ETHNOLOGY

"Word Swallowing" Links Indians of Two Americas

DID YOU ever hear a singer swallow his words with a gulp? Probably not. It isn't the technique taught in music schools.

But two explorers for the Bureau of American Ethnology have discovered that word swallowing is a trait in two American musical circles. Seminole Indians in the Florida Everglades do it. So do the Jivaro head-hunters in the forests of Bolivia. That Indian tribes so widely separated should have so curious a trait in common is decidedly remarkable.

The Seminole trick of word swallowing has just been discovered by Miss Frances Densmore, who spent the winter among four Southeastern tribes, studying their music. Stopping off at the Bureau of American Ethnology in Washington, on her way home to Red Wing, Minnesota, Miss Densmore described the Seminole singing trick to M. W. Stirling, chief of the Bureau.

Mr. Stirling leaned forward with interest.

"Did it go this way?" he asked, going through the motion of throwing his words back and swallowing.

"Exactly," said Miss Densmore.

He met the trick just once, Mr. Stirling said, among the Jivaros of South America, when he was on an expedition there last year.

The little trick of musical technique is of unusual interest to ethnologists who are seeking evidence on the ancient history of America. When distant tribes have significant traits in common, there may be clues to old migrations or to the direction taken by ancient waves of Indian culture. (*Next Column*)

In the music of Southeastern Indians, Miss Densmore found new clues this winter, pointing to ancient, forgotten contacts with tribes farther south.

She heard Choctaw Indians in Mississippi sing their dance songs, without music of rattle or drum. She attended a dance and recorded songs. Dancing without instrumental accompaniment is unheard of among North American Indians. The nearest Indian neighbors to the Choctaw who dance without the drum would be the Tule of Panama.

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PHYSICS

Beryllium Atoms Radioactive; New Helium Variety Predicted

A NEW and striking case of radioactivity, the spontaneous explosion of beryllium atoms, is the discovery announced at the California Institute of Technology by Dr. R. M. Langer and his associate, Russell Raitt, a graduate student.

This is probably the first successful prediction of radioactivity and it promises to lead to many others. Dr. Langer and Mr. Raitt first predicted the radioactive disintegration of the metallic atoms of beryllium and then systematically searched for the expected effect until they found it.

The effect of the explosion is so weak that the physicists know that the average beryllium atom will live a hundred trillion years (100,000,000,000,000 or 10 to the fourteenth power) before exploding. Extended researches show that none of the known radioactive elements can be responsible for the effects that the experimenters attribute to the beryllium atoms.

Beryllium is almost as unlike the ordinary radioactive elements as it is possible to be. It has a mass only nine times that of hydrogen whereas the most active radioactive elements have masses ten or more times larger.

Data gathered from studying the spontaneous explosions of beryllium atoms into fragments are expected to provide powerful tools in unravelling the mysteries of the atomic nucleus.

The radioactivity of beryllium accounts for the puzzling fact that beryl minerals often contain much more helium than could be explained on other hypotheses. Helium is set free when beryllium explodes.

Of great interest to physicists also is the prediction by Dr. Langer and Mr. Raitt that a new form of helium atom will be found in the future. This has a mass of five instead of the usual mass of four, and it is predicted that this heavy helium will explode spontaneously and thus prove to be the lightest radioactive element.

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MEDICINE

Sufferer Helped By Baths Of Poison Ivy Extract

DAILY BATHS which contained gradually increasing amounts of poison ivy extract were resorted to by one poison ivy sufferer when all other methods of treatment failed. This method did no harm and enabled the patient to withstand successfully further attacks of the poisoning.

In order to avoid bringing on an attack by the treatment, the dilution of extract must be very great at first, and the amount of extract must be very gradually increased, warned Dr. F. E. Maisel of New York in reporting it to the *Journal of Allergy*. He suggested that the method might prove equally helpful in skin irritations due to contact with other substances besides poison ivy. In such cases, of course, the extract would be made not from poison ivy, but from the irritating substances concerned.

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