

The Saturday Review

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English for the World!

W. L. WERNER

WINSTON CHURCHILL tells the story in his history of World War II. There was an important conference on strategy, with British and American top brass around the table. The British wanted "to table" a proposal; the Americans protested vehemently against doing that. Finally as their arguments continued, it began to dawn on them that both sides wanted the same thing. In British speech "to table" is to put a topic on the table for action; in American "to table" is to postpone or bury it.

When such arguments develop between two nations that speak almost the same language, what delays and misunderstandings are bound to occur among the Big Four who speak three languages or in NATO or in the sixty United Nations—not to mention the un-united ones! A single language will certainly not end quarrels, as any judge knows, but it will certainly reduce misunderstandings.

The problem of multiple languages is increasingly important. There was a time when a knowledge of Latin was useful all over the civilized Rome-centered world. Later French became the one language of diplomacy and was so used at the Congress of Vienna in 1814. But at Versailles in 1919 two languages were used, French and English, and at the peace conference of 1946 Russian was added as a third tongue. Now the United Nations has five official languages—Chinese, French, English, Russian, and Spanish, with French and

English as "the working languages" and Spanish a third working language of the Assembly. This is the problem in the high ranks of diplomacy. Farther down the line language problems are less important but equally distressing.

For years there have been proposals to formulate an artificial language with vocabularies from several existing languages and with simple rules of grammar and phonetic spelling. These experiments have proceeded slowly, and Otto Jespersen ("Interlinguistics," 1931) said that only six of these were "accepted by more than a handful of people." These are Esperanto, Ido, Nov-Esperanto, Interlingua, Occidental, and Jespersen's own Novial (1928).

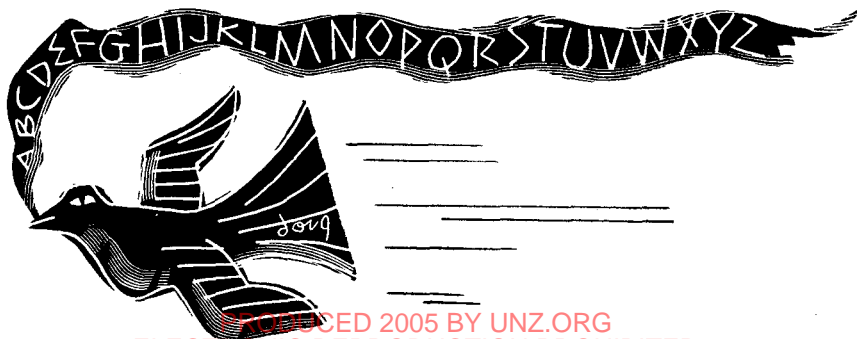
Let us look briefly at the most successful of these, Esperanto, which the German-American Hugo Muensterberg called "essentially a mutilation of Spanish and French." On August 6, 1950, the thirty-fifth annual conference of the Esperantists met in Paris with 2,500 delegates present from thirty-four countries. George A. Connor, secretary of the North American Esperanto Association, said these delegates represented one and a half million who speak and use it daily, of

which number less than 5,000 are in the United States.

Since the population of the world in 1950 was a little over two and a quarter billion people, the daily users of Esperanto number about .0007 of the total. In these civilized and influential United States the ratio would be one in 30,000. As Dr. Albert Baugh says, "A language is important because the people who speak it are important," but the leaders in world politics do not speak Esperanto. Furthermore, the British scholar C. K. Ogden cites the dependence of that language on inflections along with some fifty prefixes and suffixes, all new and puzzling to the non-European world.

SOMEWHAT different from the invented or artificial languages is Interlingua, the proposal of the International Auxiliary Language Association (IALA). Started by Mr. and Mrs. Dave Hennen Morris in 1924, it aims to find "international words"—those used frequently in at least several important languages. Many of these are scientific words from Greek or Latin roots; some are national words that conquered the world.

Its leaders have been such persons as Frederick G. Cottrell, Dean E. B. Babcock, John Finley, Stephen Duggan, and Paul Monroe. Among its researchers and collaborators are Otto Jespersen, Edward Sapir, Herbert N. Shenton, Helen S. Eaton, and E. L. Thorndike. Its two basic books are the "Interlingua For-



lish Dictionary, edited by Dr. Alexander Gode in 1951, which contains 27,000 English words well known internationally, and "Interlingua Grammar" ("no gender, no declension, no change in stem of verbs, no personal inflection").

