Effective Speech in Conversations and in Informal Gatherings.

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One of the best educated men in America, the late President Eliot of Harvard University, once made this statement;" I recognize but one mental acquisition as an essential part of the education of a lady or a gentleman, namely, an accurate and refined use of the English language."

All of us want to be thought cultured. This desire is very natural, wholesome and human. But there are other reasons also for our urge to improve our command of English. Closely allied with the desire to be respected and admired is the personal satisfaction we derive from the knowledge that we are excelling in one particular field. To possess any kind of skill yields an inward satisfaction, but to excel in the art of self—expression is peculiarly satisfying and exhilarating.

Another reason for aspiring to speak more effectively is our desire to present our ideas so that others will understand and accept them. In other words, we all want to be successful salesmen. That statement is true of all, regardless of our sex and occupation. Virtually every time we converse or try to communicate with anyone a sale is made. Either we sell our ideas, or the individual with whom we try to converse sells us his. Other things being equal, the one who possesses the greater skill in the use of words makes the sale. Emerson wrote;" Speech is power; speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel."

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that there are two English languages. They have much in common, and under certain circumstances

tend to run together. Their differences, however, are more extensive than is generally admitted by grammarians and literary scholars. These two languages are the Conversational and the Literary. The Literary is the English proper for writing of any sort except friendly letters, and for speech addressed to formal groups of persons. Conversational English, on the other hand, is the language used by well educated speakers in conversation and in informal public addres or friendly groups. There are those who assume that Conversational English comes naturally to those who study the principles of Literary English. The fact is that the differences between the two kinds of language are so considerable that a single chapter is inadequate to catalogue them. In this short paper I would like to draw attention to a few of the differences, especially to the differences which effect speech.

1. Inflection; The inflection of nouns and pronouns in Conversational English is identical with that in Literary English. The verb, on the other hand, shows many differences. Among these the contraction of the pronouns and of the adverb not with the auxilliaries are familiar to all; I'm, you're, he's, we're, they're; I've, you've, we've; I'll, you'll, we' ll; I'd, you'd, we'd; aren't, isn't, wasn't, doesn't, didn't, shouldn't, won't, oughtn't, etc. Less obvious and more intesting are some of the liberties which Conversational English takes with the tenses and moods of formal grammar. Among these the future tense is the most conspicuous. Conformity to the principles, that have grown up in certain liberties is expected of all educated persons.

   The informality of Conversational English does not justify such errors as; "We will be too tired to go" or "I will be pleased to help you." It is correct to say; "We shall be too tired to go", and "I shall be pleased to help you."

   It is correct to say; "Shall you be at home this evening?". It is incorrect to say; "Will you," unless a definite promise is

asked for. We avoid the slight stiffness of "shall you" by the far more commonly heard form, "Are you going to be (at) home this evening?" Similarly, in indirect quotations it is correct to say, "He told me he should be out of town about a week," and incorrect to say, "He told me he would be out of town." But the more effective Conversational English is; "He told me he was going to be out of town."

There is no future—perfect tense in Conversational English. The perfect tense usually takes its place. Literary English; "When he shall have completed his task, he may go." Conversational English; "When he's through with his work, he may go." Literary English; "At the end of this year I shall have been twenty years in service." Conversational English:" It'll be twenty years next December since I came here."

The careful reader has noticed that I have used the term; "the educated speaker." This term is purposely used and also purposely I do not use the term; "the uneducated speaker." This calls for some explanation. There are very few people who are uneducated in the real sense. A carpenter, a mason, a farmer who has finished his formal education at the close of the Junior High School may very well be a well educated man in his own field of carpentry, masonry or farming. These occupations are indeed honorable occupations. How would our homes be build without a skillful carpenter or mason! How would we be able to deck our tables with so much good and rich food without skillful farmers! A Ph. D is usually a very uneducated man in these fields.

However in the context of our discussion in this article, "the educated speaker" refers to that individual who has gone beyond the Senior High School for his formal education. The further this individual has ventured beyond his High School education the more will be expected of him in his own field, and should be.

