quoted above will serve to illustrate this earlier stage. (“Well, if you could look after these two elephants . . . I’ll go and see about this . . . this panda. Well, all right. He squeezed out, and he got in. Shut the gate again . . . ” etc.) As we read it with imaginative insight, I believe we can sense the fact that her speech operates as a way of assisting her moves in the game.

But at one particular point in that monologue we find language operating differently. She talks of things she wants, things that are not there in front of her—first ‘the cage’, and then ‘the zoo man’: and having spoken of him, off she goes to get him.

This indicates what really amounts to a fourth kind of representation. Just as movement-cum-perception provided the basis from which the second stage was reached, that of perception freed from movement, so language tied to the here-and-now forms the basis from which there develops linguistic representation freed from these bonds, freed from its dependence upon movement and perception. At this fourth stage words come to be used not with objects but in place of them. As our example directly suggests, the ability to use words in this way further assists exploratory activity by breaking out of the immediate situation.
Things previously experienced may be imported into the situation, as the zoo man is: ideas derived from past experience may be brought to bear upon present problems. The result is a wide extension of a child’s activities, the enrichment of the possibilities of the here and now by drawing upon the resources of the ‘not-here’ and the ‘not-now’.

We are not concerned here simply with what the use of language may import into a situation: we are concerned also with the way language does so. Luria has demonstrated in a number of experiments that what is formulated in language carries a special power to influence a young child’s behaviour; that from obeying the verbal instructions of an adult he goes on to instruct himself in words, both directly and indirectly; and that for him to say what he plans to do increases his ability to persist and complete an undertaking: that language, in short, performs a regulative function.

It has long seemed to me that the great importance of Luria’s work in Speech and the Development of Mental Processes in the Child lies in its indication of the close relation between language ability and the scope and complexity of human behaviour in general. Of the two outcomes his experiment reports—the effect of encouraging normal speech performance in both the twins, and the further effect of speech training upon one of them—it is the former, the changes of behaviour in both boys after their speech had become ‘normal’, that is without doubt the major effect. By the same token, Luria’s hypothesis that language acquires a regulative function, a power of co-ordinating, stabilising and facilitating other forms of behaviour—and the evidence and explanations with which he supports it—form one of the most important contributions he makes in this book to a general reader’s understanding of the way language works. His Chapter VII is for this reason a key chapter, and his formulation has acquired, in my copy, a kind of illuminated border more often associated with ‘texts’ of another kind:

With the appearance of speech disconnected from action . . . it was expected that there should also arise the possibility of formulating a system of connections transcending the boundaries of the immediate situation and of subordinating action to these verbally formulated connections.

That, taken at its very simplest level, is how the zoo-man got to the four-year-old’s model zoo-field.

That same four-year-old had a sister two years younger than herself. One Saturday morning when they were respectively four and a half and two and a half, I tried, for about fifteen minutes, to keep a record of all that happened and everything they said. During the course of it, the older child, Clare, sat on the sofa with coloured pencils and a drawing block and, in spite of interruptions from Alison, the
younger child, she completed two pictures; one of a girl riding a pony and one of a girl diving into a pool—both of them references back to things she had seen and done on her summer holiday three months earlier. She talked to herself from time to time about what she was doing ("Want to make your tail a bit shorter—that's what you're wanting.")—but sometimes inaudibly.

Meanwhile, Alison

1. pretended she was a goat and tried to butt Clare,
2. tried to climb on to the sofa,
3. came over to me and claimed my pen,
4. saw a ruler on the table, asked what it was, wanted it,
5. crawled under the table,
6. came out and asked me what I was doing,
7. climbed on to a chair by the window, looked out and made ‘fizzing’ noises,
8. climbed down, saw her shoe on the floor and began to take the lace out,
9. came over and asked me to put the shoe on her foot,
10. saw the other shoe, and did the same with that,
11. went over to Clare and pretended to be a goat again,
12. climbed on to the sofa and claimed the pencil Clare was using.

It will be clear, I think, that Alison’s behaviour arises almost entirely in response to the various stimuli of the here and now, and is in this respect in direct contrast to Clare’s sustained activity. A principal conclusion from Luria’s experiment would be that language is the primary means by which the behaviour typical of the four-and-a-half-year-old is derived from that typical of the two-and-a-half-year-old—a gain which might crudely be called one of ‘undistractability’. The story Luria tells of the twins in his experiment may in fact be seen as an accelerated journey between the stages represented respectively by Alison and Clare. For those of us who from observation and experience know more about children than we do about psychology, that starting point may prove a helpful approach to what Luria has to say.

As a child acquires the ability to use language to refer to things not present, it becomes possible for him to represent in words ‘what might be’ rather than simply ‘what is’. As he does so his formulation may equally be a fiction—a make-believe—or a plan, and sometimes the two will be indistinguishable. A two-year-old child is able to make the first moves in this direction: but the ability either to sustain the make-believe or to carry out the planned activity is one that is developed as the facility in verbalising grows.

The habit of verbalising originates in and is fostered above all by speech with an adult: the appropriateness of the adult’s early ‘instruc-
tions' to the child's own concerns, and the eagerness and confidence with which he 'obeys' them constitute the criteria of favourable conditions. As Luria reminds us (in Vygotsky's words) "a function which is earlier divided between two people becomes later the means of organisation of the child's own behaviour."
Writing to Learn and Learning to Write

My lecture derives from some work that I’ve been doing for the past six years as director of the British Schools Council Research Project into Development of Writing Ability in Children (ages 11–18). We’re still working on the data of that, so I shan’t be referring to it very much more. But we began by collecting writings in all subjects from children eleven to eighteen from about sixty-five schools. We had about 2000 children in all and we drew a sample of 500 children’s work in English and other subjects. And what I want to discuss is the thinking that has arisen in connection with sorting and interpreting those papers. I shall be quoting one or two of them to you.

The first of these was written by an eleven-year-old called Jacqueline, for her science teacher. She writes on how to make oxygen and this is what Jacqueline says:

It is quite easy to make oxygen if you have the right equipment necessary. You will need probably a test tube (a large one), a stand with some acid in it. You will also need a Bunston burner, of course you must not forget a (glass) tank too. A thin test tube should fix neatly in its place. When you have done that, fill the glass tank and put the curved end upwards. Put the (glass) tank on the table and fill with water. Very soon you will find that you have made oxygen and glad of it.

It’s the “glad of it” that interests us here. I wonder where that came from. On the whole she is trying to tell you what she did, so if you are really keen to make oxygen, well, you know how she went about it and you can go about it. That is what she is trying to do, but that bit at the end seems to come from somewhere else, doesn’t it? I can just imagine her mum saying, “Yes, I dropped in and had a chat and a cup of tea, and glad of it.” It comes straight out of speech. It is a sort of spoken fragment. I wonder what her science teacher thought of.

it. Do you think he would think he was glad of it, or that this was something she might well have left unsaid? I think from what I know of the situation that he was glad to know that Jacqueline was glad she'd made oxygen and wasn't simply going through the hoops for him. On the other hand, while I would welcome that expressive feature, that feature taken from speech, in that writing at that stage, I hope you would agree with me that in the long run, ultimately, if she's out to inform us and wants us to have the information necessary for making oxygen, that at least is inappropriate—is not required.

What about this? This is another piece from the research by a fifteen-year-old boy from a school just off the old Kent road, which is a dockland area of London—a tough school, a school in a rough area.

School, ugh. Dad is up having a wash, Mum has gone to work, sister has got up, and me, I don't get up till I'm told to. If I had my way, I wouldn't get up. Still I get up, have a wash and go to school. On the way you see some funny people about these days. Take that old man who lives round the corner. He says that he cannot go out to get his pension [that's the old age pension, and he has to go to the labor office to get it] but when someone gets it for him, he is round the pub like a shot. Crafty old man. At any rate, to get back to walking to school. School, what a terrible word, whoever invented it should have been shot. I know parents say schooldays are the best days of your life but that was in those days. School was good because you started work when you were twelve so school was good. For the time you were there.

Obviously a good deal of that comes out of speech also—in fact, the whole area is fairly near to speech, isn't it? He says "cannot" instead of "can't." He got that from books, not from speech. But most of it comes pretty directly from speech. And it has other features which make it like speech. He rather assumes that we're in his context. He invites us to accept an assumption that we know the sort of thing he's talking about, so he says, "You see some funny people about these days."

"Take that old man who lives down the corner." Well, what old man? We've nothing leading up to him. He's come straight out of the boy's context and he's offering it to us to accept and assume the context, which is again like speech and which is again why I want to call it "expressive." The whole piece is expressive. This is not a case of expressive features in a piece which is out to do something else. This chap isn't trying to inform us, to tell us things he believes we want to know; he's simply sharing a slice of his experience with us, letting us into it, which is an expressive function. It's a way of being with him. It is also loosely structured. He moves to the old man, for example, and then back to school again. This loose structure is again typical of the
expressive. The expressive is a term I take from the linguist, Edward Sapir. He is usually called the father of American linguistics, but I think he deserves to be called the father of modern linguistics. Sapir says that in all language, two strands are interwoven inextricably, one an expressive pattern and one a referential pattern. Referential means you're talking about what's in the world and you are using your reference to what's in the world for useful purposes. You are informing people, instructing people, persuading people, and so on.

But the expressive bit of it. How does language get that? Sapir gives us one answer. He says that it is expressive because "language is learned early and piecemeal, in constant association with the color and the requirements of actual contexts."¹ In other words, we pick it up as we go. "Early and piecemeal," and it never loses its ability to revive the actuality of these contexts with all their colors and all their requirements.

So I want to define expressive language as language close to the self; language that is not called upon to go very far away from the speaker. The prototype for linguists is the exclamation. You know, the noise you make when you drop the hammer on your toe. And if you are by yourself it's purely expressive. In other words, merely vents your feelings. If somebody else is there, then it is also a communication. It won't have any meaning unless a person can see the plight you're in and knows you, because we have different habits of exclamation; what might be a very mild exclamation for you might be a rather severe one for me. You need to know the person and the situation in order to get the full meaning of that communication. Well that's also true, in general, of the expressive. You need to know the speaker and the context.

Expressive language is giving signals about the speaker as well as signals about his topic. And so it is delivered in the assumption that the hearer is interested in the speaker as well as in the topic. In fact if I had to tie myself to one thing about the expressive I'd say that that was the most characteristic. It relies on an interest in the speaker as well as in the topic. It's relaxed and loosely structured because it follows the contours of the speaker's preoccupations. I sometimes take my wife for a drive, and I drive and she talks. And that talk is highly expressive. It's about anything that comes into her head. Things she sees from the car, things she remembers suddenly, things that she's forgotten in the kitchen and so on. It's highly expressive talk, loosely structured, only really communication to me because I am also in the context, because I know her and what has been happening around her. If I want to argue with her—if she says something that I disagree with—or if she says something I am curious about and want some information about, then her language is likely to move away from the expressive, further away from the person speaking and a bit nearer to the actualities of the world. Nearer to what Sapir calls the referential.
I'm saying all this about expressive because I do believe it's very important. I believe it has a very important function. Its function in one sense is to be with. To be with people. To explore the relationship. To extend the togetherness of situations. It's the language of all ordinary face-to-face speech. So it's our means of coming together with other people out of our essential separateness. But it's also the language in which we first-draft most of our important ideas. In other words, most of the important things that there are in the world were probably first discussed in expressive speech with somebody who was in the context. And if you put those two things together I think you'll see why I claim for it, in the third place, and it's the form of language by which most strongly we influence each other.

I was in New Orleans when Martin Luther King was shot, and of course the talk was everywhere. Talk on street corners and church porches, in bars, indoors. I really do believe that the quality of that talk, what it was able to achieve in influencing people's opinions, was a material factor in forming public opinion and hence the political outcome of the event. It's far more influential than sermons in church or printed political manifestos.

Expressive writing is primarily written-down speech, and that is, I think, why it is important as writing. Being written-down speech, it does something which I want to describe in two ways. First, it maintains the contact of the writing with the resources the writer has, resources which come from speech. We recruit and keep fit our linguistic resources, above all, through speech. So when we are using expressive language, we are writing in such a way as to maintain the closest contact with those resources. And then saying that same thing a second way, expressive writing is also important because in it, we make sure the writer stays in the writing and doesn't disappear. We'll come back to that.

