

# An International Language – When?

"The whole world will surely have a common language, that is quite elementarily Utopian ...." (H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, I, p. 5.)

Let it be said at the outset that an international language would be a boon to mankind; that it is feasible and possible of realization – on certain conditions. Even the most violent and outspoken adversaries of all interlinguistic schemes have conceded the value of an interlanguage, and their criticisms have been primarily directed against one or the other attempt at propagating some particular tongue. There are four basic plans for adoption of an international language: (1) an *a priori* philosophical language which has no vocabulary and grammar in the conventional sense, but which relies on abstract written or audible signs, based on a philosophical classification of all things and acts with which the human mind wishes and needs to concern itself; (2) the revival of a "dead" language, mainly Latin or Greek, probably modified; (3) a constructed language, like Volapük, Esperanto, Ido, Novial and scores of others; or (4) the extension of a current language, modified or unmodified, over the greater part of the world.

A plan for a philosophical language was ordered as early as the seventeenth century by Francis Bacon who suggested the adoption of "real characters" comparable to Chinese ideograms (China was just being "discovered" then), which would be independent of any pronunciation. This was to be, naturally, an auxiliary "language," not to be spoken at all, employed only in highly learned endeavors and not in *belles lettres* or in commerce. Such an enterprise would have little to recommend itself for practical purposes and would nowadays scarcely be grouped among international languages. But several other attempts in the same direction followed Bacon's. The names of John Wilkins<sup>[1]</sup>, Francis Lodwick<sup>[2]</sup>, Thomas Urquhart<sup>[3]</sup>, Cave Beck<sup>[4]</sup>, Dalgarno<sup>[5]</sup> and many others down to our own century might be mentioned. Not to be omitted are various suggestions for numerical languages, in which numbers take the place of words by means of an

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About the author: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst\\_Pulgram](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_Pulgram) sowie: [http://www.univie.ac.at/geschichte/gesichttet/2010/e\\_pulgram.html](http://www.univie.ac.at/geschichte/gesichttet/2010/e_pulgram.html)

<sup>1</sup> *Mercury, or the Secret and Swift Messenger*, 1641. A chapter in this work bears the ambitious title: "Concerning on Universal Character, that may be legible to all nations and languages"

<sup>2</sup> *A common Writing: whereby two, although not understanding one the other's language, yet by the helpe thereof may communicate their minds to one another, composed by a Well-Willer to Learning*, 1647. Later this was expanded into: *The Ground work, or Foundation laid for the Framing of a New Perfect Language: and on Universall or Common Writing, and presented to the consideration of the Learned by a Well-Willer to Learning*, 1652.

<sup>3</sup> *Logopandecteion, or on Introduction to the universal Language*, 1653. This is, no doubt, a satire (although by some taken at its face-value) which makes fun of the author's predecessors. Suggested are eleven cases, eleven genders, four numbers, eleven tenses, seven moods and also a provision that the words retain the same meaning no matter what the order of the letters.

<sup>4</sup> *The universal character, by which all the nations of the world may understand one another's conceptions, Reading out of one common writing their own Mother Tongues; on Invention of general Use, the practice whereof may be attained in two hours space, observing the grammatical Directions; which Character is so contrived, that it may be spoken as well as written*, 1657. Note that the inventor makes provisions for oral use of his language. "Honor thy father and thy mother" is written: leb2314 p2477 pf2477 and pronounced: lebtoreonfo peetofosensen piftofosensen. (See: Wiener, Leo: "Universal Languages, II," *Boston Transcript*, February 23, 1907.)

<sup>5</sup> *Ars signorum, vulgo Character Universalis et Lingua Philosophica*, 1661.

internationally accepted code<sup>[6]</sup> and, last but not least, a very ingenious scheme of communication based on musical notes by the Frenchman Jean-François Sudre (1817). All these philosophical systems—including those, or rather, especially those which were devised also for oral use – suffer from an insuperable impracticability. Leaving the phonetic aspect aside – beauty not being a necessary criterion of an international language – mastery of those tongues would require a prodigious memory to retain the immense number of classes and subclasses and divisions and subdivisions into which the visible and invisible world is divided – a difficulty which might discourage even philosophers, for whom such languages were primarily designed in any event. Hence philosophical languages perhaps failed to solve the problem mostly because they were too ambitious. Leibniz and Descartes also were greatly interested in the universal language, and the latter noted in a letter to Father Mersenne in regard to the philosophical language:

