

A Shade-Theory in Speech for the Student of English Literature

by R. ISHIGURO.

1.

Readers, please try and read the following passage:—

(1) The Duke, like business man he was, was very brief and to the point. He congratulated Charles Repton not (thank Heaven!) on having got rid of the slight headache which seemed to have filled the thoughts of too many people, but upon the great accession the Upper House was to receive, and then the Duke having said so much went on to what he really had to say, his pronunciation marred only by that slight lisp which ill-natured reports so constantly exaggerated. Sir Charles Repton (he said) would remember the very disgraceful case of the editor of the *Islington Hebdomadal Review*?

Charles Repton tried to remember, but could not.

Well, it wath the cathe of the man who had very properly got twenty yearth of the betht for thaying that he could reveal how old Ballymulrock had got his peerage... a dithgratheful cathe! There wath blackmail behind it!

—H. Belloc: A CHANGE IN THE CABINET, XV.

Awful is the last paragraph! But fortunately there is given the key to it: the word "lisp." Replace the "th" in the unusual words with an "s", and you will find the wording there all right. Then how about the following?

(2) The butter an' the cheese weel stowit they be,
I sit on the hen-coop the eggs on my knee,
The land kail jigs as we jog owre the rigs,
The gray mare's tail it wags wi the kail,
The warm simmer sky is blue aboon a',
An' whiddie, whuddie, whaddie, gang the auld wheels twa.

—Sydney Dobell: THE MARKET-WIFE'S SONG, 1st stanza.

This may be doubly difficult for ordinary students of English, for the diction is very short of the regional standard (the Kentish dialect, the poet being born in Kent), which is in turn remote from the Received Standard we are generally taught at school. The passage may be written as follows in our poetical English.

The butter *and* the cheese *well stowed* (packed) they be (are), I sit on the hen-coop with the eggs on my knee, the *land-rail* sings as we joy *over* the *ridges*, the gray mare's tail [it] wags *with* the land-rail, the warm *summer* sky is blue *above all*, *and* whiddie, whuddie, whaddie (sound-imitation words), *go* the *old* wheels *two*.

Here is another specimen:—

(3) "Oh, it's yer blissid riverence! Sure and I can tell ye the same. The purty darlin' wint out, as usual, but a bit later. And she says: 'Mother Geeham,' says she, 'it's me last noight out, praise the saints, this noight is!' And, oh, yer riverence, the swate, beautiful drame of a dress she had this toime! White satin and silk and ribbons, and lace about the neck and arrums—'twas a sin, yer riverence, the gold was spint upon it."

—O. Henry: WHIRLIGIGS, XXIII.

This is the locution with which Lorinson "the artist with the shifting point of perspection" in New Orleans addressed Father Rogen. This artist's peculiarities in speech stand out in vowels, such as [i] for [e], [ei] for [i:], [oi] for [ai], and so forth.

(4) I hadn't bin standin' on the platform many seconds when the gentleman that I tow'd yow weighed twanty stun come up, and he say, "Yow've lost the train, hev ye?"

"Yes," I say, "I hev, and all throw them blessed sangwedges; but we never mind," I say, "now I'm 'ere I'll see about the plaace, and go on by the train to-morrer."

"Oh," he say, "yow can go on to-day, if ye like; the station maaster will make it all right for ye."

"No," I say, "I've come out to see about, and I may as well stop here for a day as not; but dang it," I say, "Sairey will be at

Kensinton to maat me, and she'll be disappointed agin."

"Well," he say, "doant trouble yerself about that, for yow can tallergraph; but the maaster 'ill make it all right for ye if ye like, for he's one o' the most civilest maasters on the whole line."

"Wot du yer maan by tallergraphin'?" I say.

"Doant yer know?" he say. "Why, yow can send a message that yow 'a lost the train, and she'll get it in half-a-hour, and it'll on'y cost ye a shillin'."

"Get it in half-a-hour!" I say; "why, yow doant maan wot yow say!"

"I du thow," he say, "and if you go wi' me, I'll show ye the poast-office, where yow can hev it done in no time."

So away we went. He wor a nice civil man, though he wor so big.

—James Stilling: GILES'S TRIP TO LONDON, II.

This record of "A Farm Labourer's First Peep at the World," as the author calls it, brims over with such linguistic curiosities. But it is rather strange such a rustic is not so vulgar in syntax or sentence-construction.

2.

In studying the English literature we can not confine ourselves to the aristocratic purity of the language: literature can never in nature be rigid in form. The range of language in which literature expresses itself is so vast and wide: the archaic and colloquial, the standard and provincial, the cultivated and illiterate, all must be resorted to to make literature have its full sway. This is indeed the first and most disheartening stumble to a student of a foreign literature. A beginner often complains of being unable to find and identify so and so expression in his dictionary. No dictionary ever affords to teach us every word we encounter in reading a work, never. Language is not a clean-cut block: it has some shade or other of its own, especially in actual speech.