So far IALA's work has been chiefly research on an international level and its converts have been scholars. Like most of the artificial languages, it does not yet have translations from classics in other languages nor new authors of its own to help spread its appeal, as Tolstoy's fables taught the peasants to read. None of the present auxiliary languages is internationally popular.

That leads to a second consideration: which existing language would serve the world best? Who speaks what now? All the authorities give somewhat different estimates but the general picture is the same:

Chinese ..450,000,000 (many dialects)
Indic325,000,000 (many dialects)
English ...225,000,000
Russian ..180,000,000 (many dialects)

Then in declining order from 110,000,000 to 50,000,000 come Spanish, German, Indonesian, Japanese, Sudanic, French, Portuguese, Arabic, and Italian.

Chinese for world use is out of the question; it is divided among various dialects, and its written language consists of many thousands of ideographs that Chinese scholars are now trying to reduce to a mere one thousand. The largest of the Indian dialects, Hindustani, is used by only 140,000,000, ranking below English and Russian.

The 225,000,000 estimate for English seems conservative; in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and the United States the population is about 220,000,000, most of whom are literate. The British Commonwealth includes over one-fourth of the population of the world, whose official and commercial language is English. The ambitious native politicians, the enterprising native traders, civil and uncivil servants learn English. Hindi is on its way up to be the official language of India, but today Premier Nehru speaks English to his all-Indian Congress so that they may understand him. In the first great national election of the Republic of India, the posters read "Vote Sucheta" and "Ladder Is the Symbol of Progress. Vote for Marain." In the official Government year book of the Union of South Africa (1939) it is reported that "in urban

areas 53 per cent of the European population speaks English in their homes as opposed to 41 per cent speaking Afrikaans, while in rural areas the English speaking element is only 15 per cent."

WITH only such scattered reports, estimates seem difficult or impossible for the British Commonwealth. One source says that one-eighth of the population of "the colonies" speaks English. Linguist Mario Pei calls "English by far the most widespread of the world's colonial languages, since it affects some 520,000,000 people of colonial or semi-colonial status." Another expert says the English-speaking population of the world is over a billion—which would be almost half the earth's population—counting 260,000,000 in native British countries and the United States, 350,000,000 in the colonies, and 445,000,000 elsewhere.

The word "elsewhere" leads to another carrier of English in this century, the American Expeditionary Forces in World Wars I and II, in the Korean police action, and in occupied countries. More than 2,000,000 American troops were abroad in the First World War, and about 8,200,000 in the Second. Figures are obscure for Korea, but with that action now longer than our participation in World War I and with additional troops in Europe, an estimate of another 2,000,000 might not be too high. Thus, more than 12,000,000 uniformed Americans have not only been abroad, often in foreign language countries, but have stayed there for considerable periods, if not forever. And to this figure should be added the considerable numbers of British troops who also carried English abroad in these wars.

Scholarly publications promulgate English at a higher level. With the

universities of Europe lacking in researchers and students and publishing facilities in both wars and their aftermaths, American publications have been elevated in importance far beyond their peacetime status. For example, the American Institute of Medicine in its international digest covers more than 300 periodicals in fourteen languages—and it is published of course, in English. The *Engineering Index* of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers covers 1,400 periodicals in sixteen languages. *Social Science Abstracts Service* is examining over 3,000 periodicals in more than twenty different languages. "The findings," says sociologist Herbert Shenton, "are available only in English, and there is no parallel in any other natural language." Much scientific terminology, of course, is already internationalized by votes of scientific associations, and would continue regardless of what general world language might develop.

A fourth important, though recent, carrier of English are motion pictures. Bosley Crowther, of *The New York Times*, reported in 1947 that 80 per cent of the pictures being shown in England came from Hollywood, and while, of course, they did not introduce English to the British, other countries probably had similar percentages. Today after years of growth the number of annual admissions to American movies in foreign countries is almost equal to the number in America. Our peak attendance here, according to Arthur Loew, head of Loew's International Corporation, was eighty-five million in 1946, but it has dropped to fifty-five million now while the foreign admissions have risen to over fifty million. Forty-four cents of every dollar made in American movies is earned abroad, says Mr. Loew. For

Simile

By Sjanna Solum

THIS small brown bird that beats against the pane
of glass, bewildered, in belated search
of refuge from opacity of rain
and fog, seeks comfort of a sheltered perch.
We open wide the casement, welcoming
the feathered visitant with warmth and light
but, frightened, it retreats on pulsing wing
and disappears into the realm of night.