"Or je tiens que cette langue est possible, et qu'on peut trouver la science de qui elle dépend, par le moyen de laquelle les paysans pourraient mieux juger de la vérité des choses, que ne font maintenant les philosophes. Mais n'espérez pas de la voir jamais en usage; cela présuppose de grands changements en l'ordre des choses, et il faudrait que tout le Monde ne fait qu'un paradis terrestre, ce qui n'est bon à proposer que dans le pays de romans."<sup>[7]</sup>

I have dwelt purposely on this part of the history of the international language movement<sup>[8]</sup> at some length. It was my intention to indicate how, from the very inception in modern times of this great and humanitarian idea, its advocates let themselves be misled into indulging in too large and too revolutionary and too ambitious schemes. As Descartes recognized, they were schemes for which the world was not ready. We shall see later how even in our days the inventors and propagators of interlinguistic systems demand more from their proselytes than most of them are able and willing to give. We shall see, moreover, how they expect more from their creation in the way of bettering the world and its inhabitants than a mere international language is able to accomplish.

Another plan considers the revival of Latin or Greek. (Any other language is altogether out of the question in a world whose principal civilizations are, willy nilly, mainly based on Helleno-Roman antiquity.) This plan has found but few supporters, and even on entirely remodeled and modernized Latin,<sup>[9]</sup> making provisions for an adequately increased vocabulary, has not been able to arouse great enthusiasm anywhere. The general feeling seems to be that what has "died" had better be left dead and that resurrection cannot quite dispel the musty odor of the grave. "*On y sent un retour en arrière*", as Michel Bréal put it.<sup>[10]</sup>

The third project envisages the construction of a new language which is to be imposed, by force or persuasion or otherwise, on everyone. There is no dearth of constructed languages – in fact a frequently voiced objection against adopting one has been that there are too many of them. A great number are the products of well-meaning, but more enthusiastic than intelligent,

<sup>6</sup> Comparable perhaps to the Dewey Decimal System of cataloguing and shelving books in libraries, an invention which, of course, never claimed to be or to become a language.

<sup>7</sup> Lettre à Mersenne, Amsterdam, 20 novembre 1629. See Adam, Ch. and Milhaud, G., *Descartes, Correspondante*, tome I, lettre 22, pp. 89-93. Paris, 1936.

<sup>8</sup> For a complete history see: Couturat, L. and Leau, L., *Histoire de la langue universelle*. Paris, 1903. Guérard, Albert L., *A Short History of the International Language Movement*. New York, 1921.

<sup>9</sup> On the order of Peano's *Latino sine flexione* (1903), for example.

<sup>10</sup> Bréal, Michel: "Le choir d'une langue internationale," *La Revue de Paris*, 15 juillet 1901, p. 230 ff.

dilettantes, who by their endeavors, sometimes bordering on lunacy and betraying a Messiah-complex, have led the subject into ill repute. But indiscriminately severe judgment is unjustified, and trained linguists do not usually indulge in a waste of scorn against the worst, or let themselves be prejudiced by professional jealousy against the best of the amateurs. Unfortunately, the ordinary seeker of the truth will be confused and deterred by this prolixity; yet it is exactly this bewildered ordinary man whom the apostles are most eager to convert. But, naturally, all this contains no cogent reason for condemning all international languages and abandoning the plan entirely. It should not be too difficult to make a choice among the various possibilities once we have decided that we want to adopt a constructed international language and have laid down a canon of desirable and necessary qualities. Such a statement of principles is contained in a paper signed by no lesser authorities than Sapir, Bloomfield, Boas, Gerig and Krapp.<sup>[11]</sup> With this blueprint in hand, a well-nigh perfect instrument of interlinguistic communication could be devised – perfect, that is, to those who attribute possible perfection to this plan. As we shall see, anything but unanimity reigns on this basic point.