Nevertheless, writing, even expressive writing, is very different from speech and this is pretty obvious. In speech you have a face-to-face situation. You have immediate feedback. When you are writing, you are left on your own. You have to work in a vacuum with no feedback. You have to imagine your audience and hold him fully in mind if you are to take his needs into account. What's written here and now is to be read there and then; some other time and some other place. I think we need to conjure up an audience for this rather lonely task, and this is one reason why I hold unorthodox views on the role of the teacher with regard to the child's writing. I think the teacher needs to extend to a child a stable audience. I think when a child is learning to write in the first stages, this business of meeting the needs of a reader is one of the real difficulties of coping with writing. The kind of encouragement the teacher can give—in other words, the extent to which the teacher is a good listener, a good reader—can make that easy
for a child, and the stability of having the same reader from occasion to occasion is also, I think, very important to those stages.

And then there's the effect of the time lag. You write it here and now, and it's read elsewhere at some other time. How do you use that time lag? How do you use the time lag between the transmission and the reception? In speech, we usually trust the process of "pushing the boat out." Are we wrong in not trusting it also in writing? How far in writing ought we to have faith in the process you might call "shaping at the point of utterance?" Or how far do you think this premeditation is something we should be much more deliberate about? We all know how expressive speech works; we all know about its importance for children. How in telling about what's been happening to them, for instance, in sharing their experiences, children are also shaping those experiences and therefore making them more accessible for their own learning. We don't learn from higgledy-piggledy events as they strike our senses; we learn from events as we interpret them, and one of the main ways of interpreting them is by talking about them—by giving them shape in language. And the incentive to do that is to share them with somebody else. Can this work with writing? Can the constant audience of the teacher and the even sharper shaping process that goes on when you write about experience—can this—continue to serve for the child as the talk with his parents has served him in infancy?

Let me refer again to "and glad of it." We judged that to be ultimately—I judged that on your behalf—to be ultimately irrelevant. That is, writing as written-down speech won't go the whole way. Something else has to happen side by side with it. I had this something else illustrated to me not too long ago when I was visiting a colleague of mine at home. I was shown a story which my colleague's wife had typed out at the dictation of their four-year-old boy. And the four-year-old boy's story included this sentence: "The king went sadly home for he had nowhere else to go." Well I was very interested in that from a four-year-old because you see "for he had nowhere else to go" is not a speech form. He hadn't heard his parents say that. He hadn't used it in speech. It had come directly to him from the printed page. He hadn't read it but it had been read to him. In other words, he has done what the linguists would call internalized a form of the written language, and he's using it in an appropriate place. He's telling a story. He's using the storyteller's language as he had got it from the printed page by somebody's reading.

And that is the other process that has to go on alongside the written-down speech. As a child extends his reading, so he internalizes more and more the patterns of the written language. I don't mean that globally—and I mean many forms of the written language appropriate to many different kinds of tasks. I think this process, once we under-
stand it, needs to be gradual. I think we can easily short-circuit it if we’re too deliberate about it. I don’t believe in setting the written model for their writing. I believe in reading for reading’s sake and the kind of internalization that comes from reading for reading’s sake will then articulate, interlink with the spoken resources. The linguistic resources which have in general been recruited at the spoken level. In other words I’m asking for a kind of metabolism. You know, language in any case is outside in the world, not in the child. He has to internalize it in order to speak. There is another internalizing job when it comes to the written form. In both these cases, just as we internalize substances of the world and create our own bodies out of them by a process biologists call metabolism, so we need a metabolic process in internalizing language. In other words it is highly selective and it depends upon internal structures already in existence. It’s a personal job, a personal selection and internalizing in terms of individual needs and interests. So I don’t think we can hasten it. I think the way in which we treat reading in relation to writing sometimes is in danger of being too deliberate.

Reporting how she made oxygen was for Jacqueline a concern with the outside world. I’m suggesting that this sort of writing makes its best start in the expressive. Here’s another little example. This is a ten-year-old country boy who lives in Suffolk.

On Sunday I made some coal gas. I got a large peanut tin and punched a hole in the top. I filled it one-third full with small bits of coal. Nothing happened when I first put it on the fire, but after a while brown stuff came out. It was gas. I immediately tried to light it, but it did not light. I tried to light it every five minutes. After fifteen minutes it lit. It lasted for eight minutes. My second try lasted one hour three minutes. Each time it did not turn to coke. The back of the tin was red hot.

Well, it’s fairly near to speech but he’s moving toward the language in which you would expect him to perform the kind of transaction he’s after—giving us information. Pretty concrete. How about its shape? Well it simply takes the shape of his activities.

Here’s a much later one and a very different one. Another stage in the journey. This is a sixteen-year-old black girl from a school in Connecticut.

When I first moved into my neighborhood twelve years ago it was a predominantly Jewish community. From the minute I moved in till just a few years ago I was an oddity looking for acceptance. I had no one in my neighborhood I could call a true friend. The air of prejudice hung so heavy in the air it choked the life out of the neighborhood. Slowly I watched the For Sale signs pop up, and
gradually I watched most of the Jewish families move out. Until I was about eleven I never knew quite why. But when I was older I realized it was because of my family and the few other black families in the area. And that's why today there is a little hurt left in me from knowing that people can be so thick-headed and narrow-minded they would let false ideas force them to move out of their homes. Today I am fighting to keep myself from inflicting my hurt on someone else and trying not to let prejudice become a part of my life.

Attempting to do a job in the world but a much more advanced job at a much more abstract level. Much more exploratory. Much more a matter of theorizing in order to solve her own problems.

Let me add very briefly, I believe the writing and the reading are complementary processes and we need both. We need to test out in writing what we can do with the written forms, what meaning we can derive from the written forms, what meaning we can communicate in the written forms. The written language forms a gateway to most further learning. And perhaps this becomes of particular importance for children from linguistically deprived homes, from dialect homes; because here will be the first and perhaps the greatest opportunity of coming to terms with this language which will prove so valuable later on.

But all that is only half the story. It's the more familiar half. I want to move on now to what I think is the less familiar half. And to do that I want to go back to a sort of beginning, a theoretical basis. I've already made brief reference to it. The most fundamental and universal kind of learning for human beings is learning from experience, which means bringing our past to bear upon our present. To do this we need to interpret, to shape, to represent experience. One way of representing, interpreting, and shaping experience is by talking about it. And we all do a great deal of it. Joseph Church, an American psychologist, has this to say about the process: "The morning after the big dance, the telephone system is taxed while the matrons and adolescents exchange impressions until the event has been given verbal shape and so can enter into the corpus of their experience." I'm sorry I can't help smiling about that because he starts off like a human being and finishes like a psychologist, doesn't he? That last idea is the important one I'm after. There is such a thing as "a corpus of experience" and talking does shape experience in such a way as to add to it—no doubt adding to what has in fact also been created largely by talk. There are, of course, many ways of representing the world to ourselves, and language is one of them.

Sapir suggested, many years ago, that we operate in the actual
world not directly, but by means of—through the mediation of—a "world picture," a representation of the world. Ernst Cassirer, a German philosopher mostly writing in America, in his book, An Essay on Man, reports that, according to a German biologist, man is slower to react to an immediate change in the immediate environment than any other creature is and he puts forward a hypothesis to explain it. He suggests that all creatures have a system of nerves carrying messages from the outside world into themselves and a system of nerves for carrying from themselves to the outside world their responses to those messages. And these two systems are linked together—the incoming stimulus and the outgoing response. But in man, for the first time, a third system is shunted across those two, and that's the symbolic system. A system of representation. So that man receives the signals from the outside world, builds them into his world picture—his representation from past experience of what the world is like—and responds, not directly to the incoming signals, but in the light of his total representation: he responds, in other words, to the incoming signals as interpreted by the representation. If that sounds a very involved process, I can think of a very simple example. If I say to you, as I might well, "I thought I heard somebody coming upstairs," I've expressed my response to an immediate change in the environment in terms heavily clothed in past experience. I think you'd find it very difficult to do it in a way that wasn't. We habitually take the signals in and interpret them in the light of our past experience—of stairways, and people, and the world in general.

A representation lasts in time in a way events don't. So you can work on it. You can go back over experiences and work on them. Not only you but other people also. When the small boy comes home and tells his mum what's been happening in school, an important part of what he builds into his representation of his day in school is what his mother says as well as what he is saying. So we can affect each other's representations. You might say what I have been doing is to work upon (or try to work upon) your world picture in certain areas to do with schools and children and language.

Representing experience is a cumulative process. Looking back, our representation is a storehouse of past experience, selective of course, not total. But looking forward, that same storehouse is a body of expectations as to what may happen; a sheaf of expectations from which we can draw as appropriate in accordance with the stimulus that meets us. It's a cumulative process, but it's not like a snowball, rolling around gathering more snow on the outside. Because every new experience is liable to demand a change in the picture of the world as a whole. Mostly we can adjust in our stride. If an event is too unlike our expectations we have to respond as best we can, because events don't
wait for us; but we are left, after it's over, with an undigested event, an undigested experience.

The expectations from which we draw, and which we put to the test in actual experience, are our hypotheses. And we modify our expectations in the light of what happens, just as the scientist puts his hypotheses to the test and modifies them in the light of what happens in the laboratory. So we are actively predicting experience at every moment in the light of this storehouse of past experience.

Let me draw a little picture of your world representation—the world as you have found it—a nice simple one—and then add an event, something happening to you at the moment.

What's happening to you, you can only interpret in the light of your total representation: in other words the small square is subject to change in the light of what is in the large square. On the other hand, your total world representation is open to modification in the light of any new experience—that is in the light of this (or any other) event. So the large square also is subject to change. Now while the event is happening, you are called upon to participate in it. For this reason your attention (represented by "x" in my diagrams) will be focused upon changes to the smaller square: I have suggested that we can normally adjust to new experiences in the course of their happening. But if what happens is too unlike our expectations, then we are left, after the event is over, with an unmodified world representation and an undigested experience—still with a large square and a small square. But suppose the event is not now happening. Let me indicate the difference. Here, the small square stands for an event which has happened and is being reconstructed in talk. And because it is not now happening, and we do not have to participate in it, we are free to concentrate upon changes in the total world representation, the large square.

The difference of focus is very important: what we now have is a process of surveying the total in search of order and harmony and unity.

Actually, the whole scheme as I have depicted it is too simple, and I have very briefly to make it more complicated in the light of what
sociologists would tell us. Now what the sociologists would point out, of course, is that I’ve spoken as though this were an *individual* matter, with only very cursory references to mothers and other people. Sociologists will point out that the building of the world is to a great extent done cooperatively. The worlds we build are very like each other in many respects. So they would want to say we build by scanning, interpreting, acting *in* and acting *upon* situations. So that from joint action in encounters with other people we build a shared social world. I want to see that in two steps: take it first at a momentary level. In any encounter each member of the group interprets the situation in his way and acts in the light of that interpretation. To act, which includes speaking, of course, is to present oneself. So in this encounter, each member of this group is presenting himself. To act is also to modify the situation. But *interaction* means that these interpretations and self-presentation* *s embodied in action are offered like pieces in a jigsaw, and it’s the fitting together of the jigsaw that in fact confirms and modifies the individual interpretations and shapes the outcome of the encounter.

And now, very briefly look at that as a cumulative process. Day by day and year by year, we classify, further interpret, and store these interpretations and these self-presentation* s and so construct a social world and an individual personality within it. Thus, when sociologists look at us, the teachers in schools, what they see (and I’m quoting here a young British sociologist called Geoffrey Esland)—what they see is that “the relationship between teachers and pupils is essentially a reality-sharing, world-building enterprise.”

I want now to go back to the diagram and add a little to it. The two sides of this page represent two different relationships between *language* and *events*. On the left side, as we said, the events are actually happening, and the language constitutes a part of what is going on, a way of participating in events. Whenever we talk or write or read for some functional purpose—to get things done, to make things happen—we are using “language in the role of participant.”

On the right hand side, you will remember, the event is no longer happening: you are going back over it in talk. Therefore, for what I hope will be obvious reasons, I want to call that “language in the role of spectator.”
And in theory, at any rate, the distinction is clear. In the role of spectator we use language to reconstruct events, to talk about what is not now going on. However, it is not quite so easy as that. Suppose I invite you to be spectator of my past experience. I had a lovely weekend in New Orleans recently. Suppose I want to talk about it, in order to enjoy it again. I take up the role of spectator of those events for their own sake, for the pleasure of it. I might prevail upon you to listen and then you would take up the role of spectator of my past experience.

