Notes on English Teaching at Uppingham School

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From the Author

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NOTES

ON

ENGLISH TEACHING

AT

UPPINGHAM SCHOOL.

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NOTES ON ENGLISH TEACHING.

THE fact of speaking a language is full of significance, if rightly understood. Education, intellectual education that is, must have material to work on. The moment a child is born, the forming of habits begins. The mother has only to direct and mould; the material to work on is born with the birth. At first sight the intellectual educator, when a few years later definite work begins, seems to have no such advantage. Certainly the practice has been to put something fresh into the mind as the first beginning. But the fact of speaking a language, rightly understood, means, that the educator, *if he chooses*, and *if he can do it*, has an immense store of material ready to work on; of most valuable material, starting from the simplest, and proceeding, step by step, up to the most complex and elaborate mind exercises that this world of ours offers. The material is plentiful, familiar, in incessant use, and is the *sole channel through which all* other kinds of knowledge must pass. Yet this great latent power has hitherto been neglected; and the one pipe through which every mind is fed, has been allowed to be clogged, dirty, poisoned, anything, without a thought of remedying this evil.

Can general education be said to have been intelligently begun, as long as every English mind has a vast store of unsifted, unsorted, uninvestigated material lying about loose in it; which nevertheless is in universal use, every moment wielded for better or worse by high and low alike?

Every man that speaks words ought to be in his degree an intelligent and conscious master of the words he speaks.

This then is our object—a conscious mastery over words and sentences.

There is but one way of attaining it—Grammatical Analysis.

By Grammatical Analysis is meant,

First, the looking on language and words as thought made visible.

Next, the examining these visible shapes to see how it is done.

And, lastly, the discovering in how many ways these thought-bricks, words, can be built up, and yet after all be in all main particulars the same.

Grammatical Analysis has nothing in the world to do with Logic. The thought taken grammatically is its exercise ground, quite irrespective of the value of the thought itself, *e.g.*, the most contemptible nominative case is as good a nominative case grammatically as the weightiest real subject, logically it is not. Hence the object of grammatical analysis is to assign to each part of the sentence its value and right name

in grammar. And the terms "*co-ordinate sentences*," and all jargon of that kind, (for grammatically it is jargon) are quite out of place. We want to know what part of speech a clause represents, not what its importance as a thought is. This is a very decisive and necessary distinction to make.

In actual practice we start with the fact that every baby in the nursery learns in three or four years that speech which at present scarcely any man, however well educated, can give a really intelligent account of. The first thing we teach is the actual fact that every language in the world must divide its words into certain classes, by whatever name it may choose to call those classes. And then that it is not possible to make either single words, or combinations of words with a single idea in them, which shall not fall into those classes, and answer to the proper test questions which determine the class to which a word or a clause belongs. Just as in natural history, the colours and size of animals may differ very much, but cannot alter the class; nay, the actual structure may differ much, but if it agrees in certain main characteristics, the class to which the animal belongs is still unaltered.

Then we teach boys to understand the value of forms and inflexions; how like the colours they wear at football or cricket these changing endings have each a most definite sense, and declare unmistakeably where the word must stand, and what its duty is.

We show them that the main plan of every sentence

in the world is the same. We show them that when a leading word in any sentence is given, that word of itself if its sense is followed out, *forces* the structure of the sentence to go on in a certain way; as a sentence may indeed stop short of the full carrying out the idea contained in the leading words, but if it goes on, must go on according to a settled plan, determined by that leading word and its thought.

We show them the value of the clauses, especially of the relative and conditional clauses, and how, if adjectives, they answer to the question, "what sort" put with the noun; if adverbs, they answer to the questions—"how," "why," "when," "where,"—put with the verb. They see in this manner how it is that in Latin or Greek many adjectives and participles are used where the English only have a preposition and case—*e.g.* "In these circumstances the Lacedæmonians did," etc. If a boy omits the qualifying sense lurking in the words, "in these circumstances," he is immediately made to analyse the English sentence, and assign its grammatical value to the words.

In this way we bring out the actual value of each word, part of sentence, and clause, and base our Latin and Greek teaching on this knowledge, so that the boys by degrees can pass an intelligent judgment on which is the better or worse way of putting the thought in words, which language is accurate, which is strong, where English is defective and why, where it is powerful and why. I have endeavoured to put

out a few of the main features of English Analysis work in this sketch, the two statements of Class work which accompany this will I hope throw some light on the actual working in school, whilst the Analysis Manual in the Clarendon Press Series on the whole gives sufficient directions how to do it.

ENGLISH WORK.

Upper IV.

About three quarters of an hour ever Wednesday evening—alternately (i) English writing, and (ii) grammar and analysis.

I. An easy essay or piece of description written in school.

II. *Grammar*—a review of the rules in the English grammar—comparison of the *tenses* in English with those in Latin and Greek—a few points of detail—*e.g.* special uses of articles—various meanings of "*that*," etc.

