

THE SPEECH OF A ZUÑI CHILD

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FROM June 23 to August 10, 1916, I had occasion to hear the daily speech of Robert Lewis, youngest son of the Governor of Zuñi, then in the twenty-third and twenty-fourth months of his life. His mother, Mrs. Margaret A. Lewis, is an educated Cherokee mixed-blood, and some English is spoken in the house. But seventeen years of residence have thoroughly familiarized Mrs. Lewis with the Zuñi idiom, which is the language of the household. Conditions are therefore substantially normal in this home as regards the acquisition of Indian speech, while a somewhat unusual degree of contact with Americans has obliterated the barrier of shyness behind which the Indian child is wont to take refuge for a long time in the presence of whites. As very little information is extant concerning infant speech among American Indians, the following notes seem to be worth putting on record.

On July 1, Robert's vocabulary consisted of these words:

ma'ma, mother. This is English. The Zuñi word is *tsitta*.

ta'ta, father, for *tattcu*.¹

na'na, grandfather; also any old man. For *nanna*.

wa'wa, paternal grandmother; also applied to other old women.

Zuñi *wowwo*. About July 15, Robert began to say *wo'wo* with nearly pure Zuñi quality of the *o*. He uttered the word whenever he wished to be taken to his grandmother's house on a visit; and the desire awoke almost every forenoon. The Zuñi word for maternal grandmother is *hotta*; but Robert's *hotta* and her family being in Oklahoma, he did not know the word. Most Zuñi children, being born and brought up in their mother's and mother's mother's house, would probably learn *hotta* before *wowwo*.

¹ *C* is *sh*, *tc* is *ch*, *L* is surd *l*, ' is the glottal stop. Other characters are self-explanatory, except that the vowels have the continental values and are throughout open in quality, and that all stopped consonants when before a vowel are unaspirated and voiced during an instant of their production. Thus *pa* is "between" English *pa* and *ba*.

pa'pa, older brother, for *pappa*.

La' or *Lai*, older sister, for *kyawwu*. The sound was not quite that of affricative surd *L*, but the articulation was so indefinite that no more exact designation is possible. This is the only word in which even an approach to *L* was perceptible. On August 1, Robert listened with interest when told to say *eLLa*, "no," but did not attempt to reproduce the word. Evidently the *L* sound as such was beyond his powers. About July 15 he began to say *ky'a'* or *kyai* for *kyawwu*.

mle'mle, or *mele'mele* or *mla'mla* (*a* as in English "bad"), American. The Zuñi word is *mellik*, at which I believe *mle'mle* to be an attempt. Robert's mother considers *mle'mle* to be an imitation of the strange speech of the Americans.

ma'ma, bread; also food in general, or eat. The Zuñi word for bread is *mullo*. I could hear no constant difference between *ma'ma*, bread, and *ma'ma*, mother; but the first vowel of the former may have been shorter.

ti'ti, almost *di'di*, meat. For *ci'we*.

tu'tu, drink; also water. Zuñi *tuttu*, to drink.

a'ta, anything sharp, hot, pungent, or strong. I am not sure what the utterance represents. I first heard Robert use it of a knife he held: knife in Zuñi is *attcianne*. It may be that a word like *attu*, a woman's exclamation of sudden pain or heat, was intended.

we'we, dog, for *wa'tsita*.

mau, cat. The Zuñi word is *musa* (pussy).

o'ho'ho or *o'ho*, also heard as *u'hu'hu*, *u'hu*, *hwo'hwo*, and *o'hwo'hwo*, horse or donkey. This is from the English interjection "whoa," which the Zuñi use in handling their animals.

e, yes, as in Zuñi.

no', the English "no," was frequently used by Robert, especially toward the end of our acquaintance, but chiefly as an indiscriminate and automatic answer to any remark made to him in English. He certainly connected the syllable with English speech; but it seemed to hold no further meaning. I did not note that he expressed denial or unwillingness other than by struggles or crying.

na' was one of his earliest utterances, his mother tells me, spoken on a variety of occasions. The syllable seems never to have crystallized into a definite meaning, for during my stay he employed it quite randomly. I believe that it is not an imitation of any Zuñi word, but that it represents an early attempt at articulation which formed into a habit.

ai' was an expression indicative of pain or inconvenience. I can not account for its origin. There is a frequent Zuñi interjection *hai*; but it means rather "is that so?" and its intonation is quite different from Robert's *ai'*.

Including the last three exclamations, this record shows a total of eighteen different words spontaneously uttered by this boy during the first week of our acquaintance. I am omitting all words spoken by him merely in response to suggestion or request. I estimate that he may have possessed in his vocabulary at this period two or three other words that I did not happen to hear; but his mother could recollect no others. The maximum reckoning is therefore about twenty vocables; the strictest count yields fifteen or sixteen.

It is interesting that of this number, six words, or one third of the total, are terms of consanguinity. At that, the fact of his mother being an immigrant deprived this youngster of two relatives that the average Zuñi child has in his home: the *hotta* or mother's mother, already mentioned, and the *kyakky* or mother's brother. On the other hand, he used no word for man, woman, boy, or girl. Men were *pa'pa*, older brother, or sometimes *ta'ta*, father; boys, *pa'pa*; old men, *na'na*, grandfather. The recognition of age seemed quite remarkably accurate. Possibly our children in their second year perceive age equally well; but certainly our speech habits do not equally encourage expression of the fact.

