

Getting the Most Out of the Dictionary

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“Ah, take one consideration with another, the teacher’s lot is not a happy one.” Slightly garbled out of *The Pirates of Penzance*, this quotation is of course an overstatement. But certainly there is one consideration that makes teachers of English less than sublimely contented with their lot: the never-ending barrage of questions about the language to which they are subjected, inside the classroom and out.

Some of my recent letters from teachers of English in various parts of the world illustrate the kinds of questions I am talking about. Here are samples of inquiries I have received over the past year:

1. A recent article in a magazine has a sentence that speaks of the people being “tired of the effort of supporting the program.” Is *effort of supporting* correct, or should it be *effort to support*?
2. In the sentence *He sank into contemplation with his arms across*, is the phrase *with his arms across* idiomatic?
3. Which is preferable, “not warm *or* cold” or “not warm *nor* cold”?
4. Suppose someone asks, “When Bill dialed 3056, did it get connected at once, or not?” Should the answer be “It got connected at once,” or “Yes, it got connected”? Is *yes* in this sentence necessary?
5. In the clause *the fields changed from green to brown, the blossoms to fruit*, what does the word *brown* mean?

These are all authentic questions to which I made a response that I hope was reasonably helpful. But I must confess that for three of the five I felt the necessity of securing some kind of data-based support for the answer I gave. And my natural curiosity led me to see what in the way of firm information I could find for the other two. These are a mere five out of dozens.

Other queries I received asked about the propriety of the use of a singular verb or pronoun of reference with *data*;

the various connectives employed with the word *different* (*from, to, than*); the acceptability of *graduated from* in the active voice; a possible justification for the split infinitive; the pronunciation of the word *falcon*.

Those making the inquiries included both native and foreign speakers of English, all of whom were teaching English in a foreign country. The fact that they asked such questions at all indicates a considerable degree of uncertainty on the part of a fair number in the profession. Let us consider first why this is so.

One reason for the uncertainty of teachers of English suggests itself at once: the lack of uniformity in the language itself. It takes only a glance at certain factual data to understand this lack of uniformity. At a conservative estimate, there are some 275 million speakers of English as a first, or native, language. It would be surprising indeed to find these vast numbers speaking the language in identical fashion. Moreover, these speakers of English are scattered over five continents. They live in widely differing circumstances. They are subject to varying conditions of education and transmission of their cultural heritage. In situations of this kind, obviously certain tendencies make for uniformity and others encourage diversity. It is beside the point, therefore, to insist that the question *Had you a good time at the cinema?* is either more or less acceptable than *Did you have a good time at the movies?* They are simply expressions that are likely to occur in different geographical contexts. Consequently, the assumption of a single, rigid, monolithic standard for the entire language is as dubious as the notion that there is a single, unqualified “correct” answer to many of the questions I cited earlier.

At this point one may well ask, “But why should questions such as these create any difficulty for the teacher? Can’t he get the answers out of the textbook he uses?” Unfortunately, the answer to this has to be “No!” or at the

very least, “Not in a satisfactory manner.” There are several reasons for this.

Textbooks are prone to oversimplify complex linguistic issues in the interest of what their authors conceive to be pedagogical effectiveness. And there is surely some justification for that. At other times the linguistic descriptions and judgments in the textbooks reflect information that is neither wholly correct nor accurate. My favorite illustration of this point is a sentence I once found in an English textbook published in a non-English-speaking country: *He was riding on his automobile through a country road.* I can readily understand why and how these errors in the use of words were made. But this scarcely condones the misinformation this sentence must have conveyed to several thousand students.

As a consequence of all this, the conscientious and professionally motivated teacher will often feel impelled to go behind the textbook and attempt to search out on his own the kind of primary information about the language on which he can base a reasoned judgment.

But suppose the teacher tries to do just this. Where will he look? Presumably he would think first of the scholarly grammars of English—the works not intended as teaching texts but on which the textbooks are presumably based. He might find answers to some of the questions like those quoted at the outset of this discussion. But the chances are equally good that he might not. This assumes, of course, that he has at his disposal the works of Otto Jespersen, Hendrik Poutsma, George Curme, Archibald Hill, Robert Lees, Charles Fillmore—to run the gamut of the 20th century, from the historical-philological school, through the structuralists, to the generative-transformationalists and the case grammarians.