For the carpenter it is perfectly correct to say; "I ain't going

home yet, I must get through with this job first." This is rather Slang English but perfectly acceptable under the circumstances. However this is not justifiable for the educated speaker. The educated man using Conversational English must say; "I am not ready to go home yet, I must finish this job," or ".....I must finish what I am doing." The Literary equivalent is; "I am not able to return home yet because I need to finish this assignment." An educated speaker does not mix Conversational English with Literary English in conversation.

2. The problem of "can" and "may". One point at which Conversational English tends to differ from literary English in the use of the auxiliaries is the strong drift toward substituting can and may in permissive phrases. The child says, "Can I stay up late tonight?" The parent is altogether apt to reply, "Yes you can if you'll take a nap," or "No you can't." When the child is in school or college he still says; "Can I write my examination in pencil?" "Can I borrow your notes?" This is ofcourse incorrect, and should be resisted from childhood on. Or, if English is studied as a second language this should never enter into Conversational (or Literary) English. It should definitely be resisted for the good reason that it is a tendency toward the impoverishment of the language, subtracting from it the best means of expressing an idea. The correct usuage is;" "May I stay up late tonight?" "Yes, you may" or "No you may not." "May I write this examination using a pencil?" "May I borrow your notes?"

Let me discuss this a bit further and from a practical point. Often students ask; "Can you correct my paper now?" "Can I come to your house tonight with my paper?" "Can you teach me English." The correct Conversational English is: "Do you have time to correct my paper now?" "Is it alright if I come to your house this evening to have my paper corrected?" "May I ask you to teach me English?"

How can we resist the slang use and indeed incorrect use of this word "can?" In general when we are called upon to decide what word should be accepted or resisted in effective speech, the test is that just indicated in the preceding paragraphs; does the word or phrase add to the resources of the language, or lessen them? Does it force one word to stand for two quite distinct ideas, such as permission and power, or does it on the contrary establish a new way of saying explicitly what has been heretofore implicitly hinted?

3. Verb—phrases; Verb—phrases of obligation are more numerous in Conversational English than in Literary English. We have not only, "I must take," and "I should take," and "I ought to take," but also, "I'm to take," and "I have to take." In this last phrase, the word "have" is never abbreviated, since it is accented. We never say; "I've to take." To these five verb—phrases of obligation must be added a sixth, if one is to be perfectly honest in registering the facts of Conversational English, the phrase "I've got to take." Observation confirms that many educated speakers who never allow themselves to add "got" to the verb "have" in the sense of possession or ownership do add "got" in the sense of obligation. Educated speakers will say; "I've got a cold." But this is not standard Conversational English. It is "I have a cold." Further more; "I've got my speech made." "You've got too much water in that mixture." "You've got to work harder than that if you expect to stay here." These last three sentences are careless and not in good usage in Conversational English. The correct usage is; "I have my speech made." "You have too much water in that mixture." "You must work harder" or "You'll have to work harder if you expect to stay here." However, the following sentences using the word "got" are in good usage for Conversational English. "I've got to take something for this cold." "I've got to budget my income better." "I've got to find another job." In these sentences the word "got" is accented. There

is a sense of urgency. When this sense of urgency is present, "I've got" is a necessary part in Conversational English, and in effective speech.

4. Syntax; Conversational English favors the simple and the compound sentences as against the complex. Although the syntax of Literary English requires that an assertion should not be joined by and to a proceding assertion with which it is not logically coordinate, this principle is relaxed in conversation, relaxed, not suspended. Good speakers never allow themselves to talk in long strings of coordinate clauses all joined by "and" or "but" or "so." Yet there is a strong tendency to coordinate when the subject discussed is not such as to demand the careful framing of sentences. For example, compare the following sentences in the two forms,

Literary English;	Conversational English;
Although the compensation is larger, the expenses are heavier.	He gets more money, but he has to spend more.
While his rank is higher, his powers are really not increased.	He has a higher rank, but he can't do any more than he could before.
When the molds have been properly greased, the concrete is poured in and tamped down.	They grease the molds to prevent sticking and then pour in the concrete and tamp it down.
His age being sufficient to entitle him to a pension, he expects to retire at the completion of the present task.	He's already old enough to draw a pension, he is going to retire when he gets through with this job.
They seized the arsenal in order that a supply of ammunition might be insured.	They wanted to have plenty of ammunition, and captured the arsenal.
Fearing lest the strikers might overpower the local police, the mayor called on the governor for assistance.	The major was afraid the strikers might get the better of the police and asked the governer for help.

