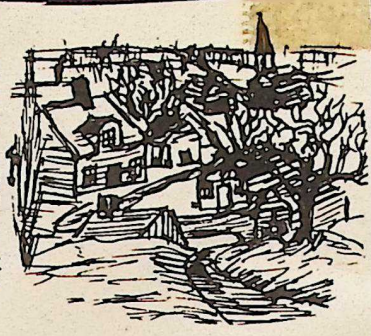
# Village View

by Andrea Leonard



It's worrying, in a nagging little way, to hear changes coming into our speech.

It's not the new words that enrich our language that are troubling -- they're a good sign, telling us our culture is growing and alive.

When pronounciation of familiar words changes, though, our speech deteriorates.

Today, unlike sixty or seventy years ago, speech patterns are absorbed more from radio and television than from the home environment.

Today's children actually hear more conversation from mechanical devices of communication than from the people they live with, and speak less as their parents do than like their favorite characters on TV.

In this day of nation-wide broadcasting, then, there's a tendency for colloquialisms to get lost. Instead, there's a growing pattern of sameness.

This places on radio broadcasters and TV performers a responsibility to use our language properly because most youngsters and even some oldsters are copying them.

Fifty or sixty years ago there lived in our Cape villages several people who had come here, while still quite young themselves, from England -- the small island which spawned the language we use -- and still refer to as English.

Although our tongue actually bears little resemblance to "King's English" as spoken by early English settlers in America, the British people who live among us half-a-century ago seemed never to lose their speech mannerisms.

We accepted their differences as their particular -- and to us, peculiar -- way. It was a personal idiosyncracy which helped set one of them apart as a distinctive individual with ways of talking different from our own.

Most of these people had come, like the rest of us, from ordinary working-class backgrounds. Their speech, in England, would have placed them in a recognized social stratum.

When a person announced on a hot summer's day, "It h'aint the 'eat, it's the 'umidity!" we knew exactly what he meant.

It's starting all over again, it seems, only now we're hearing it on the radio. The weatherman is announcing "the 'umidity is 93%," and we receive reports of classes being offered in "'uman development" at the Community College.

Is the eighth letter of our alphabet getting lost?

As we listen carefully to the way people talk, we hear wot instead of what, and witch instead of which, wale rather than whale, ware for where.

Even worse, we hear hydth instead of height. This seems to have come because wide gives us width.

If from wide we arrive at width, then apparently high must give birth to hydth for the perpendicular measurement. The spelling, you're well aware, changes to height, and in spite of the fact it looks like weight, and the e comes before the i, and there's no c, it sounds, not hate, but hyte.

You figure it out. don t be leve there s a reason. I only know that's how it is. Every dictionary confirms it.

The whole business is a bother. It's a bother to learn the correct pronounciation to start with; and it's a bother to learn to spell non-conforming words.

It's a bother when an English-speaking character, whether on raido or TV or just in casual conversation, comes out with hydth.

It's a bother because it does something weird to a listener's brain. Stops it cold. Whatever the subject was, the train of thought is interrupted; the mind rebells, yells "whoa", sends signals "something's wrong".

There was no problem interpreting the speach of the native-born English who added aitches were none belonged in front of words starting with vowels, as in "hailment": a sickness; "helephant": a large gray animal with long nose and short tail; or "hegg": the fruit of a hen.

There was likewise no problem with translating ouse to house, iccups to hiccups, Enry to Henry, orse to horse.

We considered the source. It was predictable this person would always drop initial airches and add them before words with no beginning consonant.

Today, however, when the weatherman talks about the umidity, or the commentator speaks of umanity's weaknesses, I feel youngsters aren't getting a fair shake.

These aren't the only instances of murdering the English language on the airways. Over and over, these "professionals" say "ammediate" instead of immediate. It bothers the ears and the head.

They speak of violence, referring to catastrophes as incidents. "Incident" carries connotation of subordination throughout its definition. Fatal highway accidents, death-dealing storms or fires, disasters of any kind, can't correctly be termed incidents.

Is this all a matter of language development? Or is it simply careless speech?

At this point in history -- or is it 'istory? -- no one really knows, of course. You may rail against 'istory and find yourself, a few years 'ence, a member of a small minority.

The aitch may really be leaving us entirely as part of our language. How will it happen? When most people stop using it, it will gradually fade from "common usage" and instead of "going home", we'll be "going ome". Or, (worse), goin gome.

Maybe. Maybe this is the march of modern language. Maybe in another couple of generations "common usage" will have eliminated the aitch as a recognizable sound. We'll ead for ome without elp. We'll oller at our kids, op over a wall, ope for ealth, wealth, and appiness - or even for elt and welt. We might just as well.

We're apparently already umans oping the eat and umidity will be lower in October than in September.

Can't elp wondering, owever, wot'll go next!