Moreover, despite the extensive—almost gargantuan—nature of some of these treatments (witness the seven volumes of Jespersen’s *Modern English Grammar*), it is a truism that no single grammar covers the entire structure of the English language in every conceivable contingency. Someone pointed out not long ago that neither the structuralists nor the transformationalists have covered the English subjunctive at all adequately. We might say the same for such a cause célèbre as the split infinitive, where there has been only counting on the fingers and no real analysis.

But lest I seem to be preaching a sermon of despair and wanhope (to use a good Middle English term, which I do intentionally), let me hasten to say that there is one useful source of information about the English language that English teachers often fail to use to its fullest potential—namely, the dictionary. I shall explain shortly the kind of dictionary I have in mind.

One must concede that, for a variety of reasons, the English lexicographers have come closer to dealing with the English language in its totality than have the grammarians. It is true that the dictionary organizes and presents its information in a quite different manner—necessarily so, of course. But nevertheless it is a constant source of surprise to find out how much information about the language is available to the person who is thoroughly at home in this linguistic resource, is experienced in searching out the information he needs, and is knowledgeable and sophisticated in interpreting what he finds. To go back to the five questions reported earlier, dictionaries contain relevant information on four of them. Grammars, even the most inclusive, dealt adequately with one and somewhat less so with a second.

The usefulness of the dictionary as a reliable source of information for word meanings, spelling, and pronunciation is widely recognized. But even in these obvious matters, the information that the dictionary has to offer is not always accurately interpreted. With respect to pronunciation there seem to be two general pitfalls: the interpretation of whatever pronouncing key the dictionary employs, and the supposed superior credibility of the “first” pronunciation.

Determining the pronunciation

In general, those few dictionaries that use a phonetic alphabet to indicate pronunciation pose no problem. But unfortunately they constitute a minority, especially in the United States. It is the varying systems of indicating the pronunciation, and especially the treatment of variant pronunciations, that is likely to confuse many users of the dictionary. The word *falcon*, which I referred to earlier, offers an excellent illustration of the difficulties that can arise.

A search of eight dictionaries produces three broad varieties of pronunciation: (1) a pronunciation similar to that of *talcum*, with the vowel sound of *fat* and the *l* sounded; (2) a pronunciation with the vowel sound of *offer*, also with the *l* sounded; and (3) a pronunciation with the vowel sound of *hawk*, with the *l* silent. As far as interpreting the pronunciation symbols goes, the American dictionaries pose no problem for anyone who has mastered the simple technique of equating the diacritical symbols with their values in the key words given as illustrations. (This is not to say that such a practice has my entire approval, but that is a matter I shall not discuss here.)

The British dictionaries do present a difficulty for persons whose basic orientation toward pronunciation is American. (And the reverse is also true.) No British dictionary records the first of the pronunciations mentioned above. And the British transcription of the other two pronunciations can be puzzling. For the second one I mention

above, they give a symbol for the vowel sound of *offer*. For my third one, they give a different symbol identified as the vowel sound in *hawk*. The trouble with this for some users is that most Americans pronounce both *offer* and *hawk* with the same vowel sound. But speakers of British “received pronunciation” make the vowel sound of *hawk* with the jaw higher and the lips more rounded than for their vowel in *offer*. Thus, to extract the ultimate in information from the lexicographical record requires a sophistication somewhat beyond that of the average dictionary user. But it is a sophistication a well-trained teacher of English might be expected to develop if he does not already possess it.

It is even more worthwhile and informative to note the way in which the dictionaries record the variants. The pronunciation without the *l* usually comes last. Two dictionaries, one English and one American, indicate that this is the usual pronunciation among those who practice the sport of falconry. At best this is no more than a minute sector of the population, cherishing what is clearly an in-group pronunciation. For anyone on the outside to imitate it would smack of affectation. Although this tidbit of information is pleasant to add to one’s store of knowledge, especially since it helps to account for the pronunciation of the personal name Faulkner, it will scarcely go beyond that.

We are left then with the first two pronunciations, the vowel of *fat* and the vowel of *offer*, with the following consonant sounded in both instances. Since the first of these is absent from the British dictionaries, it is reasonably safe to assume that the pronunciation does not occur in England. Consequently, if the general orientation of one’s students is toward British English, as it clearly is in some countries, this is not a pronunciation to recommend.

With American English the problem is quite different and much more complex. The 1961 Webster and the 1969 American Heritage Dictionary list /fælkən/ first and /fɔlkən/ second. The 1966 Random House Dictionary has them in reverse order. The 1934 Webster does not record /fælkən/ at all. What can we learn from this? First of all, let me say that there is little or no validity in the myth of the preferred status of the first pronunciation. As Clarence Barnhart so aptly wrote in the introduction to the American College Dictionary: “Any pronunciation in this dictionary is a good pronunciation and may be safely used. If the second or third pronunciation is your natural pronunciation, it is the one to use.”

