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ON SPOKEN DIRECTIVES FOR BUILDING UP WRITTEN UTTERANCES

Josef Vachek

It has been commonly admitted that phonetic transcription provides an inventory of graphical means which enables the members of the given linguistic community to put down in writing, more or less exactly, the make-up of spoken utterances (see Vachek 1945—49). On the other hand, much less attention has been paid to the fact that there also exists in linguistic communities an exact counterpart of phonetic transcription — i.e. an inventory of acoustic means which enables the members of that same community to put down in speaking the graphical elements of which the corresponding spoken utterances are composed. In other words, just as the phonetically transcribed text can be characterized as an optical “recipe” leading to an exact acoustic implementation of the transcribed spoken utterance, its counterpart represents an acoustic “recipe” leading to an equally exact implementation of the corresponding written utterance.

In the domain of the English language this acoustic recipe has been well known for many decades — it is the device of “spelling”, which provides each of the optical elements of the written utterance (as a rule, each letter) by its specific name (thus ⟨a⟩ [ei], ⟨b⟩ [bi:], ⟨c⟩ [si:], etc.). Still, it has so far escaped the attention of Anglicists — as well as that of language theoreticians at large — that spelling is much more than a mere practical device of an elementary practice of language teaching. Besides its recognized usefulness in social intercourse (e.g. in mutual introductions) for distinguishing homophonous family names, its general importance was pointed out only very recently by an American Anglicist working in Germany (Luelsdorff 1986). He points out the importance of “letter names” as a category which occupies an important place in a totally conceived semiotic edifice of basic elements shaping the whole system of language. In Luelsdorff’s conception, the items of spelling constitute “third-order signs whose signifiés are graphemes”. Thus, the spelling

form [pi:] has the grapheme ⟨p⟩ as its signifié; the grapheme ⟨p⟩ itself, in its turn, represents a sign of the second order whose signifié is the corresponding phoneme /p/; finally, this phoneme, constituting a sign of the first order, represents the signifiant whose signifié is “O”, i.e. “otherness” in the well-known Jakobsonian sense of the term (see Jakobson and Waugh 1979.43).

Of course such incorporation of “spelling” into the total semiotic edifice of the system of language might be (and actually was) objected to, inasmuch as some sceptics raised the question whether the “letter names” can be ascribed psychological reality. But Luelsdorff, who is an authority on linguistic research into neurologically handicapped speakers, is ready to oppose such objections: he insists that “letter-names” do possess linguistic reality. He supports this claim by their being an “inextricable part of the faculté de lire” and by adducing cases of “letter-by-letter reading”, cases of which are often witnessed by neurological specialists adduced by him. Luelsdorff’s neurological argumentation fully tallies with the common experience of everyday life in which one is often placed in situations where the use of the letter-naming device may be necessary to avoid unpleasant cases of homophony (see such notoriously known instances as *right* — *write* — *rite* — *wright*, etc.). The above arguments of a pragmatic order may be propped up by an argument drawn from the structure of lexical complexity. One finds in it a rich category of words which arose by amalgamating the initial items of two or more successive words denoting jointly a semantic unit. The items amalgamating for this purpose are not the initial phonemes but the letter names of the initial graphemes — thus the new lexical category is more or less based on the spellings, not on phonemes or sounds. The best known instances of this category can be found in the names of countries or institutions (e.g. *U.K.* for United Kingdom, *U.S.A.* for United States of America, *U.S.S.R.* for Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, *U.N.* for United Nations, *U.N.E.S.C.O.* for United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization, *N.A.T.O.* North Atlantic Treaty Organization), but in addition to such organizational abbreviations one can also find many other categories, e.g. academic degrees like *B.A.* (Bachelor of Arts), *M.A.* (Master of Arts), *M.D.* (Doctor of Medicine, originally Medicinal Doctor), and of course other terms which have found their way into use in everyday life, like *W.C.* for “water closet”, *T.V.* for television, *I.Q.* for intelligence quotient and many others. Most of them are usually written without the full stops indicating the abbreviations and thus without the empty space between the component parts (e.g. *USA*, *TV*, *IQ*, etc.). This writing practice very convincingly indicates the coalescence of the originally discreet items into one word whose special character is, however, indicated by writing the coalesced work by capital letters (in some cases, even this signal may be dropped, e.g. in *Unesco*). In some cases, where rules of phonemic contact allow this, the coalescence of the originally discreet items is under-

lined by replacing the letter-names by phonemes corresponding to the corresponding graphemes (e.g. the term *UNESCO*, in which only the first and last items are implemented by their spelling forms, while the interior three items are represented by their phonemic correspondences). A very large proportion of the amalgamated word items, however, preserve their implementation in terms of the spelling forms.