The horse, dog, and cat in the vocabulary have their parallel in every Caucasian home; and the type of interest in the animals appeared to be the same.

The one verb, *tu'tu*, drink is interesting. I am under the impression that the Zuñi mention water less frequently than we in connection with the act or desire of drinking. Moreover, their

word for drink is much easier for a child to form than their word for water, *ky'awe*, in which the initial sound is both glottalized and heavily palatalized.

Robert's command of sounds at this period included all five of the vowels of Zúñi, formed fairly clearly; the stops *p* and *t*; the nasals *m* and *n*; voiced *l*; a badly articulated surd *L* as a substitute for *ky*; *w*; *h*; and the glottal stop. The latter concluded every or nearly every syllable. Zúñi sounds that were not yet formed were the palatal stops *k*, *ky*, and *kw*; the affricatives *ts* and *tc*; the fricatives *s* and *c*; surd *L* as a definite sound; and the series of glottalized sounds *kw'*, *k'*, *ky'*, *ts'*. So far as they occur, these are precisely the sounds with which English speaking children have difficulty. Vowel quantity was little regarded, if at all; and there was no trace of the consonant lengthening which is so conspicuous a feature of Zúñi. The accent was invariably on the first syllable, as in our children's talk; but this is also a standard trait of adult Zúñi speech. The unvoicing of unaccented and especially of final syllables in which every Zúñi habitually indulges had as yet not made its appearance in Robert's talk.

Between July 1 and August 10, a number of changes and additions were observed.

About July 8, *te'* was frequently uttered with a pointing gesture. There is no corresponding Zúñi word and I suspect that it represents English "there."

July 12, he said *po'* for *poklinne*, smoke or tobacco. This was on the occasion of his first sentence heard by me: *mle'mle po'*, the American is smoking. Utterances of three consecutive words were reported to me, but I heard none of more than two during the remainder of my stay.

July 13, he began saying *po'po* for *po'yanne*, hat, in my hearing. He is said to have first uttered this word several days previously.

About July 15, the first palatal stop was heard, in *kya'* instead of *la'* for *kyawwu*, older sister.

On July 18, Robert enjoyed himself calling the same syllable *kya'* to the horses, obviously in imitation of his father's "giddap."

July 22 and on several following days he frequently repeated

opata, apparently for the pleasure of the utterance and without clearly associated meaning. It seemed to be English "over there." More interesting is the fact that this vocable had three syllables of different sound; and that the final *a* was often whispered or unvoiced as in typical adult Zuñi speech.

July 26 he called a gun *to'*. The Zuñi word is *towo'ananna*. The reduplicating tendency was evidently no longer as strong as a month before.

About this period he adopted a characteristic Zuñi intonation. In calling, or in forcible address, the Zuñi frequently lengthen the final syllable, change it from slurred *a* or *e* to *ai*, shift the accent from the initial syllable to it, and end with a sharp rise in pitch. Robert acquired this habit almost perfectly within a day or two, and soon went about calling *ma'ma'i*, *pa'pa'i*, *ta'ta'i*, instead of *ma'ma*, *pa'pa*, *ta'ta*.

Within a week, he had added *e'le'* or *e'le'i*, the vocative form of *e'lactokya*, girl, by which term his older sister, in consonance with Zuñi custom, was habitually addressed in the household. Robert's imitation of his mother's familiar call was perfect to its very inflections.

About August 7, he similarly called *Tci'pa'i*, his oldest brother's name. The stimulus of this utterance seemed to be the pleasure of its finished production, rather than want of his brother. He never used the quieter, non-vocative form *Tci'pai'u*.

This word contains the affricative *tc*, nearly like our English *ch*. I did not hear this difficult sound in any other word. On August 9, Robert was still saying *to'to* for *icotco*. This is a Zuñi "children's word" for clothes, and was undoubtedly taught him at his grandmother's house.

From the same source he derived, about August 1, another standard Zuñi children's word: *lu'lu*, American. By August 10, he was using this about as frequently as his own equivalent *mle'mle*.

On August 7, he watched me removing splinters of glass from the ground. The bright bits caught his eye; and when I stopped, he pointed to one after another neglected fragment until I had tossed them too away, saying each time: *topa*, which is Zuñi for

"one" or "another one." The repeated enunciation was remarkably correct: the chopping apart of the syllables by the glottal stop was almost imperceptible.

During the six weeks ending August 10, or shortly before the second anniversary of his birth, this Zuñi boy then had increased the range of his vocabulary by half or more. He had learned to articulate a forward palatal stop and an alveolar affricative. He had not yet pronounced the fricatives *s* or *c*, surd *L*, nor any glottalized consonant; nor did he respond to invitations to imitate these sounds. He had, however, mastered a characteristic tonal inflection, was beginning to unvoice according to rule, and was drifting away from his early leaning to make every word consist of two identical but separate syllables. Of grammatical structure there was as yet no trace, and sentence building remained sporadic and of the most elementary kind.

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