This solves the problem for the teacher who is a native speaker of American English. It is less helpful for the non-native. But there is more information lurking beneath the surface. From the dictionary record as I have presented it, it is quite evident that *falcon*, with the vowel of *tal*, is a

recent development and constitutes what is in effect a spelling pronunciation. This pronunciation was stimulated (or more probably hastened) some years ago by the appearance on the motor car market of a model with that name. This resulted in thousands of people pronouncing the word who never used it before. The question, then, is whether this was sufficiently ephemeral to cause the spelling pronunciation ultimately to disappear, to be replaced again by the older one. What the future holds here is anyone’s guess. But given the tenacity with which Americans have held to spelling pronunciations in the past, it is a reasonable assumption that /fælkən/ will remain with us and probably increase in incidence, although the path of discretion might lead the non-native speaker with no habitual commitment to either pronunciation to employ /fɔlkən/.

I have no vested interest in the matter, no strong degree of preference. I have dealt with the matter only as an illustration of how much a close and perceptive use of dictionaries can teach anyone.

Determining the meaning

I have mentioned the explanation of word meanings as one of the obvious services that a dictionary performs. Here much depends on the range and scope of the dictionary. Just as no dictionary can hope to record every word in the language, no dictionary can hope to cover all the uses and applications of the words that it does record. And on occasion, some of the information it does give is fairly well hidden. Yet, had the person who inquired about the meaning of *brown* in *The fields changed from green to brown* consulted the Oxford English Dictionary, he would have found, in the second definition given for the word, “withered leaves” given as an example of where the color can occur. And among the citations given for that definition, he would have found a line from Sir Walter Scott, *land of brown heath and shaggy wood*. This does highlight the value of citations in a dictionary, a feature all too often ignored by those who consult it.

I must mention here another matter in connection with dictionary treatments of word meaning, a matter that is little understood and appreciated even by teachers of English—namely, the order in which definitions are given. Again, a concrete illustration will be helpful. There has been in the past and still is some objection to the use of the word *disinterested* to indicate “lack of interest, uninterested.” The objectors generally maintain that the only proper use of the word is in the sense “not influenced by regard to personal advantage.” I have both heard and read objections to the treatment in the third edition of Webster’s dictionary, where the “uninterested” definition comes first. What the critics did not know is that the Webster dictionaries have

for years been committed by editorial policy to presenting meanings in the order in which they appeared in the English language. In this particular instance, the facts are that the first recorded use of *disinterested* in English was by John Donne in 1612, and that here the word was used in the sense of “not interested,” and that the other meaning did not appear until almost 50 years later. This is clearly evident from the citations in the Oxford English Dictionary, which gives the two definitions in precisely the same order, though it labels the first “obsolete.” Apparently the Webster files show a current revival of the first meaning.

Again I have no vested interest in the word, nor, as a matter of fact, in the chronological ordering of definitions. There are other ways to arrange them. Some dictionaries adopt what they believe to be an order of semantic frequency, and arguments in favor of this practice can be adduced, although firm evidence on the frequency of meaning is hard to come by. Still others seem to employ a “core and marginal meaning” principle, placing first a central meaning, around which they organize the other senses. I hold no brief for any of these schemes; each has its virtues and its pitfalls. What does disturb me, however, is the innocence on the part of so many vocal critics of the obvious necessity of a general editorial policy with respect to meaning arrangements, to say nothing of their readiness to single out a particular dictionary for criticism without taking the trouble to ascertain what other dictionaries do with respect to precisely the same word.

Determining points of grammar

So far we have dealt with those aspects of the language that are generally conceded to fall within the province of the dictionary, and for which, as surveys in both England and America have shown, the dictionary is frequently consulted. By no means is this a complete inventory of the information that the reliable and carefully compiled dictionaries contain.

Inflectional Forms. With respect to such inflectional forms as noun plurals and verb past tenses, the textbook grammar can only offer general statements about the major or regular patterns and give typical instances of the minor or deviant forms. In a sense, the dictionary has an obligation to give this information for every member of the form class in question. This is a highly valuable contribution, for it is the irregularities, the members of minor inflectional categories, that constitute the greatest difficulty for the learner, causing him to appeal to the teacher for help. It is from the dictionary rather than from the grammar that one is likely to learn that the loanword *antenna* retains its Latin plural ending only when it is used in its zoological sense and that

it conforms to the native *-s*-plural pattern when it refers to a radio or television aerial. And to the alert user of the dictionary, this may help to suggest a broader truth about the language—namely, what is likely to occur morphologically when a learned word transfers to a popular context.