Another difference of syntax between Literary and Conversational English is that periodic sentences are not common in Conversa-

tional English. The rapid give—and—take of conversational talk requires that the meaning of sentences shall not be suspended to the end. In good conversation or in informal speeches we instinctively bring the main idea near the beginning of the sentence; qualifying clauses and minor details follow rather then procede. Nothing is so tedious in conversation or in speech as to listen to a man piling up subordinate clauses in his anxiety not to be misunderstood. There are people who talk like this;

"While I would not for a moment imply that Smith is not competent, yet on account of the fact that his work requires special care, and that Brown is well known to be expert, I should prefer to have him elected."

This is what is known as "dictation English," not Literary English. The Conversational equivalent would be more like this;

"I'd rather see Brown elected myself. No doubt Smith's a competent man and faithful too. But this work calls for special care , and Brown's an expert; everybody admits that."

Other differences in syntax are seen in the matter of relative clauses. Conversational English prefers "that" to "who." In Literary English, according to some grammarians, there is a tendency to limit the relative "that" to restrictive clauses. In Conversational English the nominative case of the relative pronoun "who" is not common, and the possessive and objective are almost unheard. The following sentences will illustrate the differences arising from this curious avoidance of "who" as a relative;

Literary English;	Conversational English;
My brother, who is superintendent of a cotton mill, tells me that there is very little child labor.	My brother's superintendent of a cotton mill, he says there's very little child labor.
General Grant, who was promot-	The president promoted General

ed by the president to the chief command, immediately made preparations for an attack.	Grant to the command of the army, he began at once to get ready for an attack.
Mr. Madison, whose opinions are well known, is the only opposing candidate.	Mr. Madison is the only opposing candidate, and everybody knows what his opinions are.

It would be rather absurd to suppose that in such cases as these there is a conscious avoidance of the one form and a choice of the other. Why some of these differences exist it would be difficult to explain. What form of speech one uses depends upon the occasion and circumstance. There is nothing to prevent any man from using conversation formal or Literary English if the occasion allows this use. Formal discourses in a formal setting are perfectly correct and all careful speakers will observe occasions and circumstances. However, in daily conversation or in informal groups or at informal occasions, formal and Literary English stiffens the air and prevents communication. A certain stiffness, not to say pedantry, marks the conversation of those who talk precisely as they write Literary works.

5. Common errors in Conversational English.

It may be useful to name a few mistakes that seem to prevail among educated people.

(a) The "so—habit" and "as—habit." From observation and from correcting hundreds of papers this "so—habit" and "as—habit" seems to be firmly rooted in speaking and writing of students who study English as a second language. It is this "so—habit" and "as—habit" that forms one of the most widespread crudities in the written and spoken English of college students. It should be carefully avoided in writing. In conversation it is allowable only if not carried to excesses. Let me illustrate this "habit" with a few sentences; "I did not have much money, so I did not go on a trip this summer." "As it was raining, so I stayed

home." "As I had caught a cold, so I went for some medicine." "The weather was cold, so I wore a coat." "He's already old enough, so he is going to retire." etc. The correct Conversational usage is;" Because I did not have enough money, I did not go on a trip." "Because it was raining, I stayed home." (In conversation we need not say; "I stayed at home.") "Because I had a cold I bought medicine." "Because the weather was cold, I wore a coat", or "I wore a coat because it was cold." "He's going to retire because of his age."

(b) Errors of agreement in number between subject and verb, pronoun and antecedent. These are often due to failure to carry in the mind the precise form of the words already uttered. It seems unnecessary, however, to commit such obvious mistakes as the following;

> There's all kinds of crookedness going on these days.
> Every man and woman in the shop put on their hats.
> The purpose for all these programs are·····.
> This data is not yet complete.