As has been commonly admitted, Modern English with its relatively less clear limits of word categories appears to be perhaps more favourably disposed to this new word-type of coalescence than other European languages (particularly those which still preserve much of their traditional synthetic grammatical structure) but a good many such coalescence formations may be found in them too. It is hardly necessary to stress the fact that the new word type is found very useful as a directive for putting down written utterances because it saves much time, especially in business correspondence where the superior clerk giving instructions to his assistants or typists can save much time on the condition that the persons receiving the superior's instructions are able to put these instructions into practice. This can be done, of course, on the condition that these persons are perfectly acquainted with the subject matter and the ways in which it is to be put in practice.

The instructions, however, cannot be limited to the basic levels of language (morphology, orthography of the lexical units involved); they will also be found most useful on the higher levels, both syntactic and hypersyntactic. Since mastery in the problems of these higher levels takes for granted, above all, a knowledge of the use of punctuation marks, it will also be essential for the person giving the instructions to point out the positions and categories of these marks, since it cannot always be taken for granted that the typist receiving the instructions is as perfectly versed in the syntactic and hypersyntactic points as might be needed. In other words, the directives must be also applied on these higher language levels if the implementation of the needed written utterance is to be as perfect as might be expected. It should be added that the directives to be given on the hypersyntactic level must also include, if found necessary, the instruction to divide the overlong text into paragraphs or even into chapters. In all such cases the instructing person and the instructee may be regarded as partners of a dialogue in which a perfect understanding between the partners is essential for the desired implementation of the needed well-balanced written utterance.

Here one should add that in some situations the two partners of the said dialogue may merge into one single person: this is the case of an author who intends to put the finishing touches to a literary text which he has prepared for publication but with which he is not fully satisfied. In such a case the author becomes his own critic or opponent with whom he of course shares one and the same goal: to work out the written utterance in a way which would express semantic content in a full and neatly

balanced manner, respecting the regularities of the given system of language on all its levels, from the basic, elementary, phono-graphic, to the highest, syntactic and even hypersyntactic, including all rules governing its more extensive texts with their extrinsic as well as intrinsic organization. In all this activity the author, working also in the self-critical role, will very deeply appreciate the part played by directives operating on all these levels and will make ample use of them.

Our brief survey of the directives presented here might of course be thought objectionable on the ground that one can hardly place on the same level the spoken directives implemented by spelling representing "letter-names" and the directives governing the use of the punctuation marks or even the directives which are at work when more extensive written utterances have to be further divided or otherwise textologically reorganized. Such an objection, however, can be very easily faced: what unites all the directives commented on here is, after all, the one and the same pragmatic goal which all of them are obviously serving — the mediation of the communicated semantic content in a manner which is as quick and as distinct as possible. This goal is present in all the enumerated cases, whether it is effected in the form of a dialogue (uniting the work of someone dictating with that of a typist) or in the form of a self-critical monologue (where an author also functions as his own editor).

One might finally object to our analysis by adducing the well-known fact that in many language communities which are still ignorant of the art of writing spoken utterances have not yet been faced with their written counterparts. Still, there can be no doubt than even in such language communities there is a strong tendency for such written utterances to emerge, simply because it is only after this emergence that the given community will have at its disposal two sets of means enabling its members to face up linguistically to all situations in which they may find themselves placed. And there can be no doubt that after the accompaniment of the spoken norm by its written partner the members of the community, now controlling both shapes of the full-scale functional systems, will be faced with the inevitable necessity of the directives linking the two shapes. It is these directives which may enable the members of the community to bridge the gap existing between the two. Until now, the attention of theoreticians as well as of teachers of language has been concentrated on written utterances as opposed to spoken ones, particularly on low language levels. The modest aim of the present paper has been to point out the necessity of studying the directives leading in the other direction, and also on the higher language levels.

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POZNÁMKY O MLUVNÍCH DIREKTIVÁCH PŘI VÝSTAVBĚ
PSANÝCH PROMLUV

Základní mluvní direktivou při výstavbě psaných promluv je tzv. spelling ("písmenkování"), který je strukturně dokonalým protějškem fonetické transkripce, která zase podává psané direktivy při výstavbě mluvených promluv. Jména písmen představují (podle správné formulace Ph. Luelsdorffa) více než složku elementární jazykové výuky: jsou závažnou složkou celkovostně pojaté stavby základních jazykových systémových položek. Svědčí o tom i vžitá zkratkové výrazy typu ÚJČ, TV, WC, IQ atp., jež se mluvně zpravidla realizují ve své písmenkové podobě. — Na rovině syntaktické má obdobnou direktivní úlohu systém interpunkční; na rovině hypersyntaktické pak pokyny textologické (j. zřízení nového odstavce, dělení rozsáhlého kontextu v řadu menších atp.). Obdobně diriguje i jednotlivého autora nadsyntaktický zřetel při jeho „finishing touches“ atp. Ve všech takových případech jde o jeden a týž pragmatický cíl: o vyjádření významového obsahu co nejvýrazněji a co nejzřetelněji.