And finally there remains the last plan – the one contemplating extension, by some means, of the validity of a now spoken tongue so as to make it something of a *lingua franca* of world communication. There are now several *linguae francae* extending over limited but comparatively wide areas. Among the most important are English, Pidgin English, Arabic, Yiddish, Latin. Judging by the trend of historical and political events of the past centuries, English has a fair chance of becoming the greatest *lingua franca* of the modern world. So much has been admitted even in quarters where charity towards things British traditionally has not been encouraged.<sup>[12]</sup> Statistically this trend has been exposed by the English statistician Lewis Carnac in the following table.<sup>[13]</sup>

	Speakers in million					
	English	German	Russian	French	Italian	Spanish
End of 15th century	4	10	3	10	9j	8½
End of 16th century	6	10	3	14	91 .	8½
End of 17th century	81	10	3	20	91	8½
End of 18th century	20	31	30	31	15	26
End of 19th century	116	80	85	52	54	44
End of 20th century	640	210	233	85	77	74

For past centuries, this chart shows nothing more than an estimate, correct figures being hardly obtainable; whereas the future, the end of the twentieth century, offers only a very hypothetical prognostic view and a very strongly optimistic and flattering one for all languages concerned.

<sup>11</sup> "Memorandum on the Problem of an International Auxiliary Language," *Romanic Review*, XVI (1925), pp. 244-256. Most important are the *General Principles*, including ease of pronunciation for speakers of all tongues, simplicity of grammar, ease of unambiguous translation, flexible structure with optional use of some grammatical features, easily comprehensible vocabulary built mainly of the materials familiar to speakers of western European languages, incorporation of the results of the logical developments of linguistic trends, possibility of developing a shorthand system and phonetic intelligibility on the telephone, radio and phonograph.

<sup>12</sup> Diels, Hermann: "Leibniz und das Problem der Universalsprache," *Sitzungsberichte des Berliner Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 1899, pp. 589-599.

<sup>13</sup> Umschau, V. (August, 1899), p. 632.

For in it there is assumed, without the slightest foundation in fact or even expectation, a rate of arithmetical progression continuing at the rate prevailing in the nineteenth century – that is, at the time of imperialistic expansion of nearly all European powers and languages. Granting that we might still be living in an imperialistic age, it can hardly be assumed that future campaigns also will drop their bounty in the laps of so many nations with comforting impartiality. This chart, then, is useful only in indicating a general trend.

The argument between the promoters of a spoken language and the champions of a constructed language has been raging all through the history of the international language movement. Many linguists have maintained that an artificial language is a contradiction in terms, that a language must grow organically like any product of nature, that it must be free to change – as an international language undoubtedly would, too (they say), in various ways in different parts of the world, thus splitting up into mutually more or less unintelligible dialects<sup>[14]</sup> – and that, in any case, a language could not be created with any prospect of permanency even in a dialectized form; it would wilt away, another Homunculus.<sup>[15]</sup> At least one Esperantist, however, adopts the argument of the organic growth and life of language to prove, not that Esperanto is not realizable but that it must be satisfied with its position as "*langue internationale juxtaposée, et non substituée aux langues nationales*."<sup>[16]</sup> Then there are linguists who contend that the difference between artificial and natural, as terms applied to language, is one of degree rather than of kind<sup>[17]</sup> or even that, far from being a contradiction in terms, artificial language is a tautology since all languages are man-made – that is, artificial.<sup>[18]</sup> If we were to pursue these arguments, we should surely find ourselves involved in the controversy on the origin of language itself : φύσει or θέσει, God-given or man-made, with consequences that go far beyond the scope of this paper and, to be sure, the scope of the international language movement itself.<sup>[19]</sup> And finally there is, among a few philologists, sometimes plain resentment that amateurs should usurp the prerogatives of the professional linguist.<sup>[20]</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Brugmann, Karl: "Zur Frage der Einführung einer künstlichen Hilfssprache," *Indogermanische Forschungen*, XXII (1908), p. 387. The logical objection against this view is that due to the excellent communication, written and acoustic, of our days the danger of dialectization is small. Only a complete disruption of communications, caused by "total" war, would have a definitely damaging effect. And in such a monstrous calamity subsequent formation of dialects would indeed be a negligible phenomenon. See: Pei, Mario A.: "One World? One Language?" *Modern Language Journal*, XXXI (1947), p. 13. Schuchardt, Hugo: *Auf Anlass des Volapük* (Berlin, 1888), pp. 6-7.

<sup>15</sup> Meyer, Gustav: *Essays und Studien zur Sprachgeschichte und Volkskunde* (Strassburg, 1893), II, pp. 34-35; Brugmann, Karl: "Zur Frage ...," p. 371 f.; Diels, Hermann: *Internationale Aufgaben der Universität*, Rede zur Gedächtnisfeier des Stifters der Berliner Universität König Friedrich Wilhelm III, in der Aula am 3. August 1906 gehalten (Berlin, 1906), p. 30 f.; Dauzat, Albert: *L'Europe linguistique* (Paris, 1940), pp. 254-255.