The plural noun data is coming to be used as a singular by many college trained men and women who ought to know better, especially scientific men. It is the kind of change that should be resisted, for the reason that the idea is a plural idea, denoting a number of distinct items of informative bearing upon a subject.

(c) Errors in the use of adjectives as adverbs. Some of these arise from mistaken analogies. We have a few words in English, such as"fast," "hard,"which have the same form for adjective and adverb. The Old English adverb was regularly made from the adjective by adding an—e—, which disappeared in the late Middle English period. Elizabethan English had many adverbs without —ly—, including words derived from Latin and French. The tendency is now in the other direction.

We say; "He has a fast horse," "He drove very fast," "I had a hard yourney," "He worked hard." It is easy to see how by

imitation of such cases other adjectives come to be incorrectly used as adverbs. The adjective "due" is very often misused as an adverb.

It is used properly, that is, used as an adjective, in the sentence, "His illness was due to over exertion." In the incorrect sentence, "I was late, due to an accident," due is used to modify the predicate. We often hear such a sentence as this; "Due to a variety of causes the movement failed." The remedy is to substitute "owing to," or, "on account of."

(d) Errors in the the use of conjunctions.

"As" appears incorrectly as a substitute for "that" or "whether" in the common expression, "I don't know as I can tell you just when it happened." The correct Conversational English is, "I don't know whether I can tell you·····."

"But" is unnecessarily prefixed to "that" after doubt. Incorrect, "There's no doubt but that he was responsible." Correct, "There's no doubt that he was responsible."

"As though" is carelessly used for "as if." Incorrect, "He talked to me as though I had no knowledge of the matter." Correct, "He talked to me as if I had no knowledge of the matter."

"If" is substituted for "whether" in cases where an alternative idea is expressed. Incorrect, "I'm not sure if I can go with you." Correct, "I'm not sure whether I can go with you."

"Because" is wrongly used for "that" in the statement of a reason. Incorrect, "The reason he failed is because the evidence is all on the other side." Correct, "The reason he failed is that the evidence is all on the other side."

The commonest of all Conversational errors in the choice of conjunctions is the habitual use of "and" to begin sentences, without any definite intention of indicating a coordination of ideas This habit of filling in the natural pause between sentences with "end" is a nervous mannerism. It is disturbing and

distracting in Effective Speech. The remedy for it is either to suppress it by conscious effort, or to supplant it by suitable connective adverbs or phrases.

(e) Errors in the use of prepositions. Errors in the use of prepositions are perhaps no more numerous in Conversational English than in Written English. "Different than" is now about as common among educated people as the established "different from." It is objectionable and should be resisted on the ground that "than" is a conjunction, while the idea of separation in the word "different" calls for a preposition rather than a word of comparison. Incorrect, "This material is different than that piece of material." Correct, "This material is different from that piece of material." Incorrect, "The climate here is different than in my country." Correct, "The climate here is different from my country." To catalogue all common errors of Conversational English would demand much more space, let the few illustrations given suffice at this point.

6. The disappearing subjunctive mood.

Few traces of the subjunctive mood remain in Conversational English. Its place has been largely taken by the indicative. In the dependent clause of present and future conditional sentences, the indicative mood is found where the condition is one of reasonable probability, the verb-phrase with "should" where it is of remote probability. Thus in Conversational English we find the following good usage;

If he's there, I'll give it to him.

If he takes more than he should, he'll be sorry.

If he should call while I'm away, ask him to wait.

If he should take that road, he'd surely be too late.

On the other hand, in conditions contrary to fact, we still hear

the past subjunctive;

If he were only a little stronger, he could do it all right.

If he took more pains with his work, he'd be the best man.

Notice that the conversational tendency away from the subjunctive produces such equivalents as these for the last two sentences;

If he'd only been a little stronger, he could have done it all right,

If he'd only take more pains with his work, he'd be the best man.

But it is not good Conversational English to say; "If he was only a little stronger……." The verb "to be" is more conservative than other verbs, and does not permit the substitution of the indicative for the subjunctive in the past tense as it does in the present.

