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PSYCHOLOGICAL PARALLELISMS BETWEEN SPEECH DISORDER AND ORAL ENGLISH¹

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BY PSYCHOLOGICAL parallelisms between speech disorder and oral English, I mean vague correlations between conditions that exist in one and those which are found in analogous form, in the other.

In this paper I wish to compare psychological content, the vague mental background of speech, in a word, the mentation above our external, oral utterances, with that utterance itself.

In order to discover a few characteristics of speech disorder that have their counterparts or analogous characteristics in oral English, let us consider for a few moments some cases of speech disorder and analyze their mental background enough to catch the size of its content, and then let us compare this result with some of the psychological contents found in cases where speech is supposed to be above the pathological, where it is supposed to rank as normal, and yet, where there are at the same time numerous individual varieties. In a word, let us compare the psychological content of a speech disorder with the psychological content of normal speech and see if there are any parallelisms.

We all know that, outside of the field of speech, individuality (and its varieties) externalizes itself in various forms. Take, for example, the field of disease. The whole clinical picture of any given disease is necessarily modified by the dominating individuality of a person behind that disease. In other walks of life it is recognized that the individual type plays a leading rôle everywhere. In most undertakings, in fact, one is inclined to look for the individual to fit the place rather than to select some vague, generalized personality and mould it into the place. In dramatic performances we choose the already formed individual fitted to take a certain part rather than picking out

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individuals indiscriminately and moulding them into the individuality of the part. As we look now into some of the rarer forms of speech defect, I think we shall find persisting this same principle of dominating individuality.

The external speech of the idiot may consist in a grunt or in a few words which he has taken years to learn, or there may be the utterance of a few short and simple sentences. The psychological background or mental content above this sort of utterance is found to be marked by emptiness, lack of mentation, undevelopment, incomplete sensory intake, slight—if any—proper interpretation, often no mental digestive processes, and little, if any, motor control exerted over the output. The mental act behind idiotic utterance consists in a quick speech reflex along a well-trodden line, with as little mentation as one can imagine. Pathologic study shows deficiency in the structure of the brain and that therefore the nerve foundation requisite to utterance is lacking.

The speech of the imbecile is a little better. It is usually long delayed in starting, and at the time of completion may consist, at best, of pretty perfect utterance of short sounds, both vowels and consonants, coupled usually with the ability to utter a few of almost any monosyllabic words. But the great lack in the utterance of the imbecile consists in an inability to combine words. For example, you ask him to say word by word "the cat ran down the cellar stairs" and he can say it, but ask him to say that whole phrase and he misses it. The mentation of the imbecile consists in a small amount of sensory intake, some vague stabs at interpretation of that intake which are often sufficient to guide him in some of his ordinary doings. Over this there is a very slight amount of collaboration and some little control of the motor output. The mental act in cases of imbecility consists in a fairly characteristic reflex speech that shows a little mentation but fails, and constantly fails, in combinations of ideas and phrase expression. The brain here has more structure than idiocy, and yet it provides only a faulty foundation for the fulfilment of its expected function.

Another feature common to both of these speech disorders is this: There is a slight possibility of development in each case,

but the general picture—the whole external appearance in each condition—the show, remains practically static and unchanged. There is a fairly stable psychological content and a pretty uniform vocal externalization of that content. We also notice a fact which is so closely correlated here as to deserve mention, the fact that the brain structure, on large lines, shows corresponding variations.

We turn now to the moron. The moron is a high-grade mental defective. He is so high, sometimes, that he fails of detection; he is often difficult to diagnose without long experience in making mental measurements, and he often passes muster where he should not have passed. The speech disorder in the moron consists in the lack of a high degree of power to combine utterances. Individual sounds are correct, any and all words may be uttered, and usually he can frame short or even pretty long sentences, but when the moron is put up against complicated combinations, subtle connotations, the need to make intricate mental analyses or to follow intricate ramifications of thought, there is utter failure. The mind appears like a child's mind, as if the individual had stopped mental growth at fifteen, while the body had gone on developing for years. The psychological content of various individual morons shows a pretty complete and elaborate sense intake, fairly full interpretation of such sensorial data, simple forms of mental collaboration, and fairly full control of motor output. The lack, in a word, consists in the absence of complicated collaboration processes.

One moron may show his deficiency in relation to playmates and play with those that are younger; another may show it in another expression of mental processes such as study. The brain in the moron exhibits an inherited variation in structure.

Thus we have shown in a general way that oral utterance is parallel to psychological content and that it is parallel to brain condition.

A review of these conditions shows certain elements or phases of the situation that are constant and are never reversed. For example, in the idiot we never find the power of collaboration or the utterance of complicated sentences that we have in the normal individual or even that which we have in the moron. In

the imbecile we have a half-way house to normal psychological content and vocal externalizations. This form is always higher than the idiot and never as high as the typical moron. In the moron itself, we always find the basis of sensorial content, interpretative ability, with slight collaborative processes, but we never find those marked deficiencies of the idiot or the imbecile.

We have here types of speech disorder as externalization of types of psychological content with a structural foundation in brain abnormality, and these are pretty constant variables. When the speech output enlarges the psychological content enlarges, and the brain structure becomes more normal.

One might reverse this order and say that the individuality of the brain type allows more amplified development of the psychological content, and that this, in turn, naturally permits a more complete vocal output. Within the class these types are constant. They never change, one to the other. They never revolve very much. They are susceptible of some slight improvement, but the type is constant.

If you have caught my meaning, we have here, then, a clear picture which I want to use in asking a question and in stimulating discussion.

Have we enough evidence to take this point over into what we call the normal sphere of speech and make the same correlation? Are we justified in saying that normal brains necessitate normal psychological content and normal oral content? Can we say, as we hear men talk, that their oral variety depends on a psychological variety, and this on a cortical brain variety? A side question might also be asked: If the brain variety comes from heredity—and we can be sure that brain heredity enters here—are we then to breed for voices, minds, and brains and thus indirectly, are we to assume a sort of fatalism here, a sort of fixed, stable, inflexible nature, educable in part, but which when training is forced, presents a stony resistance beyond which we fail to educate? Again, are we orally what we are because we are psychologically what we are, and this because we are anatomically what we are, and does each type, therefore, stand a unit, unique, unchangeable, yet slightly elastic?

Picking the individual for the dramatic part was mentioned above as a necessity. The study of speech disorder and the psychological background in mental defectives shows us that there is a pretty constant type that is limited to classes, immovable and slightly educable. Can we say this same thing about all normal mentalities as we meet them in the world? Can we say that each man represents a type of speech, psychic content, and brain basis, and must we assume that he is in his intellectual background pretty much the same inflexible thing, perhaps slightly variable, a little elastic, somewhat amenable to education, evolution, and change, but after all a set, invariable, fatalistic entity belonging to a stable type? This query I open for your decision in the discussion.

Summary: A study of speech defect in the varying degrees of psychological content, with corresponding change of brain background shows that the psychological content corresponds to the amount of oral output.

A study of a variety of types of speech defect shows that the output varies somewhat according to the type within the class.

Brain structure, psychological content, and oral output thus run pretty constantly parallel between different classes of mental defectives. This shows that in the background we have a pretty firm establishment of a mental type with which we must deal.

To enliven the discussion, I will carry my conclusion to its end, and say that in what we term the normal individual structure, psychological content and oral output therefore run vaguely parallel in normal types and are only partially educable, changeable, variable, but are mostly fixed, fatalistic, and firm.