Analysis (prepared out of school); questions on a portion of one of the analysed sentences in the 'Analysis,' and a fairly complex sentence given to be analysed on paper, without trying to retain the original order of the words.

Besides this, about twenty-six lines of Shakespere are learnt by heart every week. The whole of this is repeated at the end of the half-year, and a paper is set on it consisting partly of grammatical questions, and partly of questions on the meaning of unusual words and phrases.

The way in which the Analysis is worked is as follows:—A piece of English is chosen; then by a series of questions it is first

divided into its complete sentences. Each separate sentence is then taken, and its subject and predicate first found. Then the various qualifying clauses and words are taken separately—and their relation to the sentence is stated—*e.g.* adjective or adverb; in the latter case the adverb is shewn to answer to one of the questions—How? Why? When? or Where? and thus any hard nomenclature is avoided. In doubtful cases it is shewn how different explanations of any one part affect the general meaning of the sentence. And, lastly, the clauses themselves where they are complex are taken separately and analysed.

The same principle of analysis is also applied to the preparation of translation lessons. The boys, for instance, in this form begin Greek Play, and are often inclined at first to come and say "they cannot make anything of it." They are then taught to turn their attention only to one sentence at a time, by the help of the stops, and the difficulty is then seen to resolve itself into two main branches—difficult words, and difficult constructions of sentences. The former are explained, *e.g.*, by a crasis being resolved, or the particular meaning of such particles as γε explained, and the latter are solved either by stating the nature of a clause, or pointing out the subject or predicate. In the long sentences of Livy there is very rarely any help given in the way of translation. The limits of a sentence are pointed out, or the subject, or predicate, or both, or the limits and grammatical nature of the clauses stated, or sometimes in the case of oblique construction the whole is thrown into the direct form.

In Latin Composition attention is first drawn to language as expressing thought: that the thoughts may be, like a child's, simple and expressed in isolated sentences, or else complex and expressed in involved sentences.

By comparison of Latin and English it is shewn that great power of formal change in words enables sentences to be much more involved than they otherwise could be—and from this the two following principles are deduced, and given to the boys to be kept in mind:—1. That for the sake of *force*, emphatic words in

Latin will go to the beginning of the sentence, while English must preserve the logical (called 'natural') order, or *clearness* will be lost; and as a corollary to this, the boys are taught to be suspicious of retaining constructions which in English are passive lest it should be found that the only reason of such a construction is the wish to place an emphatic word early, while Latin will retain the simpler active construction merely placing the word first while its form clearly shews its proper place relatively to the rest of the sentence.—2. English uses many *sentences*, while Latin has many *clauses*. The working of this may best be shewn by an example lately given. "Solon refused to fly. His friends asked him what he relied on for protection. His answer was—'on my old age.'" In taking this piece the boys first answered that there were three thoughts. On looking at the second sentence the first was seen to be stated merely as a reason for the first. On looking at the third it was seen that the answer was given to the friends on their questioning Solon. Thus it appeared that the main thought underlying all three sentences was "Solon gave a certain answer." The sentence then ran as follows:—"When Solon refused to fly, he answered his friends who were asking on what he relied for protection, 'On my old age.'" Proceeding from this point, it was easy to mould the sentence into a natural Latin form. Similarly when a copy of Prose is set, the boys are always taught to read it through carefully to try and see the thought that underlies the form—and then to fix on the main assertions, and place the others in a subordinate relation to them.

The reverse process is equally applicable to translating into English, but it is found that owing to the boys being really not yet acquainted with the nature of good English, it is safer for the sake of accuracy to keep to a rather bald translation, only now and then introducing a passive construction, or breaking off a relative clause into a separate sentence, and such like.

A. C. C. A.

ENGLISH WORK.

Lower III.

The question of English—whether it should be taught—and how it should be taught—is naturally enough engaging the thoughts of sensible men of the present day.

There is no royal road, whereby knowledge may be attained without the sweat of mind and strain of brain, but the old-fashioned fact-teaching without illustration (setting a boy a page of grammar, and whipping him if he made a mistake) seldom led even to knowledge, and never developed the powers and capacities of the human intellect.

Now the teaching of English is specially valuable for its illustrative powers: grant all the advantages that can be claimed from the special 'nuances' of Greek and Latin idioms, phrases, and constructions, there still remain the same main sentence-laws which can be dealt with in the known tongue infinitely better than in the unknown. The power of moulding and unmoulding without the restraint of ignorance of material is of great value. If a boy understands the *main* Principles of Grammar in one language, he does in another: the grammar of his own illustrates the grammar of the foreign, and *vice-versâ*.

How is English to be taught? I venture to add some remarks upon means which I have put into practice.