<sup>16</sup> Moch, Gaston: "La question de la Langue internationale et sa solution par l'Esperanto", *Revue internationale de Sociologie*, V (1897), p. 256.

<sup>17</sup> Jespersen, Otto: "Nature and Art in Language," *American Speech*, V (1929), p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> Schuchardt, Hugo: *Auf Anlass ...*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> See Diels, Hermann. *Internationale Aufgaben ...*, p. 22 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Particularly if the protagonists are a Warsaw Jewish physician and a Prussian University professor: "*Woher dem Dr. Zamenhof die Berechtigung kommt, von den Deutschen zu verlangen, sich seinen Einfällen anzubequemen, möchte ich erst nachgewiesen haben ...*" "*Immer der gleiche Refrain, die Esperantisten und ihre Häuptlinge können tun, was sie wollen, wir ändern armen Menschenkinder müssen ...*" Leskien, August, "Zur Frage der Einführung einer künstlichen Hilfssprache," *Indogermanische Forschungen*, XXII (1908), pp. 390, 394.

See also Leskien, August, *Zur Kritik der künstlichen Weltsprachen* (Strassburg, 1907), p. 37. Non-philologists retaliate by proposing the other extreme: "... the prevailing notion of language as something miraculous,

Those who favored the international acceptance of a living natural language found themselves immediately attacked for furthering nationalistic aims of their respective countries. It is almost impossible to draw any battle lines here – one is treated to a fight of everyone against everyone. Any propagator of his native (or any other) tongue may have been, but was not necessarily, guilty of imperialism or, at least, misguided patriotism. By the same token any one of his opponents might have been a true internationalist who wished to forestall one nation's undue preponderance, or he too might have been simply a jealous chauvinist who scented danger for the projected or current expansion or preservation of his own language – that is, nation. Internal and external politics based on linguistic diplomacy is nothing new.<sup>[21]</sup> The sentiments, and the terms in which they are expressed in this controversy, are of a fascinating variety: surprise, anger, scorn, fear, hatred, arrogance, indignation, they run the gamut of emotions of the homo politicus, reminiscent of the squabbles of "wardheelers", disguised as discussions for the good of mankind. A sorry spectacle, but not one which must militate against international languages, just as the course of politics in its lower form must not militate against representative government.

The fear that the nation, or nations, whose language came to be adopted as the international language would derive material and also spiritual advantage from this linguistic expansion is not groundless. At least it is not within the framework of national thinking as it prevails today, whereby one nation's gain is not only not everyone's gain but indeed somebody's loss. While theoretically we may maintain that this state of mind is illogical and unethical and inimical to the common interest, we must admit that it is firmly imbedded in the mind of civilized man. What is even more discouraging, educated and presumably enlightened persons of responsible standing condone and encourage this attitude, as exemplified by the reaction of some scholars and national leaders to international languages. Obviously a thorough re-evaluation of values, to borrow a phrase of Nietzsche, lies many generations ahead of us if the gods grant our civilization to see the light at all. Some evils may seem ineradicable. But recognition and denunciation of their true character is a necessary, if thankless, task. Otherwise someone may produce phrases ostensibly critical:

"... no living language can become today the vehicle of intercourse for the whole civilized world, and it is absurd to look for such a thing. ... [It] would give the favored people such an enormous advantage in the control of the political world and such immense preference in the world's market that no nation would consent to it before its downfall."<sup>[22]</sup>

This may be a true enough appraisal of facts. But that his words are not honestly critical is shown in that the same author elsewhere disparages claims for English as an international language, not on practical but on patriotic grounds, championing German instead. (That the concepts of "race" and "Anglo-Saxon" and "instinct" should be admitted in the discussion does not enhance its integrity.)

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untouchable, is fostered in a great measure, if not chiefly, by professional philologists. It follows that tradition and training unfit them for being the architects of the M[odel] L[anguage] ...." Talmey, Max: "Notes on a Model Language," *The Scientific Monthly*, XXVIII (1929), p. 331.

<sup>21</sup> See: Dauzat, Albert: *L'Europe linguistique* (Paris, 1940); Woolner, A. C.: *Languages in History and Politics* (Oxford, 1938); Meillet, A. and Tesnière, L.: *Les langues dans l'Europe nouvelle* (2nd ed., Paris, 1928); Dominian, L.: *Frontiers of Language and Nationality in Europe* (New York, 1917).