On the other hand, I might begin to tell you about my past experiences and after you had listened patiently in the role of spectator, you might suddenly find you were in the wrong role, because what I was doing was working up to asking you to lend me a fiver—working up to raising a loan. A hard luck story. Well that’s not the spectator role because that’s participation. I am pursuing my practical purposes here, talking to make things happen—and so, participating in events. So even though I’m reconstructing past events, because they are the means to something I am now pursuing, they are not in the role of spectator.

We could contrast that with hospital talk. I don’t know whether you’ve visited a hospital or been in a hospital, but you know on visiting day in hospitals the talk is all about operations, symptoms and illnesses and pains and aches. And all this is spectator talk. Going back over things in order to come to terms with them—to deal with as yet undigested events. On the other hand, in the doctor’s consulting room, you may also reconstruct past experience and talk about your symptoms and your aches and your pains. That’s quite different. You are contributing there to a diagnosis. Participant role. And if you got into the kind of vein you would use in the hospital, the doctor would soon recognize it and pull you out.

Another example; think of a party, and the party is over, and you and your fellow hosts are discussing the behavior of your guests in order to discover who it could have been that left a ring on the wash basin. Well that’s very helpful of you. It’s very useful. You are doing part of the world’s work. So you are in the participant role. On the other hand you’ll probably find that the conversation soon drifts into another vein, and you find yourselves discussing the behavior of your guests in order to enjoy their behavior in a way you couldn’t when they were still behaving. And that’s pure spectator role.

We can take up the role of spectator of our own past experiences and since you can of mine and I can of yours, we can become spectator of other people’s experiences, real or unreal. Spectator of imagined experiences. Spectator of our own possible futures in our daydreams. So I’m including under this role of spectator a whole range of possibilities. In spectator role, we are free from the need to interact. Our
attention is upon events that are not happening, interactions with people that are not now present. (We are, of course, in a situation and interacting with our listener. But we are minimizing our interaction. We may offer him a drink as he listens to the story, but this is likely to be felt as an interruption to what we really are doing—which is to concern ourselves with events not now happening, for the sake of doing so.) Free then from the need to interact, we use that freedom, I suggest, first of all to pay attention to forms in a way that we don’t when we participate. And the forms of language, particularly.

If we are in a spectator role, then the way you tell your story is part of my enjoyment in it, and the forms of language and the way you form language will be an essential part of what you are doing. And particularly this is true of the form or pattern of feelings. You know, if a mother during the day has a small son to look after who gets into all kinds of trouble, the feelings aroused in her are likely to be above all sparked off in action. But when her husband comes home in the evening, as long as he knows the boy is safely tucked up in bed, he loves to hear about the hairbreadth escapes. They both now are in spectator role. They can both enter into and appreciate the feelings of fear and anxiety and horror and excitement and pride, and so on in a way you can’t when you’re participating. One is somehow able to savor feeling as feeling in a spectator role in a way one isn’t free to savor it in a participant role.

And finally, something not unconnected with that. We also use the participant role to evaluate. We bring onto the agenda of our talk with neighbors and other people a great deal of human experience by taking up the spectator role. I suggest that we take up the spectator role out of need—when we need to go back and come to terms with undigested experience. But we also take it up for fun and pleasure—because we never cease to long for more lives than the one we’ve got. We’ve only got one life as participants. As spectators, countless lives are open to us. They are extensions of our own. And what is afoot when we are extending our experience into each other’s as we gossip is above all an exploration of values. As I recount a story of events, I’m offering evaluations and I am looking to you listening to me to come back with your evaluations. I want to establish this as an important feature, because I believe we are dealing with a basic social satisfac-

I’ve suggested that in the spectator role we show a concern for the total world picture, a concern for the total context into which every experience has to be fitted. I’ve suggested that creating a world is to some extent a social process. Now the physical part of our world is very easy to corroborate. Corroboration that you have the same idea of this room as I do isn’t going to be difficult. Where our world pictures are likely to be held vulnerable is not in the physical features, it’s in the
value system. It's in what we feel and believe about the world that we hold our world picture most privately and tentatively. So we're always offering evaluations to other people to see how they evaluate and in so doing are gaining the basic social satisfaction of having our value system, as it were, checked and calibrated against those of other people.

I now want to complete the diagram by adding a reference to the principal functions, or uses, of language, as we categorized them for the purposes of our research on writing.

TRANSACTIONAL ———— EXPRESSIVE ———— POETIC

The middle term is one we've already talked about a good deal—the expressive function. Loosely structured, equally at home in the spectator role or the participant role—language close to the self. We saw Jacqueline attempting to meet the demands of a participant role, attempting to get something done. The kind of writing that fully meets such demands we labeled—for very obvious reasons—"transactional." It is important to see the line in the diagram as a continuous scale, a spectrum. We've already noticed that as the expressive moves towards the transactional, it has to make more explicit reference to the outside world. The personal features that are not relevant are omitted, and more of the context is filled in for somebody who is not in it already, not face to face sharing the same situations and events.

So those are the kinds of changes that go on as "expressive" moves out to "transactional." I could say a lot more about the transactional, but I'm going to leave that, because the important things I want to discuss come on the other half of the diagram.

From the expressive to the poetic. In other words, language in the spectator role. Once again, as a piece of expressive writing changes to meet in full the demands of the spectator role, it changes from expressive writing to what I want to label "poetic." I don't mean rhymes. I don't mean meter. I don't mean poetry in the usual sense; poetry is certainly at the core of it, but is not the whole of it. By poetic I mean language as art—poetic in the original Greek sense, something made, a verbal object. So as we move from the expressive to the poetic, once more meeting the demands of a wider audience, once more language gets further away from self, but in a quite different way because for a quite different purpose. The personal features are given wider meaning as they enter into a very intricate complex organization. Because
the further you move along this scale towards the poetic, the greater is
the attention paid to forms, to the organization of form. The forms of
language, but also the forms of events, the plot of the novel, the pattern
of feelings—forms in general. So what you are doing is to create an
artifact, a verbal object. And it’s this refinement of organization that
gives personal features a kind of resonance by which they have mean-
ing for an unknown audience. Transactional language is language that
gets things done, language as a means. Poetic language is a construct,
not a means but an end in itself. So language in the role of spectator is a
spectrum that stretches, as far as the written language is concerned,
from an intimate letter, a way of “being with” someone, writing in the
expressive, to literature: novels, poetry, drama.

I’m saying in part what has often enough been said before. It was
said very elegantly by W. H. Auden about poetry.

For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its saying where executives
Would never want to tamper.5

Poetry makes nothing happen. It’s not transactional. One last point
about that. I think perhaps I can make this clearer by contrasting the
way we contextualize a piece of language, or make it our own. You
know we have our own ongoing purposes. If a piece of language is to
mean anything to us at all we have somehow to incorporate it in those
ongoing purposes. In other words we have to contextualize it.

With transactional language, what goes on is piecemeal contextual-
ization. If you read a piece of transactional language—an article on
a subject such as how to teach composition, or this piece of mine—then
you take what you want from it and leave the rest. You pick a bit here,
you leave all this because you don’t accept it or you knew it already.
You pick here, you pick there, you make new relations between those
bits, and you make your own relations between those and what you
already know and think. That is piecemeal contextualization. What a
writer of poetic language has to do at all cost is to avoid that piecemeal
contextualization. What he’s after is contextualization as a whole. In
other words he wants to resist contextualization until the poetic object
has been built up by his reader. He wants a hard skin around it.

Of course we do respond to literature in this piecemeal fashion.
I’ve heard children reading Yeats say, “Oh, I didn’t know Yeats was a
spiritualist.” Or even reading other poems say, “Oh, I didn’t know
there were camels in Tibet.” We do contextualize literature piecemeal. There is no reason why we shouldn’t. But we do it knowing
that we are not playing the game for which the poem is written. In
order to do that we need to resist this piecemeal contextualization. It
doesn't matter whether there are really camels in Tibet—there are camels in Tibet in the poem and that's all that matters.

And yet, of course, we do in the end have to contextualize a piece of poetic writing. A novel can incorporate a message. What we must do is resist the piecemeal interpretation of that message because the message is embodied in the construct. When we have reconstructed the verbal construct, then we can make that our own—and I would call that global contextualization.

I want to stress the importance of that spectrum from the expressive to the poetic. I think I can illustrate this with two pieces which represent, in a sense, poles. They're both expressive still, but they're both moving towards the poetic in very different ways. One was sent to us from Canada from the Jessie Katchem Primary School in Toronto. It was written by a boy who lived with his mother because the father had abandoned the two of them several months before. This is what he wrote:

Once upon a time there was a little boy and he didn’t have a mother or father. One day he was walking in the forest. He saw a rabbit. It led him to a house.

There was a book inside the house. He looked at the book and saw a pretty animal. It was called a “horse.” He turned the page and saw a picture of a rabbit . . . a rabbit just like he had seen in the forest. He turned the page again and saw a cat. He thought of his mother and father, and when he was small and they had books for him and animals for him to play with. He thought about this and he started to cry.

While he was crying a lady said “What’s the matter boy.” He slowly looked around and saw his mother.

He said, “Is it really you?”
"Yes, my son. I’m your mother.”
"Mother, mother . . . are you alive?"
"No child. This is the house that I was killed in.”
"Oh mother why are you here?"
"Because I came back to look for you.”
"Why mother? Why did you come back to look for me.”
"Because I miss you.”
"Where is father?”
"He is in the coffin that he was buried in. But don’t talk about that now. How are you son? You’re bigger . . . I’m glad to see you.”

“It’s been a long time mother.”

While the boy and the mother were talking his father came into the room and said “Hi son. How are you?”
“Fine,” said the boy, “fine.”
Suddenly the mother and father came to life.
The boy was crying, and the mother and father were crying too. God suddenly gave them a miracle . . . to come to life. The boy looked at the mother and father and said, “Oh Mother, oh Father.”

Well, spectator role taken from need—in order to repair as far as you can the fragmenting of your picture of the world, to come to terms with events. But as I said, the spectator role is not only used from need. We habitually take it up for much more commonplace and enjoyable reasons. Here’s a very different example written by another boy. An eleven-year-old boy called Malcolm in a school very near where I am working in London:

“Sir, can I have two pieces of paper?”
“Yes you can, Malcolm. What do you want it for?”
“To do a picture of a tiger, sir.”
“All right then, Malcolm.”

It took me two weeks to do that picture, but when he was finished he was Lord of the Jungle, he was magnificent. Lord of lords, Master of Masters.
The way I felt I just could not describe, but it was just the way Miss Harford felt. [Miss Harford was his English teacher.] Well, no one in this world could describe him, only someone out of this world could describe him. He was magnificent.

Poetry is a form of celebration. That is a celebration well within the expressive, but moving in the direction of poetry.

Everyone wants children to learn language to get things done, you know—even politicians and economists. If we as English teachers do not foster the kind of language which represents a concern for the total world-picture, the total context into which every new experience that comes to a child—a man—has to be fitted, then I don’t know who will.

I am going to finish very briefly by picking up one or two points. I’ve suggested that as there is a metabolism of the body, so there must be a metabolism of the mind in learning. A child must draw from the environment (which includes books and teachers) but draw selectively in accordance with the structure of his own personality. In other words, learning has an organic shape. Like a plant or a coral. As teachers we very often think of the shape of learning as though it were frost on the boughs we provide or barnacles on the bottom of our boats.

A child’s learning has its own organic structure. Hence, the value of writing in the expressive, which is the language close to and most
revealing of that individuality. Hence, also, the importance of individual work and work in small groups, and of the sea of talk on which all our school work should be floated.

Given these conditions I want to suggest that children learn to write above all by writing. This is an operational view of writing in school. The world about the child waits to be written about, so we haven’t the need to go hunting around for exercises or dummy runs. We have to set up a working relationship between his language and his experience, and there is plenty there to write about. An operational view implies that we have our priorities. Of course we care about spelling and punctuation, but not more than we care about what the language is doing for the child.

Reading and writing and talking go hand in hand. And development comes from the gradual internalization of the written forms so our standards, the standards we apply to their writing, must be such as to take care that we don’t cut the writer out of the writing; or to put that another way, cut the writer off from his resources at the spoken level. Development comes in two main directions—towards the transactional and towards the poetic. And in either case, if we are successful, children will continue to write as themselves as they reach those two poles. Their explorations of the outer world demand the transactional; their explorations of the inner world demand the poetic, and the roots of it all remain in the expressive.