I. *Viva Vôce analysis.* I select some subject in poetry which will last through the half-year, pleasant and amusing, in order to keep a hold even on boys who apply most unwillingly—the language adapted as well as can be to the standard of intellect dealt with.

I read every week a certain amount, so as to make a good appreciable advance in the story (I generally read to them, as I have not time to be a teacher of reading): after this, we select together a piece for the week's recitation, of about 35 lines.

This piece I take and pull to pieces.

I first break it up into *paragraphs*, then decompose those paragraphs into the *great main* sentences, the great main sentences into the *lesser main* sentences. Each lesser main I subdivide, pulling out prominently its main *parts*, throwing into the background all the subordinates. I then put together the main *parts* of the lesser main sentences, omitting all subordinate parts. This plan, of course, gives the full main sense of the passage; by this means a boy gets well hold of the meaning, and is ready to receive a gradually increasing supply of qualifying material.

We should then analyse in the following way.

What is the subject of the main sentence?

What is the predicate?

Split up the predicate into its component parts (v.c.^{n} and case).

State any qualifications, in order of importance, belonging to subject.

State any qualifications, in order of importance, belonging to predicate.

Every little subordinate clause is equivalent to what part of speech?

Why cannot such and such a subordinate clause go with the subject?

Why cannot such and such a subordinate clause go with the predicate?

Why are you sure it belongs to predicate, or subject?

Take a subordinate clause and compare the different effects of putting it as a qualification to verb, and to case, (this often leads to niceties of taste and appreciation of language-power.)

Build up in every conceivable way,
First the main stone walls and roof,
Then add the subdividing walls,
Then add the doors and staircases,
Then add main furniture,
And so on gradually until even the knick-knacks of each room are complete.

} Hundreds of illustrations of this sort may be found.

See if it is laid out so that you get a good idea of the whole at a glance; walk into each room and see if the colours harmonize.

Put the *main* subject with *subordinate* verb, and *vice-versâ*, and see what nonsense you get.

Change the active clauses into passive, and *vice-versâ*.

How are 'water,' 'air,' 'green fields,' "happiness," etc., (whatever it may be) described?—what similes?

Is the Christian Poet's metaphor at all like the heathen's? and so on, according to your class.

Take the *words*. Do you recognize relation to other words in English or in other languages.

Is such and such a word used in its primary meaning, or not?

Perhaps it has a sinister meaning, when not long ago it possessed an opposite one. And so on, according to your class.

To put down every question is of course impossible.

This is the sort of thing done.

I now go on to *Paper Analysis*.

II. *Paper Analysis*—two kinds.

(i) The Prominent ideas most prominent to the eye—the rest gradually appearing in proportion to its importance.

The advantage of this system is that it explains itself. I have found the stupidest boys able to tell me the meaning without any help.

(ii) As in Mr. Thring's Analysis—the same passage as (i)—so that the two may be compared—keep in horizontal lines, as you read, and you keep the order of the words in the passage.

III. *Grammar.* With respect to English Grammar, its want of inflection and informality make it more difficult, no doubt, to teach: I think most boys for this very reason fancy that English Grammar requires no learning. But the language being informal, affords first-rate material for Grammar-questioning—*e.g.*—the cases being unmarked, you can test a boy's real thought better than in a formal language. Because the eye is not struck so quickly with the differences, a boy is apt to fancy that the differences are less appreciable: no doubt the eye-teaching which can be brought to bear upon Latin and Greek Grammar is one of the greatest advantages those languages afford as means of education, [Greek and Latin Grammar want colour introduced to make a dull boy see clearly such things as tense-formations, and the like] but the eye must first see, and the mind must grasp too, and when the eye-attention has been caught, the mind is to follow, and the mind can be fed better with the natural food of English. The familiar words readily lend themselves as material for exercising thought, and furnishing examples of common constructions.

W. E.

I hope these sketches will be sufficient to show the power there is of teaching the English language as a basis of grammar knowledge, and what an engine it may be made in giving the most ignorant some intellectual training. At least they will show the interest that such a method can excite, and how

definite the method itself is. I attribute the utter neglect of English as a teaching instrument hitherto to two causes. The first is, no one has attempted to teach grammar through English, but many attempts have been made to Latinize English Grammar. The second is, that the teaching of English Literature, old words, or the history of the language, has been called teaching English. But this kind of thing has nothing fixed, and varies with the teacher; and if it did not, is utterly out of the question as a subject for the ignorant, the dull, or the scant of time. Whereas the Principles of Grammar taught through English, and the analysis grammatically of English sentences are nothing more nor less than the sorting and arranging in a simple effective way the material which every human being who uses words has already stored up, does not require to be taught, uses every time he speaks, the only thing wanting being the ability to give an intelligent account of that which perpetual practice has made easy to do. Every Englishman ought to know his own language.

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