<sup>22</sup> Münsterberg, Hugo: *American Problems* (New York, 1910), p. 214.

"... der angelsächsische Instinkt verlangt, dass es die englische Sprache sein soll, die sich den Weltkreis erobert. ... Andere Nationalsprachen ... mögen zunächst noch in Frieden bestehen, aber andere Weltsprachen dürfen nicht geduldet werden",<sup>[23]</sup>

and

"... der Traum von der englischen Weltsprache [wird] schnell dahingehen; die Sprachhoffnungen für das Deutsche aber werden sich, wenn nicht alles trägt, aufs herrlichste erfüllen. Die deutsche Sprache kann und will da nirgends die englische Landessprache verdrängen ...."<sup>[24]</sup>

After a violent attack, an appeasing gesture. It need hardly be mentioned that, on the other hand, in the days of Great Britain's greatest imperialistic expansion, the intrinsic virtues of the Anglo-Saxon tongue (for Anglo-Saxon read English) were extolled, along with some claims of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority. World domination was claimed, by some British subjects, for both race and language. I shall not attempt here to prove or disprove the basic merits of English, but the consensus of linguists in general appears to be that among Indo-European languages English has, in syntax, grammar and vocabulary, though not in orthography,<sup>[25]</sup> a great many attractive progressive qualities.<sup>[26]</sup> Naturally, this has nothing to do with the Anglo-Saxon race, whatever that is. But, it is asserted, the form of a language will in any event not be the criterion on the basis of which it will be or should be accepted universally, excepting perhaps orthography, where tradition is psychologically not so deeply anchored. The "illusion of linguistic perfection"<sup>[27]</sup> is, if not damaging, in no wise furthering the cause, especially if we keep in mind, as we ought to, "... that the interlanguage of the future is for future, not for present generations, and that it does not have to be made 'easy' or 'logical' for anybody in particular,<sup>[28]</sup> provided it is imparted in the right way and at the right age."<sup>[29]</sup>

It lies in the nature of the problem that the requirement for a *constructed* language is that it should be as nearly perfect as possible,<sup>[30]</sup> whereas an *existing* language must be accepted as it

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<sup>23</sup> Münsterberg, Hugo: "Sprachhoffnungen in der Neuen Welt," *Internationale Wochenschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik*, VI (April, 1907), p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Loc. cit., XIII (April, 1907), p. 56.

<sup>25</sup> Attempts at simplifying English spelling were criticized on linguistic practical grounds in plausible enough terms (Münsterberg, Hugo: *American Problems*, p. 195 ff.) but also were attacked and "exposed" as "*sprachlicher Imperialismus*" (Münsterberg, Hugo: "Sprachhoffnungen ..." VI (April, 1907), p. 23).

<sup>26</sup> For a dissenting opinion see E. Sapir in: Shenton, H. N., Sapir, E., and Jespersen, O.: *International Communication* (London, 1931), p. 79.

<sup>27</sup> Pei, Mario A.: "A Universal Language *Can* Be Achieved," *Town and Country*, September, 1944, p. 130.

<sup>28</sup> Educationists have measured the "Progress in Learning on Auxiliary Language" (Thorndike, E. L., and Kennon, Laura H. V., Institute of Educational Research, Division of Psychology, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 1927). "No attempt was made in the initial stages of this testing to include tests intended to measure the ability to write or speak Esperanto" (p. 7), which is surely most unfortunate; but, it is said, "so far, results of measurements show that college students make the most progress in learning Esperanto, adults next, and then younger children" (p. 5). This is not startling so far, but I have been unable to find a continuation of the tests with more illuminating results.

<sup>29</sup> Pei, Mario A., "A Universal Language ..." p. 130.

<sup>30</sup> See Meillet, Antoine, in his review of Gautherot, G.: *La question de la langue auxiliaire internationale* (Paris, 1910), in *Revue Critique*, 11 mass 1911, p. 185: "Je crois à la possibilité et à l'utilité d'une langue artificielle internationale; mais je crois aussi que, avant d'arrêter cette langue, il faut l'examiner de près et la porter à un point de perfection tel qu'il n'y ait plus à la corriger d'une manière essentielle quand elle sera dans l'usage courant."

is, with perhaps no more than slight revisions in spelling and vocabulary. The latter applies to Basic English. As to perfection, who is to decide at what point a constructed language has reached that stage? Only its successful spread could confirm it. For, if any one authority were to constitute himself this infallible arbiter, his judgement would surely be challenged, and not necessarily out of mere spite and jealousy. I do not know how successful an Academy, that decides on usage and changes and improvements, could be in the long run. But if it had to deal with an artificial language, it would in any event labor under the lack of a linguistic hinterland.<sup>[31]</sup> This is at least one danger to which a national language is less exposed.