We don’t often write anything that is merely communication. There’s nearly always an element of “finding out,” of exploration. So it’s a very common process for us to be able to read into our own writing something which we weren’t fully aware of before we started to write. Writing can in fact be learning in the sense of discovery. But if we are to allow this to happen, we must give more credit than we often do to the process of shaping at the point of utterance and not inhibit the kind of discovery that can take place by insisting that children know exactly what they are going to say before they come to say it.

I want again to mention the importance of writing in the spectator role. Chaos is most painful in the area of values and beliefs. Therefore the harmonizing, the order-seeking effects of writing and reading on the poetic end of the spectrum are highly educational, important processes.

And then finally the teacher as listener. We must be careful not to sacrifice to our roles as error spotters and improvers and correctors that of the teacher as listener and reader. I could sum it all up very simply. What is important is that children in school should write about what matters to them to someone who matters to them.
References


4. For an explanation of this and other important ideas I have drawn upon here, see D. W. Harding, “The Role of the Onlooker,” in *Scrutiny* VI, No. 3, 1937, pp. 247–58.

Talking

What Do We Mean by ‘Meaning’?

A study of talk has particular interest because it constantly forces us back to a consideration of what we mean by ‘meaning’. We may approach the problem circumspectly by recognizing that meaning has to do with some one thing standing in for another. At a most obvious level, a child might ask, “What does ‘rapacious’ mean?” and be happy with the answer, “‘Rapacious’ means ‘greedy’”; where the text then says ‘rapacious’, the child says to himself ‘greedy’—for as long as the equation remains in mind. Of course, we have to recognize that substitution covers far more cases than substitution in meaning: I may use a nail-file to unscrew my lighter, and if it does the job I have substituted a nail-file for a screwdriver. We shall need to say that meaning is associated with a substitute used for the purposes of understanding and not for any other kind of performance.

If ‘rapacious’ may stand in for ‘greedy’, it is equally true that ‘greedy’ is a word that substitutes in our understanding for some element that is common to a whole category of recollections about events, about pieces of human (or other) behaviour that we have observed; in like manner, ‘apples’ substitutes in our understanding for a whole category of remembered (or imagined) objects of many shapes, sizes and colours. Further, the process works in essentially similar ways when words are not involved at all; a wind-sock pointing north may have meaning for me; that is to say, in my understanding it may substitute for the unpleasant experience, recollected or imagined, of trying to land a plane across wind. Or, to take a different example, a fragment of Venetian glass on my carpet may substitute for the horrifying sight of a treasured vase reduced to fragments. This example is different, of course, because the wind-sock was constructed in order to communicate a meaning, whereas the piece of glass was not intended to mean anything.

It is very unlikely that the child who was happy to accept ‘greedy’

as a substitute for 'rapacious' would have been equally happy if in answer to his question, "What does 'greedy' mean?" he had been told that 'greedy' means 'rapacious'. No, it is the familiar word that we need to have standing in for the unfamiliar one. More generally, with the meaning of signs or objects or events in mind, we might expect the near to stand in for the far, the obvious for the not-so-easily-perceived, and the thing that matters less to us standing in for the thing that matters more. (It would be absurd to suppose that an aircraft in difficulties with a cross wind could ever be useful as a means of discovering which way a wind-sock was pointing!)

Meanings We See and Hear

Intended and unintended meanings assail us, without the help of words, at every step. We take and use them, often entirely unaware that we have done so. Psychologists call it 'processing the data of our senses'. Novelists construct their narratives largely by bringing these processes to a conscious level for their readers. Here is C. P. Snow describing how Lewis Eliot, a principal character in this novel, made his way to his home in London after a few days' absence:

I felt an edge of anxiety, a tightness of the nerves, as I always did going home after an absence, even an absence as short as this. . . . As soon as I reached Cheyne Walk, my eyes were straining before I was in sight of the house. When I did see it, the picture might to a stranger have looked serene and enviable. The drawing-room lights were already on, first of the houses along that reach; the curtains had not been drawn. . . .

As I walked up the path, I did not know how she would be.

The hall was brilliantly lit, pertinently tidy, the hall of a childless couple. No voice greeted me. I went quickly into the drawing-room. Here also the lights attacked me, as in the dazzle I saw my wife. Saw her quiet, composed, pre-occupied. For she was sitting at a small table, away from the fireplace, looking down at a chess-board. . . . So far as I could see, she was not playing a game, but working out a problem.

'Hello, you're in, are you?' she said. 'You'd better help me with this.'

I was flooded with relief, relief so complete as to be happiness, just as I always was when I found her free from strain. Whatever I had expected, it was not this. I drew up a chair opposite her, and, as she bent her head and glanced at the board, I looked through the tall pieces at her forehead, the lines of which were tightened, not as so often with her own inner care, but with simple calculation.

'I don't see it,' she said, and smiled at me with great light-filled grey eyes.
(After a paragraph describing how her appearance has changed since first he knew her, he goes on:)

Seeing her through the chess pieces, I noticed none of these changes, for I was only concerned with her state from day-to-day. I knew the slightest change in her expression, but I could not see what would be obvious to others. Trying to keep her steady, over the hours, the days, the years, I had lost my judgement about whether she was getting better or worse. All I knew was that to-night she was gay, anxiety-free, and that for this night, which was as far as I could see ahead, there was nothing to worry about.¹

The meanings we see and hear, the information we glean through our senses, are of particular importance to anyone who wants to study talk, because talking is the mode of language which is most inextricably embedded in these other ways of deriving meaning. ‘I don’t see it’, for example, spoken in the above situation would have been quite unintelligible to anyone who could not ‘read’ the situation itself—the chessboard, the woman sitting preoccupied, her look indicating that she was puzzling over something. Notice above all, however, that the reader learns a good deal about the ‘set-up’ (the characters and their relationship), not by having it explained to him, but rather by being shown objects and events that convey a meaning to him.

We might speculate that this way of handling meaning may have deep roots in us because there was a time, in our earliest years, when no other mode of handling it was available.

Two-way Traffic in Meanings

I realise that in speaking of ‘handling meaning’ I have blurred a distinction that has to be made clear. We must distinguish between arriving at a meaning for oneself and communicating meaning to somebody else. The distinction once made, however, we may find a complicated set of relationships between the two processes. The first thing to be clear about is the fact that we cannot take over somebody else’s meanings ready-made. One of the popular errors in educational thinking is to polarise the difference between ‘being told’ something and finding it out for oneself. In fact, ‘to be told’, successfully, we have to go through a process very like finding out for ourselves. In order to accept the new information offered to us we have to have somewhere to put it: and having somewhere to put it means having a network of past knowledge and experience into which the new information will fit and make connexions in such a way as to make sense of it for us. Where we have difficulty in doing this, the normal procedure is to draw out connexions by talking about the new information; and talk with an expert who does not understand our ignorance may be less helpful
than talking with others who share our experiences and share our ignorance. (There is no argument here for withholding information from people who can use it: in daily life we live in a regime of asking and telling, and so it should be in school.)

There may be rare occasions when we find ourselves employed in conveying a meaning from one person to another without any understanding of that meaning on our part. A child, for example, might be sent to the baker's to ask for 'a seedy bloomer' without knowing that that is a loaf, or what kind of a loaf it is. To take the opposite case, we may sometimes be aware of arriving at an understanding which we nevertheless cannot communicate to anybody else. How far, in fact, can we ever be sure that what we have, for somebody else's benefit, formulated (put into words or expressed in gesture or mime or by other means) is the precise equivalent of the meaning we have arrived at?

Where an understanding is at all general, we should perhaps regard 'communicating', 'expressing' or 'formulating' it as somewhat akin to applying it to a particular situation: this may help us to account for a feeling we have that our most fruitful ideas are those which we re-formulate most often. Something that lies behind each re-formulating process is more powerful and more precious than any formula arrived at, and to cling to the formula rather than undergo again the labour of reformulating may be to rob the idea of its power.

Very often, of course, we arrive at a meaning (with or without the help of 'being told') and there we rest, without attempting then to communicate it to anyone else. More often, I believe, the two processes are interlocked: we come to an understanding in the course of communicating it. That is to say, we set out by offering an understanding and that understanding takes shape as we work on it to share it. And finally we may arrive co-operatively at a joint understanding as we talk or in some other way interact with someone else. One of the most important things to be said about talking in this chapter is that it is the normal way in which we endeavour to make sense of our own experiences, so that we store in memory not the raw data of events but the meaning we have come to attribute to them. Speech is of all language modes the best suited to this task because it has grown its roots, in infancy, deep into our first hand experiences. Or, as Sapir has put it, speech has 'an almost unique position of intimacy among all known symbolisms' because it is 'learned early and piecemeal, in constant association with the colour and requirements of actual contexts.'

Our Earliest Meanings

Until recent years, linguists who studied the way infants learn to speak were primarily interested in analysing the grammatical structures of their early utterances and noting the successive stages by which they arrived at the grammar of the language as we know it.
Much that is of interest and importance was learned from this work, for it is the grammatical structure of languages that makes them the most highly specialised system of human communication. Sometimes these linguists justified this focus by claiming that the ability to use language is innate and being so could not be observed until it became operational and manifested itself in the act of speaking.

Recent years have seen a change of emphasis. It has been recognized that observers who arrive on the scene only when a child is able to talk have missed a great deal of interesting earlier behaviour—behaviour in which he exchanges understandings with his parents and begins to discover meaning in the world around him. Today, psycholinguists in many parts of the world are providing evidence of the way an infant’s earliest uses of speech evolve from, and depend upon, ways of handling meaning that do not employ language.

Thus, Bruner’s observations of the behaviour of young babies with their mothers form part of a fascinating new chapter in language study. He suggests that shared looking and listening and shared activity, mother and baby, are key processes in the infant’s first attempts to make sense of the ‘meaningless flux’ that engulfs him. Between mother and child patterns of action are set up: to the child, these emerge, as it were, from the flux and become recognizable as they are repeated. As the mother follows the child’s direction of gaze, and the infant’s comes to follow the mother’s, objects are picked out for attention and routines of action embodying the objects become established. Expressive gestures and sounds and (from the mother) speech accompany the actions and accentuate their patterns. Some of the patterns are, as Bruner says, ‘in earnest’—that is to say they are concerned with ‘mothering’, with feeding habits, for example—but most of them are play. It is a characteristic role of the mother in these joint sequences to mark the completion, the climax—a hug at the end of peek-a-boo, perhaps, or a ‘Good boy!’ when the child successfully negotiates a mouthful of food.

The role of speech or speech-like noises in these sequences is strictly supplementary to the meaning already attached to the joint activity. Bruner suggests that conventional speech sounds, as spoken by the mother, are arrived at by the baby in gradual steps. He describes, for example, a mother and child who have established a routine of giving and receiving. When she gives the object—ball or rattle or whatever—to the child, the mother says, ‘There you are’, and she says ‘Thank you’ when the child gives it to her. After a while, the baby begins to add his noises to the exchange, but they are his own sounds and not recognizable words. Then at 9 months and 2 weeks, Bruner records, the baby says ‘Kew’ when the mother takes the object he has offered; a month later, he says ‘Kew’ whenever she offers him something; and two months after that he says ‘Look’ when handing to her and ‘Kew’ when receiving from her. Bruner points out that this piece
of learning prefigures a later process in which an infant learns to use 'I' and 'you' appropriately: I once heard a 22 month-old girl ask for some cake at the table by saying, 'You have some of dat over dere'—a stage that will be familiar to many parents.

As an infant grows older, the patterns of his playful activity will rely less upon the initiative of the mother. He will devise his own routines, and he may co-operate with other people he meets, even strangers. Here is an example from my own experience when I visited some friends last Christmas. Rowan, aged 22 months, was a grandchild of the house, staying there over Christmas with her parents. She was allowed to wait up to see the guests arrive, and though she didn't say a great deal she moved about without any shyness, quite capable of occupying herself. At one point she began to collect up any drink-mats that happened at that moment to have no drinks standing on them; she had four when she approached me. I held out my hand in invitation and she quite happily gave me all four. I handed them back one at a time and said 'There you are' or something of the sort with each. She gave them back to me in the same way, one at a time, without a word, and I said 'Thank you'. This time, however, I had no sooner received the last of them than she reached firmly out and took all four at once—and proceeded to hand them back to me one at a time. After several performances of this pattern, she began to initiate each repetition with the word 'Now!', spoken with emphasis in a tone that reminded me of a conjuror signalling the beginning of his next trick. This was repeated many times, with minor variations—I don't know how long she would have kept it up if her bedtime had not intervened: she readily exchanged this ploy for the more familiar one of piggy-backing off on her father's shoulders. Patterns, ploys, routines—it is certainly in these ways that behaviour escapes from randomness and unpredictability and takes on what we can only call 'meaning'. Furthermore, the one word Rowan used brought to a focus in an entirely appropriate way the nature of this particular routine: it was a bonus, heightening the meaning that was already present in the behaviour itself.

