

Basic English Becomes World Politics

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advertisement, have less covering power. These have a place in Basic because it would be hard, if not impossible, to do without them.

Ogden's great and surprising discovery was the fact that English may be clearly, smoothly and expertly used with a very small number of those names of acts and operations listed in schoolbooks as "verbs." In the normal talk of most persons of education, about 4000 common ones come into play. To take the place of these 4000, Basic has 18 whose power to do the work of all the others seems past belief till one goes into their range of sense expansion in detail. These 18 are: come, get, give, go, keep, let, make, put, seem, take, be, do, have, say, see, send, may and will.

When these elastic little servants are used, separately or joined in word structures like give up, put off, get over, they say everything normally covered by more complex, Latin-rooted ornaments of the language. There is no exchange of common knowledge, news, or everyday opinion which may not be made clear with Basic's 850 words. And quality of writing is not over-greatly damaged by its narrow limits. The reading of it may give no more trouble than the reading of these last three paragraphs which—to the word paragraphs—have been written in Basic English.

With the single exception of Chinese, English is the only major language from which a basic elixir can thus be distilled. Professor

Richards (now at Harvard, and Basic's most active exponent in the U.S.), estimates that at least 2000 words would be required to create any kind of a useful basic French or Spanish. Tortuously inflected languages like German and Japanese would demand even more. The reasons why English—richest, most intellectual, and perhaps most delicate of all languages—contains this inner voice, rest in the history of the British Isles.

"Seldom Awkward, Often Eloquent"

Although the chief claim made for Basic is that it would enable people all over the world to communicate with one another in a relatively-rich and easily-acquired medium, enthusiastic advocates say that it need never be awkward and can often be eloquent. The fundamental rule, they say, is that bad English is bad Basic, good English good Basic. And to show what the possibilities are in eloquence and dignity, *Life* gives the Basic version of Lincoln's address at Gettysburg, which we reprint elsewhere, along with the original, for purposes of comparison.

There is, in fact, a library of Basic—works by Shaw, Stevenson, Swift and Tolstoy; at least one play by Shakes-

peare; and best known of all, a Basic *New Testament*. Here is the Lord's Prayer in Basic (from St. Matthew):

Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. Let your kingdom come. Let your pleasure be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us this day bread for our needs. And make us free of our debts, as we have made those free who are in debt to us. And let us not be put to the test, but keep us safe from the Evil One.

Arguments Against

So much for the advocates. Let us now return to the *New Statesman* for some irreverence:

With one half of the claim put forward for Basic English we are in complete agreement. It is a very easy language for a foreigner to learn. Two weeks of hard work, as its inventor, Mr. Ogden, reckons, might suffice. The pupil's pronunciation might leave something to be desired. He might be tempted to translate the idioms of his mother-tongue into it, with disconcerting effects. But a quick-witted Englishman, let us say Mr. Churchill, landing, for instance, at Syracuse, would understand the first Sicilian who brought him fruit and wine with a careful little address in Basic English. Here is a good beginning. But we are not so sure that the Sicilian would understand Mr. Churchill with equal ease. All

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OPERATIONS, ETC.

100

COME
GET
GIVE
GO
KEEP
LET
MAKE
PUT
SEEM
TAKE
BE
DO
HAVE
SAY
SEE
SEND
MAY
WILL
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AFTER
AGAINST
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NORTH
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THINGS

400 GENERAL

ACCOUNT
ACT
ADDITION
ADJUSTMENT
ADVERTISEMENT
AGREEMENT
AIR
AMOUNT
AMUSEMENT
ANIMAL
ANSWER
APPARATUS
APPROVAL
ARGUMENT
ART
ATTACK
ATTEMPT
ATTENTION
ATTACHMENT
AUTHORITY
BACK
BALANCE
BASE
BEHAVIOUR
BELIEF
BIRTH
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WEST
PLEASE
YES