Without going into details, I shall simply say that the dictionary is likely to contain fuller information than the school grammar (not necessarily the scholarly survey) about the variant status of the past tense and past participle forms of such verbs as *thrive*, *dream*, *prove* (past participle), *awake*, *swing*, *eat*, *shine*—to mention only a few. Some of these, the last two in particular, reflect differences between British and American usage. Others show the verbs to be in the process of transition from irregular to regular status.

Agreement of Verb. It was the Oxford English Dictionary and not the textbooks that as early as 1907 explained that the use of *none* with a plural verb had been current in the English language from the time of King Alfred on. It took the textbooks some four decades to catch up with this significant feature of English—namely, that in a negation the distinction between one and more than one is of far less importance than it is in a positive statement. It was again the dictionaries that anticipated the textbooks in the observation that the noun *data* had in essence become a collective and accordingly might quite as readily govern the singular as the plural.

This brings to mind another useful and highly innovative feature to be found in just one dictionary of the American vocabulary. As all of us know, the facility of the English language in forming compound words is extraordinary. But for the most part, one can find out what they are only in terms of the first element of the combination. Thus, it is easy to be impressed by the 15 compounds with the word *beaver* as the first element listed in the current Webster, beginning with *beaver board* and ending with *beaverwood*. But where is one to find out about the combinations with *board* and *wood* as the last element? The answer is the Dictionary of Americanisms, which furnishes this kind of index as part of its regular apparatus, and in these particular instances lists 71 combinations for *beaver* as the first element and 48 for *beaver* as the second element.

Synonym discrimination is another important service that most dictionaries perform. Confusion here is likely to arise from two sources. Bilingual dictionaries can do little more than list the most obvious equivalents—which often falls short of suggesting the restrictions on the use of words with closely related meanings. For example, a French-English dictionary will give *absorber* and *armortir* as French equivalents of English *absorb*. But this falls far short of indicating the contexts where *absorb* may be used synonymously

with *monopolize, consume, engross, take up, deaden*—and when they cannot. One can easily *absorb* or *take up* someone's time or attention; a blotter can *absorb* or *take up* the water from a glass that has been overturned, but one can scarcely *absorb* the next topic in a list to be considered.

A further difficulty arises from the fact that a host of English words have cognates in a number of Western European languages. Returning to *absorb* as a case in point, we find that the French cognate *absorber* is often used in the sense of “drink” or “imbibe,” and that Spanish *absorber* may mean “to eat” as well as “to drink.” In English the meaning of *absorb* does intersect with the meaning of *consume*, but only in the extended sense of a *consuming* or *absorbing* interest or curiosity. (I have met people who might be said to absorb their martinis at a cocktail party, but I would find it considerably more difficult to speak, even in jest, of their absorbing steak smothered with onions.) The point is, however, that reputable dictionaries, through a well-devised scheme of cross-referencing, do deal with synonym discrimination in considerable detail.

About Usage Labels. I must not leave this subject without calling attention to the various kinds of usage labels that dictionaries employ. These may refer to the national varieties of English in which a word or meaning is current; whether or not it is obsolete or archaic; whether it is a scientific, technical, or occupational term; and, finally, to the degree of acceptability of a particular word or construction—the so-called status labels.

Earlier in this essay I used an old word *wanhope*, meaning “despair.” The second (1934) edition of Webster's New International Dictionary records it as obsolete, and the third (1961) edition does not even enter it. A resourceful teacher should be able to discover the nature of the editorial policy that eliminated the word in the third edition. Then, by consulting the citations in the Oxford English Dictionary treatment of the word, he would conclude that the editors of the Webster Third had simply made a mistake.

Included among the status labels are such terms as *colloquial, informal, illiterate, dialect, substandard, nonstandard, and slang*. To begin with, no one using a dictionary should ever accept as conclusive the application of any of these labels in one dictionary without verifying it in two or three others. The criteria for applying these labels are so hazy and inconsistent that uncritical acceptance of the judgment of one dictionary is perilous indeed.

The label that merits the most attention here because it is so often misinterpreted is *colloquial*. Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of the lexicographers, many persons have come to take it as a term of condemnation.