Bruner makes the important point that the routines devised by mother and child introduce and ring the changes upon basic elements of person-to-person and person-to-object interactions. Thus, there is an action, a doer or agent, sometimes the object of an action, the recipient, an instrument with which the action is performed; there is location, change of location and possession—a list that strongly reminds us of the lists compiled by linguists when they catalogue the grammatical cases that may be found in a language. Gordon Wells in Bristol uses similar categories and his systematic study of the speech (and speech contexts) of one-and-a-half and three-year-olds is based on a similar hypothesis. And Roger Brown, in his book A First Language: The Early Stages surveys a number of language acquisition studies center-
ing on Harvard which in general support this view. What is evident from these and other studies is that precursors of many of the features of adult grammar are to be found in children’s earliest utterances and in their pre-speech behaviour. It is not enough to explain that in the course of his evolution man has come to perceive and act in ways derived from the structure of the language he uses: we have also to put forward the alternative hypothesis that the structure of language has developed to reflect the nature of man’s cognitive processes, the ways in which he attends to and interprets experience. Or, in Bruner’s words, ‘language is a specialized and conventionalized extension of human co-operative action.’ The three researchers we have referred to, among others, relate sensori-motor behaviour, as Piaget has described it, to the meanings that pre-verbal or early verbal behaviour expresses or encodes. It is becoming evident that meanings established before language is achieved provide an entry for the child into verbal meanings, and thereby into language structure. Language moves within his grasp when he can begin to match meanings of words and verbal utterances with what he has already learnt about the world.

Home as a Language-workshop

Much has been said about the importance of the language a child experiences at home in infancy as a basis for his later social and mental development. From the studies we have just described we can justifiably claim that the good effect begins long before the child begins to use language—that the co-operative activities, in play or ‘in earnest’, provide an essential basis for all that follows. Other studies suggest that the give-and-take, the rough-and-tumble of language as it is unselfconsciously used for work and play in the home constitutes a better learning situation than would anything more deliberate. The home, in other words, provides a language workshop, an environment of language-in-use—often interrupted, often fragmentary—and it now seems likely that such experiences are more productive than any focus upon language, any attempt to give language instruction in the home would be.

Indicators of progress in the home are multiple: the average length of utterance becomes consistently longer, the structures more complex and more varied; more of the meanings in co-operative activity become verbalised; as we have noted, autonomous activity, the development of the child’s own ploys, increases with maturity, and in course of time he begins to assist his solitary activity by adding a verbal commentary, talking to himself about what he is doing; and, to conclude with a non-linguistic development, whereas a child derives meaning in the early stages by establishing pattern (cooperatively) in his own activities, he becomes more and more capable of perceiving patterns in other people’s behaviour, taking meaning from sequences
Talking

that he has not himself actively devised. The importance of the destination here, his ability as a mature adult to process the data of his senses, to interpret what he sees and hears, is something we have stressed in an earlier section.

The earliest form of speech to be established is conversational exchange: the child joins in the family conversation that has enveloped him from his earliest days. Though some of this conversation will consist of an expression of wants and needs, most of it will be by way of comment: in Susanne Langer’s words, ‘Young children learn to speak . . . by constantly using words to bring things into their minds, not into their hands.’ It is a characteristic achievement of the human race that we store representations of the world as we encounter it and respond to immediate experience in the light of past experience, that is, in the light of our stored representation, our ‘world picture’. The various ways of handling meaning that we have already considered are, in fact, modes of representation, and among those modes language comes to play a key role as an organising instrument. As we talk about experiences, we further shape and interpret them (and this, again, is normally a co-operative undertaking) and it is in this form that we store them. What is, looking backward, a storehouse of an individual’s experience is, looking forward, a body of expectations as to what may yet happen to him. From that body of expectations he draws, in accordance with the immediate environment to which he is attending, knowledge of the world which will enable him to make sense of the present and, when necessary, keep a prudent eye on the future.

Young children, however fluently they may talk, are in one sense poor conversationalists, since they are comparatively unable to put themselves into somebody else’s shoes and see the world from their point of view. In course of time and experience, they become better able to take account of a listener’s needs and expectations at the same time as they are acquiring a greater ability to use the words we use and to mean by them what we mean, and gaining control of a greater variety of language structures.

Most children, after conversing for something under a year, discover another function for language, one I have briefly referred to above. They talk to themselves about what they are doing. Vygotsky and Luria, Russian psychologists, have claimed that this running commentary has a very important purpose: it is in fact the young child’s way of thinking out answers to the problems that face him in solitary activity. When first produced, the running commentary takes the forms and intonation patterns of the child’s conversational speech, but as time goes on the forms adapt to this different function. The commentary (‘speech for oneself’, Vygotsky called it) becomes abbreviated or fragmentary and may show an idiosyncratic use of words, the use of ‘private meanings’. Its evolution, that is to say, is essentially
in the opposite direction to that of conversational speech. Since the commentary is not spoken to be understood by another person but to serve the speaker’s own purposes, this relaxing of the rules and conventions of language may in fact be an advantage. It was Vygotsky’s contention that this function became progressively ‘internalised’, and when, by the age of six or seven the running commentary no longer occurs, it is because outward speech has turned into ‘inner speech’ or verbal thought. On this hypothesis, speech in infancy is a foundation upon which later thinking is built.

We have looked briefly at the importance of play in the co-operative activities of mothers and babies, and we must note now some of the ways in which young children will play with language. It is in the nature of play as an activity that it tends to focus attention upon the activity itself rather than upon anything to be gained by doing it. For example, most children reach the final stage of being able to walk under stimulus of a desire to get from where they are to somewhere else: walking is the means, the instrument. But once they have mastered the art of walking they begin to ‘play’ with that activity: focusing upon the activity, they elaborate the movements in a variety of ways: that is to say, they dance—a pleasurable occupation not concerned with getting from here to there. Commenting upon mothers’ and babies’ co-operative activities, Bruner notes that ‘the rituals of play become the objects of attention, rather than being instrumental to something else’ and underlines the value of this: ‘Play has the effect of drawing the child’s attention to communication itself, and to the structure of the acts in which communication is taking place.’11 Play of this kind with language may occur spontaneously as part of a conversation or breaking into a running commentary, or in isolation. The story is told of a psychologist’s son who danced up to his father (who was with a group of colleagues) to the chant of ‘Maximum capacity! Maximum Capacity!’ Some children go in for a more extended and deliberate form of playful activity which bears the nature of ‘a performance’. It is consistent and characteristic enough to be reckoned a third kind of talk in the home, alongside conversation and the running commentary. The speech is often delivered in a kind of rhythmic sing-song, and may be accompanied by a dance-like walking up and down. I call it ‘the spiel’. Here is a brief extract from the spiel of a three-year-old. She has just finished her dinner, as her interpolation indicates: it shows also that she recognizes what she is doing as an ‘it’, a performance:

There was a little girl called May
and she had some dollies—
and the weeds were growing in the ground—
and they made a little nest out of sticks
for another little birdie up in the trees
and they climbed up the tree—
and the weeds were growing in the ground
(I can do it much better if there's some food in my tum!) . . . 

Later examples of such performances are likely to be more straightforwardly narrative in form. I have a tape of a five-year-old boy who spins a long breathless yarn about motor-bicycles and racing cars, talking at great speed to the very last words, 'And that is the end of my story what I told.'

Finally I must refer to a fourth kind of talk, the dramatic talk of make-believe play. In its earliest stages it is likely to be a monologue, played out in a variety of voices, and with the help of one or more dolls, teddy-bears, toy animals or whatever. When the child is at an age to co-operate with other children, the activity becomes a joint one, and the dolls and teddy-bears are likely to fade out of the picture. In talk of this kind the context, the situation is invoked: it is therefore a more accessible form of speech than story-telling, where the situation has to be put into words.

Each of these forms of talk embodies its own kind of learning, capable of development into distinctive adult activities; in each, in various ways and to varying degrees, verbalised meanings are supported by intended and unintended meanings derived through the senses from the situation shared by speaker and listeners. The first two forms are, on balance, concerned with the organisation of the objective aspects of our experience, the 'thingness of things'; the third and fourth—those related to play—are concerned with the organisation of the subjective aspects of our experience, the 'me-ness of things'. Both aspects have their sophisticated linguistic forms of expression in adult society; it is important that we concern ourselves with both in school.

The use of language in the pre-school years yields an enormous dividend to the child, a dividend in terms of the evolution from more or less helpless infancy to the self-possessed status of a five-year-old. Here in the home, then, there is a direct means-end tie-up between speech and what it achieves for the speaker. Can we preserve that direct relationship throughout the years of schooling?

References

8. Courtney B. Cazden, *Child Language and Education*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972, p. 128. Cazden quotes from an earlier work (Brown, Cazden and Bellugi, "The child’s grammar from I to III" in J. P. Hill, ed., *1967 Minnesota symposium on child psychology*, University of Minnesota Press, 1969): "We suspect that the changes sentences undergo as they shuttle between persons in conversation are . . . the data that most clearly expose the underlying structure of language."
Notes on a Working Hypothesis about Writing

The speech of children in their infancy has a ‘here-and-now’ quality about it. They make comments, ask questions and make demands relating to the events going on around them and the people and objects involved in those events. Thereafter, a major dimension of their linguistic growth lies in their increasing ability to use language at further and further remove from the immediate context, the ‘here and now’ in which they speak. This does not mean, of course, that they abandon one form of language in favour of another as they might abandon one pair of shoes when they needed a bigger one. As adults we continue to rely on ‘context-bound’ speech as the currency of our everyday exchanges with the people we meet. “Development” lies in a bifurcation, an ability to do two things with language where previously we could do one.

Adding mastery of the written language to mastery of the spoken reflects one aspect of this development from context-bound to context-free utterance. A written communication—transmitted here and now for reception elsewhere, later—must of necessity be put into terms that can survive that transplantation. But again, this does not mean that all speech is context-bound and all writing context-free; simply that there will be an overall tendency in that direction.

Being context-bound (relying heavily for its interpretation upon the situation in which it is uttered) is one of the characteristics of ‘expressive language’ as a number of linguists have defined it. But it is only one part of that definition. In our Schools Council Writing Research Project we distinguished three major functions for writing and labelled them ‘Transactional’, ‘Expressive’ and ‘Poetic’. We described the expressive as utterance that relies on an interest in the speaker (or writer) as well as in what he has to say about the world. We called it an utterance that ‘is not projected very far from the speaker’—a communi-

cation between intimates rather than a public speech or a letter to a stranger. As such, it will tend to carry information about the speaker as well as conveying his message about the world; revealing, for example, the speaker's attitude towards his message, towards his listener and towards his present state of mind, himself. Expressive forms of speech capitalize on the fact that both speaker and listener are present: expressive writing simulates that co-presence, the writer invoking the presence of the reader as he writes, the reader invoking the presence of the writer as he reads.

Our experience of chatting with people we know well in a relaxed and loosely structured way is thus a major resource we draw upon when we write expressively. And whether we write or speak, expressive language is associated with a relationship of mutual confidence, trust, and is therefore a form of discourse that encourages us to take risks, to try out ideas we are not sure of, in a way we would not dare to do in, say making a public speech. In other words, expressive language (as a kind of bonus) is a form that favours exploration, discovery, learning.

Transactional language is the medium of a verbal transaction, a means of getting something done through language—whether it be asking or giving information, instructing or persuading. Poetic language, in its fully developed form, is the language of literature—stories, poems, plays. We saw it as language not for doing something but for making something, a verbal object; and it seemed to us that the child who writes a fictional or autobiographical narrative, giving shape to real or imagined experiences, should be seen as performing at his untutored level essentially the same task as the novelist or poet achieves at a higher level, in a more finely organised way.