May it be granted that the nearby wood
provide it haven in some wide-armed tree . . .
Compassion binds us closer, since it could
as easily, assuredly, be we
who, plunging through opaqueness, seek release
from fear and fragility of peace.

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every eleven persons here, ten persons elsewhere in the world are singing "I'll See You in My Dreams," humming the "Lullaby of Broadway," and saying "OK."

To all these major disseminators of English, add our annual tourists, our Fulbright scholars and other students, our globe-trotting Congressmen. Add the efforts of UNESCO, large but not yet fully reported. Add the international festivals, pen pals, and library loans. Add the British Penguin Books and similar paperbound works that have replaced the Tauschnitz volumes of the nineteenth century. Add, too, the radio, because over 800 of the world's 1,400 radio stations use English alone.

So much for the condition of English in foreign countries today. What efforts are being made to hasten this spread? And why?

If we need some immediate spur or some excuse for devoting effort to this cause, we can find it in the Soviet Union. As part of its creeping aggression, Russia is using language to unify the captive bordering nations on the west and the allied Chinese to the east. More and more it is forcing the use of Russian on Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, and Eastern Germany. Of all the usable languages of the world, Russian is our closest competitor, our only close competitor. If our lives are to be lived in a succession of crises, here is a timely cause—a battle against dictatorship not with guns and bombs, but with a tough yet flexible, beautiful but strong, enduring, and powerful weapon, the English language.

THREE sets of people are making this fight to extend the use of English in the world. One group advocates Basic English, a simplification that consists of reducing our vocabulary from 600,000 words to a mere 850 simple common words. In 1920 two British scholars, C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, were working on a study called "The Meaning of Meaning." Ogden had earlier concerned himself with simplifying the language, and in the course of writing this book they evolved Basic English. The first book on it appeared in 1929. Interest soon developed in England and abroad, and the Rockefeller Foundation and the Payne Fund contributed money. An Orthological Institute to spread these ideas was founded in Cambridge, England, and one in Peking, China (1936). In the USSR at least 150,000 schoolbooks in Basic were being circulated by 1936.

What are these 850 words? Six hundred are names of things (nouns), 150 are "qualities" or adjectives, and the remaining 100 are "operations" mean-

La Rochefoucauld, Country Editor Version



EDITOR'S NOTE: Out of the pungent writings of small-town editors, John M. Henry has compiled, and Vanguard has Published, a book called "A Little Treasury of Main Street, U.S.A.," excerpts from which are given below.

I thought I was familiar with all the reasons why people want to subscribe to *The Courier*, but a new one popped up the other day. A man from out Dover way came in and paid his two dollars, saying: "Some of my kinfolks died and I didn't know anything about it until a neighbor read it in the paper."

A. P. COOKE,
Courier, Plant City, Florida.

Whenever I begin taking myself too seriously over something I am writing for our newspaper, it brings me down a couple of notches to realize that the eggshells from your breakfast tomorrow are apt to be scraped right into my pretty words!

JUSTIN HAMMOND,
Independent, Corona, California.

Birth notes in a small-town newspaper cause a good deal of phoning around, unless the editor explains who the mother was before her marriage. The folks want to know that.

OPAL HOLLOMON MELTON,
Cooper County Record, Boonville,
Missouri.

ing verbs, prepositions, conjunctions, adverbs of time and place, etc. The magic of this new economy is the verb—only eighteen verbs to express everything; they are—*come, get, give, go, keep, let, make, put, seem, take, be, do, have, say, see, send, may, and will.*

For writing on special fields like science, Basic uses an additional list of 100 general scientific terms (*agent, arc, area, axis, etc.*) and often another list of fifty words peculiar to the individual science treated. Similar supplementary lists exist for art, economics, religion, etc., with the top margin still within 1,000 words. Basic has two main aims: to introduce foreigners to our language and lead them into general English, and to serve as a minimum secondary world language

The radio will never supplant the newspaper. You can't fold up a wave length and sit down with it beneath you on the grass.

CAREY WILLIAMS,
Herald-Journal, Greenboro, Georgia.

If you have frequent headaches, dizziness and fainting spells, lame back accompanied by chills, cramps, bunions, jaundice, chilblains, or epileptic fits, it's a sign you are not well and liable to die any minute. So hasten to the *Tribune* and pay your subscription a year in advance and make yourself solid for a good obituary notice.