Here are two principles set up by the science of language. The first is the principle proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure, who contrasts a language (*la langue*) with the speech (*la parole*). A language is a linguistic system lurking in mind of the whole nation, from which each individual must learn to choose whatever he or she wants in actual speech. And in consequence each individual has his or her own speech or dialect (*Redensart*), or style in the widest sense of the word. Hence the denunciation of the generally accepted dialects by Karl Vossler and his school. This principle advises us to be magnanimous when hearing a person speak.

But in reading a piece of literature, we are fortunately eased to some extent of that individual divergencies. There the second principle comes to succour us; the written language is not the exact copy of actual speech; writing, as Lord Bacon said, makes man exact in thinking, and in language as well. Moreover a writer can not be so bold as to scare away his readers by most faithfully copying what he thinks his heroes actually speak. That is why the rustic Giles speaks (or Mr. Stilling makes him speak) not so despicably in respect of syntax.

Granted these, the student of literature need not be nightmared by the shade of language I have emphatically mentioned above, but it would be very miserable if he be not ready enough to accept or discern the shade. Though the up-to-date thinkers including Esperantists and proletarian philosophers admit of no shade in language, but the student of literature at least never agrees with them. No, even an intellectual and not emotional treatise can not be free from such shade in language. Hence a shade-theory in speech. And it is a great help for a student of literature to have a sound knowledge of the theory. What is a shade-theory in speech then?

No language ever corresponds exactly to thinking, as Herman Paul declared it, and Henry Sweet illustrates it in his "A New English Grammar." This is clearly seen even to an unintelligent eye in the meaning of a word. Indeed, a word has so composite a meaning, that Ogden and Richards or Malinowsky boldly say that a word has no definite sense of its own. This is the semantic side of the shade-theory, and he may be despised who nails himself on one meaning of a word he accidentally hits upon as is often the case with a pupil ill-trained in language. He must be taught to grasp the fundamental sense and the accessories along with it.

But the semantic side is not so vital to the student as the phonetic side of the theory. A writing in alphabet has an advantage in copying a word as it is actually uttered, but this affords a disadvantage to a student of the Far East, who is accustomed to considering a word as a concrete and definite unit to the eye. He is bewildered if he meet with "He toud me", because he never expects "told" to be written in any other way. This is one of the phonetic shade, and if ignorant of this theory, a student must be at a loss before he consults his dictionary. Read again one of the specimens given in the section one above, and you will find most of the difficulties to be phonetical deviations. If you read them exclusively with the eye, you never can approach what the author intends to convey. You must, as it were, translate the letters into sounds. This is the best and most natural way of reading. A phonetic assimilation as theoretically called is the first step in appreciation of any art through language.

There is much still to be said of the shade-theory in speech, but for a student of the English literature I have said what I have to say. Now let me, however, take advantage of this occasion to expound the shade-theory in speech

a little further in a separate section.

3.

A language never stays in the same place: the change and flow is the life of language. Is that change a degeneration? Yes, the purist cries. But if the community keep on being active and progressive, the change in language can not be called a degeneration. So we peacefully hail the change in language on condition of the people being healthy, or at least we must composedly meet it as it comes. Then where is its germ, the motive power for the change being taken granted to exist outside the language? The germ exists just in the shade of language. The shade of language, therefore, is not only the portion to make the language flexible, but also the vital source for the language growing and developing. Cut off the shade, and the language will be sterile and die, just as a tree dies when its formant stratum dries up.

Then it is necessary for us to nourish the shade in order to keep the language active and progressive. What shall we do then for nourishing the shade of a language? Combine till amalgamated the sound and its sense not only in a word but in a sentence, that is, in the language as a whole. This can be done only by auditorily and orally repeating the language itself. In learning a foreign language, not less the mother tongue, we should try to follow the standard example. There seems not to be a shade, but if there is no such shade as seen in an uncultivated dialect, there is still a shade of its own. No language without shade!

By this apprenticeship we gain a speech-feeling (*Sprachgefühl*) or speech-conscience, which directs us what to use and what to avoid when we speak (or write). And we resort to this when we happen to need a new form for

a new idea. On the other hand, as our views on language widen, learn other shades such as regional or social existing in the range of the language. This uplifts our *Sprachgefühl*, and we gain more garments than before: we can live a wider life than before. We can then enrich the language if influential in any way. This is the way the shade in language serves to develop a language, only the process is generally carried on unconsciously and incorporately.

To a student of foreign literature, to be such a changing agent is out of the question. His concern lies in the power of appreciating well and right the given work through the language. That again, however, requires a rich and correct *Sprachgefühl*. Not until that *Gefühl* is attained to, the literary appreciation can possibly be intended. That is why a true study of literature is said to be possible only in one's own language. Indeed, the *Sprachgefühl* so vital to the study of literature is in its extremity nothing but the genius of the language or *Koto-tama*, and that precious spirit can be sought or embodied in the shade of speech and language.

A shade-theory in speech! it passes maybe into a linguistic mysticism conceived by the philologists in the Tokugawa Age and many of the European philosophers in the 18th and 19th century. Mysticism and symbolism in language have been depreciated for this half century, but I have a mind to revive them in a new light. (Dec. 1930)