It was the main purpose of our publication, *The Development of Writing Abilities*, 11–18, to describe those categories (among others). But in addition to describing them we set up a developmental hypothesis, the hypothesis that expressive writing should be regarded as a matrix from which the other two categories would develop. That is to say, expressive writing might be seen as a beginner's all-purpose instrument; and 'learning to write' would involve the progressive evolution both of the other two forms, transactional and poetic, and of the mature forms of expressive writing that we continue to use in personal letters and the like. It should be noted that this hypothesis is not a part of the conceptual framework we evolved, the description of the function categories, but a broad hypothesis about the kinds of distribution of function categories that might occur. We speculated that distribution patterns might reveal 'routes of development' in writing ability and that one route was likely to be a more successful one than others. The reasoning behind this speculation is simple enough, though a full spelling out of the stages begins to look complicated:
1. A great many children who cannot yet write are able to converse fluently in favourable conditions.
2. Those conditions include a relaxed situation, and someone they know and trust who will be receptive to what they say.
3. The speech in which they will be fluent in such situations will be expressive speech as we have defined it.
4. Expressive writing (as we have defined it) is the form of writing that most nearly resembles expressive speech.
5. At the stage when they first try their hands at writing, most children have rich language resources, in terms of syntax and vocabulary, but they are with few exceptions spoken language resources. If they are to become writers, they have to adapt these resources to the new demands of writing: the more the written forms resemble spoken forms at their command, the easier the transition is likely to be.
6. ‘Dissociation’ in the special sense of ‘successive differentiation’ is familiar enough as a mode of learning. Young writers who begin by employing an all-purpose expressive writing might by a process of dissociation arrive at differentiated forms of discourse as they meet and solve the range of problems presented by different kinds of writing tasks. (The slogan, ‘Learn to write by writing’ must imply some such procedure.)
7. Stress must here be laid upon what the writer is reading, or having read to him; in other words on written ‘models’. Progress is likely to depend upon the degree to which he is internalising the forms of a variety of written discourse, and his ability, in the process of writing, to ‘shuttle’ between these new resources and his consolidated spoken resources.

That brings us to first base, but an analysis in terms of learning in general (not learning to write) is an essential part of our hypothesis. Thus:

8. A learner meeting a new concept needs to see its relevance to what he already knows (what he knows from experience as well as what he has learnt from formulations previously met). Since learners vary as to their prior experience and knowledge, they cannot be appropriately helped (by teacher or other learners) to make these links unless they have some opportunity to verbalise their experience etc.
9. For these reasons, talk has a heuristic role to play, and expressive talk (being relaxed talk, relatively free from fear of making errors) is likely to be more strongly heuristic than, for example, the more formal exchange of teacher question and student answer with a whole class as audience. But (a) writing, as premeditated utterance, may have the effect of sharpening the process of seeking
relevance, as well as harvesting for the writer connections first explored in speech, his own and other people's. And (b) writing puts the onus for effort on each member of the class. Hence the hypothesis that expressive writing has an important role to play in the initial stage of grappling with new concepts.

10. If the dissociation process (as we described it above) works according to hypothesis, the learner will be acquiring mastery of informative writing at the same time as he succeeds in more effectively organising his understanding of the concepts he is writing about. This dual achievement should enable him increasingly to go through the exploratory stages of grappling with new ideas without committing those stages to writing. And at the same time the teacher may recognize that there is less and less need for him to assist in those exploratory stages or monitor them, hence less and less call for expressive writing. This would be reflected in a distribution of function categories that showed (or intended to show, for there would be difficulties of interpretation) a transference of activity in writing from expressive forms to informative ones as learners become more mature.

That might be said to bring us to second base, though it is a minimal statement and many interesting ramifications could be added. To take one example:

11. Our characterisation of learning in (8) above is a pretty traditional and conservative one—that of the learner who is introduced to new concepts. We have talked to science teachers who believe that one of their first tasks is to assist learners to distil facts from their own first-hand experience—as a necessary foundation for a learning career in which they must take many facts on trust from the reported experiences of other people. They therefore see a special virtue in expressive writing in that it will tend to record in one and the same account both the experiences and the facts being drawn from them. By this means the teacher is allowed to perceive and assist the act of learning, that of sorting experience from fact in order to select and organise the facts. It is not only at the earliest stages that 'learning science' may involve an open-minded contemplation of some 'bit of the world' (a plant, a soil sample, a crystal or whatever) so that the learner may decide for himself what facts need to be formulated in order to solve a specific problem; and return for more focussed looking at the object in the light of the facts so formulated. Expressive talk and writing are suitable modes for verbalising the initial process, the open-ended contemplation, and informative writing a suitable mode for formulating the appropriate facts. It will be obvious, I
think, that the teacher's skill in selecting a sequence of problems to be solved will be directed to ensuring that the particular facts required for the solution of each build up to a coherent study of a scientific principle or concept, and beyond that to a coherent study of a particular branch of science. There is more to be said about science teaching in relation to the broad hypothesis we are considering, but it must await its turn.

In (6) to (11) above we have looked at the learning we associate with the expressive/transactional spectrum of the function categories. The development from expressive to poetic is associated, in our view, with a learning process, but one of a different kind (perhaps one that is not often thought of as 'learning'). This is our next concern:

12. Most children who have had the opportunity will like to listen to stories, read or told, and will frequently tell stories of their own making. There is in fact some evidence that written stories constitute the only justification some children can accept for the existence of a written form of language.

13. Most children who have the encouragement of an interested listener will narrate some of their own experiences.

14. Narrative versions of our own experience are compositions and as such subject to 'embellishment'; fictional stories often display, however indirectly, aspects of the writer's own experience. Thus 'autobiographical/fictional narrative' might be seen as a continuum.

15. When we talk about our own experiences, I believe we usually do so in a way that suggests we want our listener to share the feelings we ourselves have about those experiences—to sympathise with us when we feel we were hardly done by, to admire when we are proud of our achievements, etc. This is consistent with the explanation D. W. Harding has given of gossip about events and of fictional narratives, both of which he includes under the term 'imaginary spectatorship'. He suggests that they constitute 'detached evaluative responses' to experience or to the possibilities of experience; and he associates our engagement in such activity with the maintenance of our value systems. In offering evaluations we are looking for corroboration, since to have our value systems 'sanctioned' by fellow members of our society constitutes a 'basic social satisfaction'.

16. These purposes seem to us to differ in important ways from the purposes of informing, persuading, theorising, etc. that are the typical activities of transactional discourse. We see them as requiring a different kind of discourse, one organised on quite different principles. The existence at the most developed end of this
spectrum of a work of literature supplies a clue as to the nature of this alternative organisation; cutting many corners, we have described it as the ‘construction of a verbal object’. The change from expressive narrative (gossip about events) to poetic narratives (verbal objects) is therefore seen as one of increasing organisation-for-unity. ‘Organisation’ may include the ordered disposition of sounds, words, word-meanings, sentences, events, feelings, thoughts, images.

17. The move from speech to writing in this spectrum (paralleling that described in (9) above) will allow the shaping towards unity to be carried out in a premeditated way that is impossible in ordinary speech situations. (It is interesting to notice that speech may achieve poetic form when it occurs in a situation that is highly charged emotionally.)

18. While the fully developed written outcomes of work in history, geography, social studies, science will always be transactional forms of discourse, there are initial stages when writing in the expressive/poetic spectrum may be valuable from time to time. ‘Imagine you are a boy or girl in Roman Britain and describe your experiences’ has been a familiar assignment in history lessons, and if some geographical region or some social milieu be substituted for ‘Roman Britain’, a similar task will have appeared in a good many geography and social studies lessons. The value of such tasks, as we interpret the matter, lies in encouraging students to empathize with the human elements in the topic under study, and while inaccurate or inadequate knowledge of the facts may disable the effort, the primary effort does not lie in getting the facts right but in what can be constructed within the factual framework. It is possible that even in science lessons this move towards the poetic could fulfils a purpose: commenting on the study of biology, Michael Polanyi has said, “our understanding of living beings involves at all levels a measure of indwelling; our interest in life is always convivial.”

19. A further item needs to be added to our analysis, and it brings us to fourth base—and home. It has been pointed out that the ease with which in expressive language we move from the transactional side of the borderline to the poetic, and back again, gives to that form of discourse a flexibility which serves its particular purposes of exploring and developing interpersonal relationships. Expressive writing for such purposes is not a form of discourse transitional to any other form; its development throughout the years of schooling will be to mature forms of expressive writing.

Since the publication of our report, a number of surveys have been carried out in terms of our function categories, some in England,
some in Australia, some in Canada and some in U.S.A. What they indicate is that expressive writing is very little encouraged in most schools, far too little for there to be any evidence regarding our hypothesis that expressive writing is the best starting point for writing in any of the function categories. We hold to our conviction that the quality of learning could be improved if fuller use were made of the heuristic potential of expressive writing. The alternative hypothesis to which teachers must be working might be phrased as follows: "If you limp around long enough in somebody else's language you may eventually learn to walk in it."

References

1. I owe acknowledgements here to an unpublished paper (1972) by Peter Medway of the Schools Council Development Project on Writing across the Curriculum.


When I think of the variety of things we do in the course of a day and the vastly greater variety of things that are going on all about us I find myself bedazzled. Some of the things we do we choose to do, in others we seem to have no choice: and to say that is, I suppose, to comment on two ways in which the things we do are related to the things that go on around us. We are accustomed to thinking of an act, or an event, as taking place in a context, the context being a kind of halo that surrounds the event. But then we have to see that life is like a pit full of snakes—anything may be seen as part of the context to something else, and none of it stays still for a moment. Yet in the multiple interactions that make up this flux we constantly manage somehow (if I may switch my metaphor) to bring our argosies home to port; individually, yes, but more importantly, as a partnership or a team or a family. How does it work?

Perhaps the word ‘enterprise’ is a useful one to bring in—a course of action directed towards some desirable end. During a single day we might contribute to or carry to completion a number of enterprises, some long term, some short term. If I say we ride an enterprise as though it were some bucking bronco, that’s one way of putting it—but makes it sound too violent, as though everything were always only just under control. If I say we constantly, every waking moment, process the data of our senses and pursue some appropriate enterprise in the light of our findings—that sounds far too deliberate and methodical, perhaps even mechanistic.

The fact that an enterprise on my part is directed towards some end that seems desirable to me is an important part of the idea: the motive for our data-processing is normally, directly or indirectly, a glimpse of some possibility ahead. We are, as it were, drawn on by the future: only in apathy or despair are we driven on by the past. Though processing the data of experience is a skill or an art we must each of us learn, I believe a poor performance at it is more often due to a lack of incentive than to a lack of skill. Putting it crudely, we ‘make some-

thing of experience’ above all in order to ‘make something out of it’—either for ourselves or for someone we regard for the moment as ‘one of us’.

**Reading the Game**

Take as an example this moment in a football match when the centre-half, say of the home team, passes the ball out to the left wing. Every player on the field is interpreting that action as an item in a series of events in the course of being performed. It means something to him (and enables him to respond) insofar as he is able to see it as part of a series and not an isolated act. To do this he ‘reads’ the immediate context, the situation—the position of all the relevant players on either side, their direction of movement, anything he knows of their capabilities and weaknesses and temperaments. The sequence of moves on the field that led up to this particular action is another aspect of context. More broadly still, the context includes such things as any deliberate strategies discussed and practised in training; strategies of the opposing side as they are known from experience or reputation; what the score stands at, and, behind that, the status and reputation of each team; what the player knows about and expects of himself. Each player must read the signs, process the data, in order to know what to expect and so be in a position to take action himself. And ‘knowing what to expect’ is rarely as simple as that may sound: it ordinarily involves entertaining many possibilities and assessing their comparative likelihood.

The example puts a premium on processing the data of our senses—what we directly perceive around us—and it is right that the emphasis should lie there. However, had we chosen to look in, not on the match itself, but on a training session on the field, we should probably have found that all that took place was supported by a running commentary of speech. The data a player had then to process would have included the things he was told as well as the things he saw. And the two, the speech and the action, would have been locked into one. The speech alone—heard later on a tape-recorder, perhaps—would have been virtually meaningless; and likewise the value to the players of what they did and were done to (the point in fact of the whole activity) would have been lost if there had been no speaking. There would, of course, be training sessions of another kind (as for example briefing before the match) when all the data being offered and processed took the form of speech.

**De-briefing**

Thus, to go back to the match, when the players interpreted a move in the game by placing it in its full context, a considerable part of that context consisted in the outcomes of processing other people’s
talk—information, in other words, which they had acquired by being told. Further, it is important to note here in passing a point we shall return to—and that is the notion that a man’s own speaking is one of the principal ways in which he processes data of all kinds. What in the jargon is called a ‘de-briefing session’—the post mortem after a match—serves as a good example of how we may talk our way to a better understanding of past experiences.