Not only is the subjunctive uncommon in conditional clauses in Conversational English, it has also nearly disappeared from dependent noun—clauses introduced by the conjunctive "that." Where in Literary English we may find a sentence like; "His position requires that he be well acquainted with the business,……" Conversational English inserts a "should" before "be." "His position demands that he should be well acquainted with the business." "He demanded that we give up the house at once," becomes, "He demanded that we should give up the house at once." In fact, if it were not for the purely subjunctive forms, "if it were," "if I were," "if he were," which cannot be mistaken for indicatives, we should hardly have any unmistakable subjunctive mood left in Conversational English.

7. Distinct vocabularies;

A few examples of the two distinct vocabularies may be given in parallel columns, it is impossible to catologue all;

Literary English	Conversational English
obtain, procure	get
prepare	get ready

correct, satisfactory	all right (there is no such word as alright)
abide for awhile	stay, stay for awhile
please be brief	please be short
I'm weary of	I'm tired of
he resides at···	He lives at···
his residenee is···	his home is···
his abode is·····	his home is·····
a vivid expression	a clear expression
he is ill	he is sick
please don't weep	please don't cry
I rise at six	I get up at six
I retire at ten	I go to bed at ten
I cleansed the room	I cleaned the room
complete the lesson	finish the Iesson, get through with the lesson
journalist	newspaper man
the train departs at—	the train leaves at
he departed from--	he went away from
he stepped upon the rock	he stepped on the rock
since, in as much as	because, on account of
he resumed his work	he continued his work, he went back---
she resumed the lesson	she went back to the lesson
at eventide the sky became black	towards evening the sky became black
she is very frugal	she is very economical
I require from my class---	I demand from my class---
it surprized me exceedingly	it surprized me greatly, very surprized--
he is exceedingly rich	he is very rich
she is a devout student	she is an earnest student
extolling the dead	praising the dead
she descended the stairs	she came down the stairs

he accompanied her to the house	he went with her to the house etcetera

8. Effective Speech.

The grammar and the vocabulary of good Conversational English have been discussed in the preceding pages. Avoidance of errors in friendly conversation is, however, a small element. It is hardly necessary to point out that conversation among friends and equals will take care of itself if Conversational English is not sprinkled with Literary English. Disadvantage creeps in when some partipants in the conversation only know the Literary English. We still need to draw attention to Effective Speech in informal gatherings. Speaking before an informal gathering is not, ofcourse, a private matter. We do not speak merely to amuse ourselves or to give our powers play. Unconsciously we are ever asking ourselves such

questions as; "Will this speech be understood by the audience?" "Will the listeners be able to grasp the full meaning of the main subject of the speech.?" "Could this speech be misinterpreted?" Speaking should be regarded, then, not as soliloquy, but as the transmission of thought from one mind to another.

(a) Errors to be resisted in Effective Speech. The first error to be emphasized is unnecessary words. When we use an unnecessary word or phrase, we are putting an obstacle, however slight, before the listeners. Our words should be adequate, neither too few nor too many. Usually the danger of using too few words is not serious, since to say a thought briefly is harder than to say it verbosely. The danger of using too many words must be constantly remembered by the speaker who aims at skillful expression. Sometimes we can reduce the number of words by mere omission, as in this sentence;

Whenever I meet her she always greets me. (8 words)

Whenever I meet her she greets me. (7 words)

At other times we can do it by altering words;

Jim was very sorry to hear of her death. (9 words)

Jim was grieved to hear of her death. (8 words)

Often we ean condense by changing the construction, using a subordinate clause or phrase or word in place of an independent clause;

He walked an hour and then reached Apex, this is a littletown, and it is situated near Borden. (19 words, Literary style)

After walking an hour he reached Apex, a little village near Borden. (12 words, Conversational style)

But the briefest is not always the best, though we should strive for it. Brevity in the interest of economy is one thing, brevity as a result of impatience is quite another. Our trees must be free of dead wood, but they must also be fully developed.