SENSE
SERVANT
SEX
SHADE
SHAKE
SHAME
SHOCK
SIDE
SIGN
SILK
SILVER
SISTER
SIZE
SKY
SLEEP
SLIP
SLOPE
SMASH
SLAVE
SMILE
SMOKE
SNEEZE
SNOW
SOAP
SOCIETY
SON
SONG
SORT
SOUND
SPRING
SPACE
STAGE
START
STATEMENT
STEAM
STEEL
STEP
STITCH
STONE
STOP
STORY
STRETCH
STRUCTURE
SUBSTANCE
SUGAR
SUGGESTION
SUMMER
SUPPORT
SURPRISE
SWIM
SYSTEM
TALK
TASTE
TAX
TEACHING
TENDENCY
TEST
THEORY
THING
THOUGHT
THUNDER
TIME
TURN
TOP
TOUCH
TRADE
TRANSPORT
TRICK
TROUBLE
TURN
TWIST
UNIT
USE
VALUE
VERSE
VESSEL
VIEW
VOICE
WALK
WASH
WASTE
WATER
WAVE
WAX
WAY
WEATHER
WEEK
WEIGHT
WINE
WINTER
WOMAN
WOOD
WOUND
WRITING
YEAR

200 PICTURABLE

ANGLE
ANT
APPLE
ARCH
ARM
ARMY
BABY
BAG
BALL
BAND
BASIN
BASKET
BATH
BED
BEE
BELL
BERRY
BIRD
BLADE
BOARD
BOAT
BONE
BOOK
BOOT
BOTTLE
BOX
BOY
BRAIN
BRAKE
BRANCH
BRICK
BRIDGE
BRUSH
BUCKET
BULB
BUTTON
CAKE
CAMERA
CARD
CART
CARRIAGE
CAT
CHAIN
CHEESE
CHICK
CHIN
CHURCH
CIRCLE
CLOCK
CLOUD
COAT
COLLAR
COMB
CORD
CORN
CUP
CURTAIN
CUSHION
DOG
DOOR
DRAIN
DRAWER
DRESS
DROP
EAR
ENGINE
EYE
FACE
FARM
FEATHER
FINGER
FISH
FLAG
FLOOR
FLY
FOOT
FORK
FOWL
FRAME
GARDEN
GIRL
GLOVE
GOAT
GUN
HAIR
HAMMER
HAND
HAT
HEAD
HEART
HOOK
HORN
HORSE
HOSPITAL
HOUSE
ISLAND
JEWEL
KETTLE
KEY

QUALITIES

100 GENERAL

ABLE
ACID
ANGRY
AUTOMATIC
BEAUTIFUL
BLACK
BOILING
BRIGHT
BROKEN
BROWN
CHEAP
CHEMICAL
CHIEF
CLEAN
CLEAR
COMMON
COMPLEX
CONSCIOUS
COLD
DEAD
DEAR
DELICATE
DIFFERENT
DIRTY
DRY
FALSE
FEEBLE
FEMALE
FOOLISH
FUTURE
GREEN
LAST
LATE
LEFT
LOOSE
LOUD
LOW
MIXED
NARROW
OLD
OPPOSITE
PUBLIC
ROUGH
SAD
SAFE
SLEET
SHORT
SHUT
SIMPLE
SLOW
SMALL
SOFT
SOLID
SPECIAL
STRANGE
THIN
WHITE
WRONG

50 OPPOSITES

AWAKE
BAD
BENT
BITTER
BLUE
CERTAIN
COLD
COMPLETE
CRUEL
DARK
DEAD
DEAR
DELICATE
DIFFERENT
DIRTY
DRY
FALSE
FEEBLE
FEMALE
FOOLISH
FUTURE
GREEN
LAST
LATE
LEFT
LOOSE
LOUD
LOW
MIXED
NARROW
OLD
OPPOSITE
PUBLIC
ROUGH
SAD
SAFE
SLEET
SHORT
SHUT
SIMPLE
SLOW
SMALL
SOFT
SOLID
SPECIAL
STRANGE
THIN
WHITE
WRONG

SUMMARY OF RULES

PLURALS IN 'S'

DERIVATIVES IN 'ER', 'ING', 'ED' FROM 300 NOUNS

ADVERBS IN 'LY' FROM QUALIFIERS

DEGREES WITH 'MORE' AND 'MOST'

QUESTIONS BY INVERSION AND 'DO'

OPERATORS PRONOUNS CONJUNCTS IN FULL

MEASUREMENT NUMERALS, CURRENCY, CALENDAR, AND INTERNATIONAL TERMS IN ENGLISH FORM.

THE BASIS OF BASIC ENGLISH are these 850 words arranged in a system, designed by Basic's inventor. It classifies nouns as "things, general" and "things, picturable," adjectives as "qualities" and their "opposites." Under "operations" are listed Basic's 18 verbs and an assortment of prepositions, conjunctions and other structural words