We referred, in speaking of the training session, to the way speech may be interlocked with action. A great deal of our speech is of this kind: linguists seem to prefer furniture-removers to footballers as illustration of it (‘Up a bit, Alf! Steady! To your left. Mind the lamp, O.K., towards me.’). Infants who have been busy processors of the data of their senses for a couple of years or so readily handle this second source of information once they have mastered the code; from then on it is one of the directions of their development that they learn to interpret, and to originate, speech at greater and greater remove from action. Our example has crudely illustrated what we may now call three phases in the processing of data. During the football match the data offered took the form of action without speech; during the training session on the field it was action-cum-speech; and at the briefing session it was speech divorced from action.

A last word to finish off the football match: if the centre-half aimed accurately and if the outside-left formed appropriate expectations and made an appropriate response, then we may suppose that a winning goal was scored. And if the referee then blew for the finish, one more argosy was brought home to port. And the whole incident has brought us to a proper beginning: we are committed to a consideration of reading. And whoever heard of a practising footballer who spent no time reading about the game, whether it was the book of rules or the match reports?

Which is to indicate that our fourth stage of data processing is the reading of the written language. It follows logically from stage three (interpreting speech divorced from action), because the written language by its nature takes the disjunction of language from action a step further. A spoken utterance belongs to a moment and goes by with events. (If we record it and replay the recording we resurrect a moment of the past.) A written utterance has no such simple relation to time. Perhaps the only constant in a multiplicity of time relations is that a piece of writing is normally ‘transmitted’ at one time for ‘reception’ at a later one. (And there are exceptions to that generalisation, as when we use writing to ‘talk to’ a deaf person.)

The break with the stream of time has important consequences for the data processing task. Interpreting data, we have suggested, involves seeing an item not in isolation but in context. A speaker and a listener normally share the immediate context—the situation in which
the words are uttered—as well as a great deal more in the way of shared knowledge and shared experience. If the talk is by long-distance telephone, the domestic, national and world situations of speaker and listener (insofar as they are relevant and known to both) represent a shared context that is the background to all that is said. But if I post a letter to you this evening and then die in the night, any assumptions you might make about a shared context will be sharply dislocated.

**Generating Expectations**

As a simple summary of what we have said so far, we might plot a child’s progress diagrammatically in this way:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>action without speech</th>
<th>action-cum-speech</th>
<th>speech divorced from action</th>
<th>reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 year old</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 year old</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 year old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5-8 yr old</td>
<td></td>
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I remember being told of an experiment that was carried out years ago, I believe in Daniel Jones’s phonetics laboratory at University College, London. A recording of a conversation between two people was played to a group of students, but it was so distorted a recording that they could not understand a word of what was said. They were then told that the conversation had taken place in a tailor’s shop between a customer and a fitter. Armed with this knowledge, this very general expectation, they were able, on a second hearing, to make out quite a lot of the conversation. Very broad or general aspects of the context in which an utterance is made may be a powerful influence on our ability to interpret it; and this for the simple reason that they rule out so much. They limit the range of possibilities, narrow the area of experience we have to scan in order to pick up the sense of what is said. The process of listening or reading, then, is best understood as one of generating expectations as to what a speaker or writer might mean, and selecting from those expectations to match what we hear or what we see on the page.

There was a mode of communication used in the Second World War by which a base station could keep in touch with isolated outposts able to carry only light signalling equipment. The base station transmitted a powerful ‘carrier wave’ and the outpost sent out a weak signal which was enough to ‘modulate’ the carrier wave; the base station received back its own carrier wave thus modulated, and read the message. This is the model we want for reading: no transmission, no message; no expectations, no meaning.

However, the reading is part of a larger picture, as we have already suggested. We constantly generate expectations relating to our
many enterprises; one of these enterprises may take us to a book to find out something we need to know. Or, at other times, the book may be a chance encounter or somebody else's prescription. In any case, what we find on the page will meet, take up and modify some of our expectations. Our other intentions, meanwhile, will wait in the wings.

Let us say we take up a book because it has been recommended to us, or because the author is familiar, or because the title suggests that it will tell us what we need to know; and the appearance of the book itself indicates that it is not too long, the type is not too small, the words are not too difficult for us. All these are a part of the expectations active in us as we approach the reading: and what we read will proceed to change the pattern of our expectations. It is likely that the first few sentences we read will make the sharpest modifications of all. The book may quickly prove, for example, not to be the kind we took it for. Where, on the contrary, we find it immediately rewarding and worth going on with, this is likely to be because the words have thrown new light upon notions that formed part of the expectations we brought to the reading. The focus of our attention is not upon the words as we read them, but upon a pattern of meaning. We do not, as we read, add word meaning to word meaning—like watching coaches come out of a tunnel; rather it is like watching a photographic negative in a developing-dish, a shadowy outline that becomes etched in with more of the detail as we proceed. The finished picture represents a transformation, brought about by the text-as-we-have-interpreted-it—a transformation of our initial expectations.

It is this emergent pattern, this set of expectations undergoing modification, that enables us to construe word meanings right as we read. If we come to an unfamiliar word we 'jump the gap' by supplying a meaning from our expectations, and read on. If the meaning we supplied for a key word was an altogether mistaken one, there will develop an increasing mis-match between what we expect and what we find. The words on the page will no longer be etching in the details of an emerging pattern, but confusion or puzzlement will spread like a stain on the negative. What we normally do then is to go back in the text to a point where all was going well, and try again. When we arrive at and identify the point of our misconstruing, we may simply make another guess and try that one out, or we may seek help—from an expert, say, or from a dictionary.

This view of the process may help to explain why we sometimes find it worthwhile to read a book for a second time. Most of us know books (usually on subjects we are in the process of trying to master) which have yielded vastly more on a second reading. What we have gleaned from the first reading, especially in highly general ways, has provided us with a more appropriate set of expectations, a better framework for the detail.
I. A. Richards put us into this way of thinking years ago. In a little book called *How to Read a Page* he examines the difficulties an adult might encounter in trying to read a complicated text, and the final advice he comes up with is, 'Read it as though it made sense'. I remember thinking when I first read this that it was little comfort for a teacher struggling to help a child over his initial reading difficulties. But much more recently I have come across an account by a research worker of the way a five-year-old had taught himself to read. Jane Torrey visited John, child of a black working-class family, in his home and watched him while he read to her:

"John's phonic knowledge and his word attack skills were strictly subordinate to the task of reading what is said. I interpreted his intonation patterns in reading to signify that he understood that strings of printed symbols represented language as it is spoken, not a series of sounds or words. When he did not understand what he was reading, he slurred over it, skipped words, converted it into something that was normal for him to say or just rejected the task of reading it. He never did anything remotely like sounding letter by letter a sequence that wasn't a word he knew or calling word by word a sentence whose meaning escaped him. *He read as though he always expected it to say something understandable.*" (My italics)

As I now see it, the point Richards was making, and the strategy John was operating, are support for the idea that in reading we do not focus upon the words beneath our noses: we look *through* the words in order to focus upon the meaning that emerges from them. And there are encouraging signs that teachers of reading today are more and more basing their methods on the strategies of successful readers rather than on the pitfalls encountered by the poor reader.

In another of his books (*The Philosophy of Rhetoric*), Richards makes an interesting point about the nature of word meanings. He suggests that the meaning of a word in a sustained utterance is of a different order from the meaning of an utterance. A word is not to be regarded as a self-contained unit of meaning which, taken with other word meanings, builds the meaning of an utterance. Rather, a word has potential contributory meaning and what it finally does contribute to a particular text will be the resultant of an interaction in the reader's mind. Richards saw two interacting elements, the *literary context* of a word (the other words with which it keeps company in a particular text) and its *determinative context* (the reader's accumulated experience of the word in previous contexts, his sense of the various meanings it has contributed to utterances in which he has met it before). The determinative context thus presents a reader with a range of possible contributory meanings; he makes a choice from this range in the
light of the literary context—the sentence, paragraph, chapter that in the present instance contains it. For the reader this is an act of interpretation, and Richards points out that he may do it badly by paying too much attention to either of the elements and not enough to the other.

When, in his poem *East Coker*, T. S. Eliot wrote of 'a raid on the inarticulate' as a way of describing what a poet does when he writes a poem, he was using the word 'inarticulate' in a new and unfamiliar way and no dictionary in existence at the time would have listed what he meant by it. For a dictionary can do no more than list what a word has been used to mean in the past, and then only, as a rule, the focal or commonest uses. What Eliot means here by 'the inarticulate', put prosaically, must be something like 'all that has never yet been put into words'. Our determinative contexts for 'inarticulate' would probably focus upon a general sense of 'unable to speak', 'dumb'. The literary context then sets a problem by putting 'the' before 'inarticulate' and prods us into some such analogy as that with 'poor' meaning 'having too little money' alongside 'the poor' meaning the mass—the collective category—of those who have too little money. But what sense can we make of 'a raid on the mass of those who cannot speak'? We are rescued, in all probability, by another determinative context, a recollection of some such phrase as 'inarticulate sorrow' in the sense of silent, unexpressed sorrow. So we arrive at the resultant, 'a raid on the body of all that has never yet been put into words'.

Richards' determinative contexts, then, are one particular example of the way expectations drawn from past experience are generated and matched with what we read; and, as we have seen, in the absence of any determinative contexts, any knowledge from past experience of what meanings a word may contribute, we leap the gap, supply a probable meaning, and try it out as we read on. We must add that where the gap is appropriately filled by these means we are in fact setting up our first determinative context for the unfamiliar word, and that this is the normal means by which we extend our mastery of word meanings. (Don't be put off by the literary nature of my example; similar processes are at work when I try to understand what the teenager meant by calling something 'wild', or when the immigrant meets a word that is thoroughly familiar in our culture, but not in his.)

These ideas lie at the heart of a comparatively recent breakthrough in the methods of teaching initial reading, a movement associated with the names of Kenneth Goodman in U.S.A. and Frank Smith in Canada. Goodman calls one of his articles, "Reading: A Psycholinguistic Guessing Game". The guessing is, of course, the supplying of meaning from the reader's expectations in accordance with the emerging meaning of the passage and as confirmed by the marks he sees on the page. He makes the point that this promising strategy is
discouraged by teachers who regard reading as a very precise process involving detailed identification of every mark on the page. Reading should rather be seen as the gaining and using of meaning, and the most effective way of achieving this is to develop meaningful expectations and use minimal visual cues to confirm or disconfirm those expectations: in other words, good-enough guessing is the right approach. (There is a story current around Melbourne of a teacher in a one-teacher country school who knitted her way through her day's work. When a pupil looked up from his reading to say, 'Please Miss, what does so-and-so mean?', she would reply, 'Say Moses and read on'. In fact, of course, this would only work when the child successfully construed the missing word and so set up an appropriate 'determinative context': where he failed, the teacher would need to drop her knitting and help him.)

The main point I have been making here is that reading should be seen as an aspect of our general strategy for processing information. We continue to require, of course, all four aspects of the process (as set out in the diagram on page 133), and we shall have simple as well as complex problems offered in each—a fact which my serial ordering must not be allowed to obscure. (We may for example have no difficulty in processing the data offered by the word 'Danger' on a signboard, but considerable difficulty in perceiving directly what it is in the situation that threatens us.) Since reading represents the least accessible form of data, it is important to remember that it relies upon information gathered by prior data-processing of any or every type; hence that reading difficulties may be solved by regressing to earlier modes—by conversation about the text, for example, or by direct sense experiences of the events or objects referred to in the written text, where this is possible. Making sense of a text is part and parcel of the larger task of making sense of the world in general. We make a grave mistake if we treat a child's difficulties in reading in sole regard to the reading task.

The whole enterprise of 'making sense of the world in general' is kept in movement by expectations, by glimpses of possibilities ahead. Any teacher who can discover what is, or with his help could become, a glimpse of something ahead in a child's life worth making for—intellectual, social, moral, constructive, artistic or simply playful, but ahead and worth aiming at—is for that child a good teacher and a good teacher of reading.

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Shaping at the Point of Utterance

The two words, 'spontaneity' and 'invention' as we ordinarily use them must surely have something in common: an element of surprise, not only for those who encounter and respond to the act or expression, but also for those who originate it. I want to suggest here that rhetoricians, in their current concern for successive drafts and revision processes in composing, may be underestimating the importance of 'shaping at the point of utterance', or the value of spontaneous inventiveness. It is my claim, in fact, that a better understanding of how a writer shapes at the point of utterance might make a major contribution to our understanding of invention in rhetoric.