Another frequently voiced objection against a constructed language is that, by definition, it will be poor, at least in vocabulary. That is also true of Basic English, but at least it has, should the speaker find it necessary or desirable, the vast reservoir of Standard English to draw from. It is true that, if "to borrow" is "to get credit" in Basic English, "not to get credit" is not by any means always the equivalent of "not to borrow"; that *schön*, *unschön*, *hässlich* are not two but three degrees of a quality, *unschön* not at all being identical with *hässlich*.<sup>[32]</sup> However, such objections are indeed of a minor nature, and it may be presumed that any *used* language will *develop* a sufficient flexibility.

We shall find ourselves in good company whether we approve or disapprove of a constructed international language. Among its advocates were Schuchardt,<sup>[33]</sup> Jespersen, Max Müller, Wilhelm Ostwald, Sapir; among its adversaries Brugmann, Leskien, Diels, Gustav Meyer, Münsterberg. However, it is remarkable, and I wish to emphasize this again, that all disapproving scholars did recognize the desirability of an international tongue. They did not agree in their reasons for rejecting artificial languages, nor on methods for the spread of a national language, nor were their motives always of unquestionable integrity. Furthermore, on the whole, whether they liked it or not, they conceded that the most likely international language was going to be that national tongue whose influence would extend over wide areas of the globe.

"Man kann sich danach die zukünftige Entwicklung der Sprachenwelt so vorstellen, dass die grossen Weltsprachen den Umfang des ihnen botmässigen Gebietes immer mehr erweitern, so dass die Zahl der am Kampfe um die Hegemonie beteiligten immer mehr eingeschränkt wird. Das wird natürlich mit der politischen Gestaltung der Erdoberfläche aufs engste zusammenhängen."<sup>[34]</sup>

"... aber sie [the simplification of language] kann nach meiner Meinung nur in der Weise erfolgen, dass die grossen Kulturmittelpunkte immer weitere Kreise um sich ziehen, um sich vielleicht schliesslich in einen einzigen zu vereinigen."<sup>[35]</sup>

"Würde statt des jetzigen politischen Systems, das auf dem Gleichgewicht aller Kulturnationen mit starker Betonung der nationalen Verschiedenheit beruht, ein

<sup>31</sup> See Brugmann, Karl: *Zur Kritik der künstlichen Weltsprachen* (Strassburg, 1907), p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> See Gomperz, Theodor: "Zur Frage der internationalen Hilfssprache," *Deutsche Revue*, XXXII (December, 1907), p. 294 ff.

<sup>33</sup> See particularly Schuchardt, Hugo: "Bericht über die auf Schaffung einer künstlichen Hilfssprache gerichtete Bewegung," *Almanach der Wiener Akademie der Wissenschaften*, LIV (1904), pp. 279-296, a report solicited by the Vienna Academy.

<sup>34</sup> Meyer, Gustav: *Essays ...*, II, p. 40.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

internationaler kosmopolitischer Völkertrutz sich ausbilden, so würde sich voraussichtlich dieser monistische Trieb auch in der Sprachentwicklung betätigen."<sup>[36]</sup>

"Mit der Einheit des Imperiums ist auch die einheitliche Weltsprache gegeben. Vae victis."<sup>[37]</sup>

"Das natürlichste Heilmittel wäre, dass eine der beteiligten Sprachen allmählich immer weitere Kreise um sich zöge, sämtliche Konkurrentinnen nach und nach in die Ecke drängte und schliesslich alle völlig zertrete."<sup>[38]</sup>

That these authors felt compelled to deal with the problem in terms of "battle," "hegemony," "Imperium," "crushing," evokes an uncomfortable realization of conquest by force, and in this sense a fearful Vae victis is not unjustified. It is not unjustified at least as long as victory and defeat will be the two foci into either of which any nation is drawn as a matter of gravitation. It follows that, if we attempt to establish linguistic unity in the world by imposing it forcefully, we are employing the very method whose eradication from the face of the earth is supposed to be the result of our endeavors.