(b) Unpleasant sounds. When a speaker uses combinations of words that are disagreeable to the ear, he places an obstacle between his listerners and himself. Cacophony, or "bad sound," grates the ear and thus distracts his attention from the sense. Euphony is perhaps most frequently violated by the use of unpleasant repetitions of sound, by the use of such chance combinations as, "the present president," "the visitor admired the vista," "a shrill trill," "he pitched hay all that day," and by the excessive use of the same consonant, as in this sentence;

The pale prince perceived a perplexed expression in the face of the principal speaker. (nine p's in one short sentence)

(c) Variety. Nobody thinks monotonously, not at least, while he is alert enough to stand up for a speech. It follows that if he really expresses his thinking, subordinating what is logically subordinate, making parallel what is logically parallel, and emphasizing what is logically emphatic, he will attain in his speech

a large measure of variety.

There is no quick way to secure variety, no short cut. If a speaker, instead of trying to express his thought naturally, aims directly at variety, he will never attain it, or, at best, will attain a kind of variety that he does not want, an artificial shadow of the real thing. He will say; "In the winters I went to school and my summers were spent at my father's farm," (shifting the voice and subject) instead of simply saying; "In the winters I went to sehool, in the summers lived at my father's farm."

An effective speaker will resist long sentences. Long sentences may begin innocently but often produce cumulative sentences growing preposterously, like a giant snowball rolling down a slope. Effective speech demands short, meaningful sentences. Long, dull and monotonous sentences are the result of dull and monotonous thinking; and dull and monotonous thinking, in turn, is the result of inattention and lack of preparation. If we are to surmount the usual weaknesses of Effective Speech, such as, vagueness, aimlessness, dullness, we must have, first of all, ample substance. Unless we have someting meaningful to say, we shall speak without interest and suffer all the deplorable consequences of speaking without interest. It results in a rambling succession of barren generalities, awkward sentences in which even grammar refuses to function correctly. When, on the other hand, we are really absorbed in what we are saying, and when the saying is meaningful, all the powers of expression that we possess become active; our ideas take on life, right words come to mind, the sentences follow the movement of thought the end in view logically unfolds.

Conscientious preparation and effort is extremely important, but not enough; there must be interest, meaningfulness and substance. Interest, meaningfulness and substance depend on knowledge, it

also rises with knowledge. How can one explain a thing when one does not properly understand it, or argue sensibly when one has not thought the subject through and procured sufficient telling evidence?

Many a student has discovered that a study at first repellent may become fascinating and exciting when one has really taken pains to know more and more about it. The possession of knowledge is delightful, the consciousness of ignorance depressing.

In approaching a theme subject, the first step must be to study it till it is sufficiently familiar. We must acquire ample knowledge and from this knowledge our speech receives substance, as well as variety.

(d) Order; In all art, order must be given to substance or materials.

Every one can see the importance of order, as well as materials in the useful arts, such as civil engineering and its branches, the importance of definite, detailed planning in the construction of roads, tunnels, bridges, etc. In the fine arts, such as painting, music and literature, the importance of order is equally great, though not so generally recognized. The order characteristic of the fine arts, however, is not mechanical but imiginative, not measurable but immeasurable, and therefor partly mysterious, like life itself. This is why a piece of literature may be more appropriately compared with a living organism than with a mechanism. As plato says in one of his dialogues, "You will allow that every discourse ought to be constructed like a living organism, having its own body and head and feet; it must have middle and extremeties. Drawn in a manner agreable to one another and to the whole." This very specially applies to Effective Speech.

In endeavoring to give form to substance, we must have before us, first and last, a definite plan. A theme of only one or two

sentences or paragraphs mentally, but long paragraphs should always be planned on paper for an effective speech. Otherwise we shall probably waste a vast amount of energy and time. (Always stay within the time limit allotted). Preserve the thoughts by jotting them down on paper.

If we will but overcome our impatience, we shall learn that the easiest procedure is to prepare in advance a clear outline and to keep it before us while delivering the speech. Control of the subject, well—planned outline, short and meaningful sentences contribute to an interesting and effective speech.

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