In all normal speech we do, almost of necessity, shape as we utter. Syntactically, we launch into a sentence and hope somehow to reach closure. We had a Director at the Institute of Education where I once worked who was a very powerful speaker, but also a great 'um'-er and 'ah'-er. As you listened to him it would go something like this: "It seems to me, Mr. Chairman—ah—in spite of the difficulties Professor X has raised—ah—that what we most need—ah—in the present circumstances—ah—and—ah—at this moment in time—ah—in some way to bring to a conclusion this intolerably long sentence." Listening, we could tell precisely at what point he foresaw his total structure, the point at which he ‘took it on the run’.

What is not so easily demonstrated is that the shaping as we speak applies not only to syntactic but also to semantic choices. When we start to speak, we push the boat out and trust it will come to shore somewhere—not anywhere, which would be tantamount to losing our way, but somewhere that constitutes a stage on a purposeful journey. To embark on a conversational utterance is to take on a certain responsibility, to stake a claim that calls for justification: and perhaps it is the social pressure on the speaker to justify his claim that gives talk an edge over silent brooding as a problem-solving procedure. Heinrich

Reprinted from Reinventing the Rhetorical Tradition, edited by Aviva Freedman and Ian Pringle (Conway, AR: L & S Books, for the Canadian Council of Teachers of English, 1980), copyright by the Canadian Council of Teachers of English and reprinted by permission.
Von Kleist, the early 19th Century German writer, puts this point boldly in an essay he called, “On the gradual fabrication of thought while speaking”: “Whenever you seek to know something and cannot find it out by meditation, I would advise you to talk it over with the first person you meet. He need not be especially brilliant, and I do not suggest that you question him, no: tell him about it. . . . Often, while at my desk working, I search for the best approach to some involved problem. I usually stare into my lamp, the point of optimum brightness, while striving with utmost concentration to enlighten myself. . . . And the remarkable thing is that if I talk about it with my sister, who is working in the same room, I suddenly realize things which hours of brooding had perhaps been unable to yield. . . . Because I do start with some sort of dark notion remotely related to what I am looking for, my mind, if it has set out boldly enough, and being pressed to complete what it has begun, shapes that muddled area into a form of new-minted clarity, even while my talking progresses.” As teachers, we are likely to have similar evidence from much nearer home: how often have we had a student come to us with his problem, and in the course of verbalising what that problem is reach a solution with no help from us.

Then what about writing? First it must be said that students of invention in writing cannot afford to rule out of court evidence regarding invention in speech: there must be some carry-over from expression in the one medium to expression in the other. Shaping at the point of utterance is familiar enough in the way young children will spin their yarns to entertain an adult who is willing to provide an audience. (A ten-minute tape-recorded performance by a five year old boy winds up: “So he had ten thousand pounds, so everyone loved him in the world. He buy—he buyed a very fast racing car, he buyed a magic wand, he buyed everything he loved, and that’s the end of my story what I told you.” A five-year-old sense of closure!) There is ample evidence that spontaneous invention of this kind survives, and may even appear to profit from, the process of dictating, where parent or teacher writes down what a child composes orally. That it is seriously inhibited by the slowing down of production when the child produces his own written script is undeniable. But it is my argument that successful writers adapt that inventiveness and continue to rely on it rather than switching to some different mode of operating. Once a writer’s words appear on the page, I believe they act primarily as a stimulus to continuing—to further writing, that is—and not primarily as a stimulus to re-writing. Our experiments in writing without being able to see what we had written suggested that the movements of the pen capture the movement of our thinking, and it is a serious obstacle to further composition not to be able to re-read, to get ‘into the tram-
lines’ again. An eight year old Newcastle schoolboy wrote about his own writing processes: “It just comes into your head, it’s not like thinking, it’s just there. When you get stuck you just read it through and the next bit is there, it just comes to you.” I think many teachers might regard the outcome of such a process as mere ‘fluency’, mere verbal facility, and not the sort of writing they want to encourage. It is my argument that highly effective writing may be produced in just that spontaneous manner, and that the best treatment for empty verbalism will rarely be a course of successive draft making.

“It just comes into your head, it’s not like thinking”: it seems that Barrett Mandel would agree with the eight-year-old, for he calls his recent article on writing, “Losing one’s Mind: Learning to Read, Write and Edit”. I quote his views here because they are in part an attempt to make room for the process of shaping at the point of utterance. He sets out the three steps that occur in his own writing process: “(1) I have an idea about something I want to write; (2) I write whatever I write; (3) I notice what I have written, judge it, and edit it, either a lot or a little.” And his claim is that the relationship between (1) and (2) is not one of cause and effect; “rather, step one precedes writing and establishes a frame of mind in which writing is likely to occur.” “It is the act of writing that produces the discoveries,” he claims, and, by way of explanation, “words flow from a pen, not from a mind; they appear on the page through the massive co-ordination of a tremendous number of motor processes. . . . More accurately, I become my pen; my entire organism becomes an extension of this writing implement. Consciousness is focused at the point of the pen.”

So far, so good, but since Mandel goes on to approve of his colleague, Janet Emig’s, description of writing as ‘a form of cognition’ it seems to me a little perverse to propose (by his title, “Losing one’s Mind”) a mindless form of cognition. ‘Freeing one’s mind’ would be more appropriate, the freedom being that of ranging across the full spectrum of mental activity from the autistic pole to the reality-adjusted pole, as Peter McKellar has described it. Or, as we might speculatively describe it today, right brain and left brain in intimate collaboration.

I want to associate spontaneous shaping, whether in speech or writing, with the moment by moment interpretative process by which we make sense of what is happening around us; to see each as an instance of the pattern-forming propensity of man’s mental processes. Thus, when we come to write, what is delivered to the pen is in part already shaped, stamped with the image of our own ways of perceiving. But the intention to share, inherent in spontaneous utterance, sets up a demand for further shaping.

Can we go deeper than this, penetrate beyond the process of
drawing upon our own store of interpreted experience? Perl and Egendorf believe we must if we are to provide a full account of writing behaviour. In an article they call "The Process of Creative Discovery"^4 they speak of a new line of philosophical enquiry, the 'philosophy of experiencing', and quote from the writings of Eugene Gendlin.5 "Many thinkers since Kant," they suggest, "have claimed that all valid thought and expression are rooted in the wider realm of pre-representational experience". 'Experiencing', or pre-representational experience, "consists of continuously unfolding orders rather than finished products"; in Gendlin's words, it is "the felt apperceptive mass to which we can inwardly point." It is fluid, global, charged with implicit meanings—which we alter when by expressing them we make them explicit.

D. W. Harding, psychologist and literary critic, explores a similar distinction in his book *Experience into Words*.^6 "The emergence of words or images as part of our total state of being is an obscure process, and their relation to the non-verbal is difficult to specify. . . . The words we choose (or accept as the best we can find at the moment) may obliterate or slightly obscure or distort fine features of the non-verbal background of thinking. . . . A great deal of speaking and writing involves the effort to be a little more faithful to the nonverbal background of language than an over-ready acceptance of ready-made terms and phrases will permit." Perl and Egendorf comment on that effort as they observe it in their students: "When closely observed, students appear to write by shuttling back and forth from their sense of what they wanted to say to the words on the page, and back to address what is available to them inwardly." This is in essence the process they call 'retrospective structuring', and its near inevitability might be suggested by comparing writing with carving: the sculptor with chisel in hand must both cut and observe the effect of his cut before going on. But retrospective structuring needs to be accompanied by what the authors call 'projective structuring', shaping the material in such a way that the writer's meaning carries over to the intended reader. It is in this aspect of writing that 'discovery', or shaping at the point of utterance, tends to break down: a mistaken sense of a reader's expectations may obstruct or weaken the 'sense of what they wanted to say'—or in Harding's terms 'obliterate fine features of the non-verbal background of thinking'. Observing unskilled writers, Perl and Egendorf comment: "What seems particularly unskilled about the way these students write is that they apply prematurely a set of rigid critical rules for editing to their written products." 'Prematurely' might be taken to mean at first draft rather than at second or third, but I think this does less than justice to the authors' meaning. Minor editing—for spelling, for example—is better left, we can agree, to a re-reading stage. What is at
issue here is a more important point: that too restricted a sense of a reader's expectations may result in 'projective structuring' coming to dominate the shaping at the point of utterance, to the exclusion or severe restriction of the 'retrospective structuring', the search for a meaning that in its expression satisfies the writer.

Such a conclusion would gain general support from a neat little study by Mike Rose, a study he calls, "Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans and the Stifling of Writing". A case study of five fluent writers and five with 'writer's block' leads him to conclude that "the non-blockers operate with fluid, easily modified, even easily discarded rules and plans, that are often expressed with a vagueness that could almost be interpreted as ignorance. There lies the irony. The students that offer the least precise rules and plans have the least trouble composing."

What I have suggested, then, is that shaping at the point of utterance involves, first, drawing upon interpreted experience, the results of our moment by moment shaping of the data of the senses and the continued further assimilation of that material in search of coherence and pattern (the fruits of our contemplative moments); and, secondly, seems to involve by some means getting behind this to a more direct apperception of the felt quality of 'experiencing' in some instance or instances; by which means the act of writing becomes itself a contemplative act revealing further coherence and fresh pattern. Its power to do so may depend in part upon the writer's counterpart of the social pressure that listeners exert on a speaker, though in this case, clearly, the writer himself is, in the course of the writing, the channel through which that pressure is applied.

I must now add the much more obvious point that in the initial stages of learning to write a child must draw upon linguistic resources gathered principally through speaking and listening, and apply those resources to the new task of writing. Some children, however, will also be familiar with some forms of the written language derived from stories that have been read to them. A four-year-old, for example, dictated a fairy story of his own composition in which he said, "The king went sadly home, for he had nowhere else to go", a use of 'for' that can hardly have been learnt from listening to speech. Thus, the early writer shuttles between internalised forms of the written language and his general resources recruited through speech: that he should maintain access to the latter is important if he is to embark on the use of writing to fulfil a range of different purposes. His progress as a writer depends thereafter, to a considerable degree, on his increasing familiarity with forms of the written language, the enlargement of his stock of 'internalised' written forms through reading and being read to. (The process of recreating the rhythms of the written language from his own reading must derive from that apprenticeship to an adult's reading.) To
put it simply, if rather crudely, I see the developed writing process as one of hearing an inner voice dictating forms of the written language appropriate to the task in hand.

If it is to work this way, we must suppose that there exists some kind of pre-setting mechanism which, once set up, continues to affect production throughout a given task. The difficulties many writers feel in ‘finding a way in’ or in ‘finding one’s own voice’ in a particular piece of writing, as well as the familiar routine of running through what has been written in order to move on, seem to me to supply a little evidence in favour of such a ‘pre-setting mechanism’. Beyond that I can offer only hints and nudges. There is, for example, the phenomenon of metric composition. Read aloud a passage in galloping iambics and most listeners are enabled to compose spontaneously in that rhythm; young children’s facility in picking up pig-Latin or dog-Latin is probably another example of the same sort of process. And by way of explanation, there is Kenneth Lashley’s long-standing notion of a ‘determining tendency’ in human behaviour: “The cortex must be regarded as a great network of reverberatory circuits constantly active. A new stimulus reaching such a system does not excite an isolated reflex path, but must produce widespread changes in the pattern of excitation throughout a whole system of already interacting neurons”. Such a determining tendency, he argues, is related to an individual’s intention. In this and other respects the notion parallels Michael Polanyi’s description of focal and subsidiary awareness. Applying that to the writing process, a writer is subsidiarily aware of the words and structures he is employing and focally aware of an emergent meaning, the meaning he intends to formulate and convey. And it is the focal awareness that guides and directs the use made of the means, of which he is subsidiarily aware. In similar fashion, a reader’s attention is not focused upon the printed marks: he attends from them to the emerging meaning. To focus on the words would be to inhibit the handling of meaning by writer or reader. “By concentrating on his fingers,” says Polanyi, “a pianist can paralyse himself; the motions of his fingers no longer bear then on the music performed, they have lost their meaning.”

Painting in oils, where one pigment may be used to obliterate another, is a very different process from painting in water-colours, where the initial process must capture immediately as much as possible of the painter’s vision. Do modes of discourse differ in production as sharply as that? And does our present concern with pre-planning, successive drafting and revision suggest that in taking oil-painting as our model for writing we may be underestimating the value of ‘shaping at the point of utterance’ and hence cutting off what might prove the most effective approach to an understanding of rhetorical invention?
Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Geoffrey Summerfield of New York University and Frank Smith of the University of Victoria who introduced me to the articles by Heinrich Von Kleist and Kenneth Lashley respectively.

References