The original intent was merely to indicate that a word

marked *colloquial* was characteristic of conversation and not usually found in formal or literary style. In order to correct the general misapprehension, the second (1934) edition of Webster's New International Dictionary went so far as to conclude its definition of the word with the statement, “Colloquial speech may be as correct as formal speech.” The attempt was fruitless. The public misinterpretation of the label continued unabated. Recently a number of dictionaries have substituted the term *informal* for *colloquial*. This does have the advantage of focusing on the style or atmosphere of the language rather than the mode of communication, speech or writing. But the new practice is not yet universal, and the teacher should be most cautious when he encounters *colloquial* as a label.

What kind of dictionary?

I said I would explain the kind of dictionary I have been concerned with in the course of this discussion. *It is the dictionary written entirely in English, not the bilingual dictionary.* And it is not the stringently abridged dictionary but one that aims at a fairly comprehensive coverage of the language. Bilingual dictionaries, as I have already suggested, are usually content to give only the most obvious lexical equivalents, without troubling to indicate where the equivalence no longer applies. This is especially true of the abbreviated or vest-pocket variety.

One of the favorite Sunday comic-strip characters of my youth was Dictionary Jacques, a French immigrant employed as a man-of-all-work by an American family. Dictionary Jacques's devotion to his inadequate bilingual dictionary was responsible for a misadventure every week. One that I still recall was on the occasion when his employer asked him to trim the Christmas tree. Obviously his dictionary supplied, for English *trim*, only the French word *emonder*, “to cut close,” but did not include *ornier*, “to adorn.” So Dictionary Jacques worked away cheerfully at what he thought he had been told to do—but the result was scarcely what the family had anticipated!

Certainly, every teacher of English should possess, as part of his personal library, a dictionary of at least collegiate size, the kind that contains approximately 125,000 entries. But, additionally, every teacher of English should have access to no less than three or four more extensive works: the Webster's Third New International, the Random House, the American Heritage, and (now that it is available in two volumes with a magnifying glass as an accessory) the microprint Oxford English Dictionary as well. It is the responsibility of any English-teaching agency or institution to supply these to its staff as part of a generally accessible professional resource library.

Interpreting what is given

But having access to dictionaries is by no means the whole solution. The teacher must soundly interpret the information they offer. And when the dictionaries differ, the teacher must consider such differences in the light of their differences in editorial policy and practice. I have already given an illustration of how this applies with respect to the ordering of definitions, but this is by no means an end to the matter.

The teacher must recognize, for example, that the Webster Third considers its primary function to be an impartial recorder of the language. Thus it draws its citations from every kind of writing, from the very popular and casual to the literary and technical. The editors set out to record the facts of the language rather than to prescribe or dictate how the language should be used. On some points, especially in its usage notes, the Random House policy was that the dictionary editor must do more than record usage: he must also teach. As a consequence, its notes reflect the opinion of educated users of English. At the other end of the scale, the American Heritage editors viewed the language as under constant challenge—from the scientist, the bureaucrat, the broadcaster, the inventor of every stripe, even the voyager in space. They felt even more strongly than the Random House editors that it was the duty of the lexicographer to add an essential dimension of guidance toward what they consider to be grace and precision in the use of language.

Determining questions of usage

In order to deal competently with many of these problems, however, we need not only the quantitative data about usage but also some indication of the editorial attitude toward new developments in the language as well. In this connection, the American Heritage Dictionary has made an interesting contribution to lexicography by collecting the views of a panel of approximately 100 persons, competent in their employment of the language, on certain moot questions of usage. The way in which the entire operation was carried out has been criticized. But nevertheless it made the point that the general attitude toward a word, a word form, a syntactical development, and so on, is quite as important as the record of usage itself. One could, for example, adduce any number of arguments—historical, logical, and otherwise—to justify the form *ain't I?* in the first person, negative interrogative (and only there). But the simple fact is that the verb form *ain't*, no matter where or how it is used, generates a host of negative reactions (from 84 to 99 percent, as far as the panel was concerned). And this is indication enough that emotion will continue to counter logic and history in this instance.