MARK NELSON,
Tribune, Fountain Inn,
South Carolina.

In big cities you may be classified by some columnist as café society. But in a small town you are merely the town drunk.

BERTHA SHORE,
Gazette, Augusta, Kansas.

As for the Editor, he refuses to be pushed around by the press agents for these numerous "weeks" or regimented or told to do even the things he wants to do or was going to do anyway. The Editor can't remember what this week is, or what he's supposed to be doing, but whatever it is, he isn't going to do it.

PAUL F. WATKINS,
Herald-Progress, Ashland, Virginia.

The second path toward world English is the invention of one man, Frank Laubach of Benton, Pa. Starting as a missionary in the Philippines in 1915, he formulated a simple phonetic alphabet for the rebellious Moros and gave them literacy, friendship, and Christianity in one package. Everybody, however stupid, was praised, and every successful pupil agreed to teach another person. The "each one teach one" gospel with simple phonetic charts spread to many countries. *The New Yorker* credited Dr. Laubach with fifteen million literates gained.

But the courageous doctor balked at trying to teach English this way. The obstacle was "our crazy spelling." "If we spelled English phonetically,"

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THE LITERARY SAMPLER

EXCERPTS AND JOTTINGS FROM NEW AND FORTHCOMING BOOKS

Life on an Expense Account

YOU wouldn't need to get any salary at all if everything you might need or want—housing, transportation, entertainment, for yourself and your family and guests unlimited—were provided for you without charge. Some approximation of this enviable state is apparent in the lives of many company executives. They get about by company car, when needed, or company-bought railroad accommodations, or company plane; and if the plane takes them and their guests to the Kentucky Derby or a Rose Bowl game, why that's all right too: that's "making contacts." They hold prolonged business conferences at delightful resorts, with golf or bathing for relaxation, and of course the company pays for everything. They may enjoy holidays at a company camp, or play golf at a company country club. If they want to throw a cocktail party at a fashionable hotel for a couple of hundred people, the company foots the bill for that, too: that, too, is making contacts. The proprietor of a big New York hotel described to me during World War II the lavish parties—shocking, for wartime, in their extravagance—that were thrown in his ample rooms; and I asked him whether they were paid for by individuals or by companies. "Oh, all of them by companies," he said. In the

May 1950 issue of *Flair*, John O'Hara, describing what he aptly called "the new expense-account society," spoke of the difficulty that ordinary visitors to New York had in getting tickets to "South Pacific" except at preposterous prices, and he added, "There are customers at \$100 a pair, and the customers are the big corporations . . . The big corporation has first claim on everything, from restaurant tables to Pullman reservations home."

Even somewhat smaller fry can do very well on expense accounts. In the restaurant life of midtown New York, where there is a heavy trade in the prestige that goes with eating and drinking in the immediate neighborhood of movie actresses, advertising big-shots, senators, gossip columnists, successful authors, publishers, ex-champion athletes, and television comedians, there is a wide circle of men and women, some of them on modest salaries, who lunch day after day, and dine often, on expense accounts. Sometimes they are dazzling out-of-town clients; sometimes they are just taking one another to lunch. In either case the company pays. I asked the proprietors of two of the most exalted of these restaurants what proportion of their guests, from day to day, were eating and drinking on expense accounts. One said nearly half at lunch, and also for dinner in his most favored room; fewer for dinner elsewhere in

the establishment. The other said three-quarters of the guests at lunch, fewer for dinner, very few late in the evening; but he guessed that at a night spot with entertainment the ratio would again be high. It is quite possible that a good many clients and prospects are really snared by such entertaining; but in any case the theory that this is how clients and prospects are snared makes for delightfully lavish living on the part of both hosts and guests for at least part of the twenty-four hours, at no cost to themselves.

—From "The Big Change," by Frederick Lewis Allen (Harper).

Groups à la Mode

THERE are fashions in children, just as there are fashions in necklines and hats. The child who is currently at the height of the mode is the child who can get along well with the group. The parents who suffer the most anxiety—sometimes, I think unnecessarily—are the parents whose child elects to stay on the sidelines. Because it is considered so extremely desirable to have a child who gets along with the group, a great many American children are sent to nursery school at the age of two-and-a-half or three. To be sure, the nursery school is a necessity for "working"