The same irrational reaction is evident with respect to the derivative form *finalize*. It is by no means a newcomer to the language, having a history of some 50 years of reputable use. One can ascertain its reputability by looking at the authors of the citations in the Webster dictionary entry. Moreover, the addition of the suffix *-ize* to adjectives is not only a widespread practice in English (witness *brutalize*, *fertilize*, *sterilize*, *spiritualize*) but a practice of long standing, going back to the beginning of the 17th century. The Random House Dictionary in a usage note recognizes the 50-year life of the word in an attempt to refute the myth that it is of recent bureaucratic coinage. Despite all of this, it turned out to be unacceptable to 90 percent of the American Heritage usage panel. Ultimately it may acquire a wholly respectable status in the language, but the collective opinion of the panel suggests that the time is not yet at hand. But it is the dictionary rather than the grammar that provides this information.

The matter of the application of derivative suffixes is one of the very features of English that is scantily glossed over in many of the textbooks of English for foreigners. There are, for example, several ways of converting adjectives into abstract nouns—the addition of *-ness* and *-ity* being just two of them. A person with a native feeling for the language knows that *brutality* and *fertility* seem plausible formations, whereas *brutalness* and *fertileness* do not. The non-native teacher of English, aware of the existence of both of these devices in the language, is not so likely to possess this *Sprachgefühl*. Where can he acquire it? As I have indicated, the textbooks and grammars are not likely to deal with the matter in any detail. But all reliable English dictionaries have separate entries for each of the derivative suffixes. And the Oxford, at least, presents the application that is made of them in considerable detail.

Naturally these differences in attitude of the American Heritage editors in the concept of the function of a dictionary affect not only the usage notes but very often what is recorded and what is omitted, the grammatical information supplied, the pronouncements as to formal and informal, to mention only a few matters. It is scarcely ever sufficient, therefore, to limit one's investigation of any language problem to the information contained in a single dictionary. And the teacher must view what is extracted from each in the light of its general editorial policy.

How does one learn about policy and practice? The answer is very simple. The dictionary prefaces and introductions always set these matters forth with admirable fullness and clarity. But unfortunately those are the parts of the dictionary that people seldom read. It goes without saying, however, that a thorough acquaintance with these *terrae in-*

cognitae is part of the professional responsibility of every English teacher. Equally so, every teacher should have a complete familiarity with all of the kinds of information a dictionary has to offer—and the requisite skill to find it. I believe, moreover, that training in full and resourceful use of dictionaries should be an important part of the formal preparation of every English teacher.

In closing

There is a quaint sentence in one of DeQuincey's essays in which he says, "I enjoy wandering among a library." Today we would use the word *browsing*, but his was a new use of the word in DeQuincey's time. Browsing in libraries

is delightful: it offers the fullest opportunity for serendipity, the finding of valuable or agreeable things not sought for. So too does browsing in dictionaries, which rank high among the incomparably rich resources of the language. But one must know how to find the nuggets. And when he has them in hand, he must be able to distinguish diamonds from glass, real gold from fool's gold. It is my firm conviction that, in order to discharge his professional potential, every teacher of English, whether as a native or a foreign language, must become an inveterate, an ingenious, a critical and a sophisticated dictionary browser. Then he can more easily and more confidently answer the barrage of questions endlessly aimed at him.

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The British Council also has several series of English-teaching films, which they are glad to lend to teachers of English without cost. In most instances, either of these organizations is able and willing to provide a projectionist and a regular screen for the purpose of showing their films.¹

1. Editor's Note: Having a regular screen set up in the classroom eliminates the necessity of the rather complicated rear-screen projection described by Mr. Ramirez, but it has its own disadvantage: To project the film onto the screen, you must have the projector in the classroom (or outside the room, shooting through an open door); and this creates a distracting noise. The rear-screen method described by Mr. Ramirez, by placing the projector in the closed (and perhaps insulated) master-console room, eliminated the projector noise from the classroom. These considerations suggest that films are less than ideal for classroom use, even when everything needed is at hand. Probably the best situation for showing films is in an auditorium with an enclosed projection booth in the rear—a facility not readily available to many teachers of English.

Conclusion

These, then, are some of the ways in which you can enrich your English-teaching program by making often-neglected visual, audio, and audiovisual teaching aids work more effectively for you. The possibilities for visual aids are practically unlimited, and success comes to the teacher with foresight, ingenuity, and imagination.

But always remember that everything described here—pictures, charts, mock-ups, tapes, films—are aids to instruction and not ends in themselves. They are not substitutes for teaching. Ultimately, the responsibility for teaching the language to the students, and employing any aids that can help in the process, rests not with the school administration (though it can help greatly) but with the teacher. It is a great step in the right direction when both the school administration and the teacher recognize the need for such aids. It is a tremendous leap forward when both DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. Taking this leap forward can put these often-neglected tools to work for you.