No decision can possibly be reached as long as within the minds of the protagonists, be they scholars or diplomats, the national attitude prevails. It has been suggested by Pei that the nations of the world constitute a linguistic committee and entrust to it the task of selecting, from among spoken languages, one that is to become, by international law, the international language in which the coming generations will be raised.<sup>[39]</sup> Pei makes the realization of this plan dependent on the willingness of the world's governments to act within their countries laws in conformity with these international agreements. Similarly, Guérard bases the spread of the future international language on acceptance of a plan by an international body.<sup>[40]</sup> But both authors, it seems to me, fail to warn the reader that it is this very acceptance by the international body that renders the entire plan utopian now. The fulfillment of this one basic condition lies far beyond our reach, and this is not the fault of the world's diplomats alone. While not all governments nowadays are of such a nature as to express by their actions the will of the people, whether they call themselves democratic or not, it may safely be said that, in the long run, a people has the government it deserves either by assertive action or by default (although both conditions may for certain periods be withdrawn from the people's sphere of action). Considering, therefore, that, as Professors Pei and Guérard well know, not all governments (how many, really?) would enact such linguistic legislation in the foreseeable future, the corollary conclusion is that the peoples of the world as a whole are not willing to take such a drastic step. It might not be too difficult to select from each nation a man so minded as to reach an understanding with his fellow conferees. But one might be hard put to select one now who is at the same time so influential at home and so much *a propheta in patria* as to make palatable to his government and his compatriots a possible international decision which spells "defeat" to all good "patriots."

Even an attempt at uniting two great languages, French and English,<sup>[41]</sup> which were to be, side by side and not in a bastardized mixture, international vehicles of communication, as proposed

<sup>36</sup> Diels, Hermann: *Internationale Aufgaben*, p. 33.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> Brugmann, Karl: *Zur Kritik ...*, pp.6-7.

<sup>39</sup> Pei, Mario A.: "A Universal Language . . . , *passim*.

<sup>40</sup> Guérard, Albert L.: *A Short History ...*, p. 194.

<sup>41</sup> A first trial, by Hoiniz, P.: *Anglo-Franca, an Nouveau Plan for the Facilitation of International Communication* (London, 1889), called by the author "*un compromis-langue english-français*" had little to

by Paul Chappellier,<sup>[42]</sup> was branded by German scholars as a basically imperialistic Western Plot.<sup>[43]</sup> It did not help matters that in the preface Albert Dauzat welcomed Chappellier's proposal on the grounds that any other international language would endanger the influential position of "*notre chère et belle langue française.*" This expresses an attitude which would, to some persons at least, no doubt seem praiseworthy, but which, I daresay, is not conducive to producing the harmony among peoples which should further the establishment of international languages. And who could blame several hundred millions of people for regarding Mr. Churchill's endorsement of Basic English with misgivings and apprehensions?

Nearly all propagators of international languages have insisted, in what has become the traditional timorous fashion among them, that their new language would not, and was by no means intended to, infringe upon or supercede the various national tongues. Hence they cautiously prefer to speak of an *auxiliary* international language. Particularly the adherents of constructed languages have, in fact, contrived to make a virtue of their policy of noninterference. The following words are quoted from the most enthusiastic, most persistent, most influential member of the movement:

"Un tel choix [that of a national tongue as international language] se heurterait non seulement à l'amour-propre légitime des diverses nations, mais encore à leurs intérêts politiques et économiques, car il conférerait à la nation favorisée un avantage énorme sur les rivales dans les relations commerciales et même scientifiques. La langue d'un peuple est le véhicule de ses idées, de son influence, de ses produits et même de ses modes; elle est aussi l'incarnation de son esprit, le symbole de son unité nationale, de son indépendance et de sa suprématie."<sup>[44]</sup> {Words in Roman type emphasized by me.}

It all sounds as if it came from the pen of Hugo Münsterberg,<sup>[45]</sup> but then Professor Münsterberg did not pose as an apostle of internationalism. If it is not the task of an international language to prevent these purely emotional, chauvinistic, anti-international notions from being nourished in people's minds, then what is its task? Yet here we see a man of Couturat's position extoll these separatist tendencies, this megalomaniac aspect of doubtful patriotism, and present exactly the ills a sane world can and must do without, as virtues whose perpetuation should be safeguarded.

But, Couturat and others would argue, we wish to be realistic and our constructed language aims merely to help man in practical affairs. In adhering to this self-imposed restriction, literary that is, "impractical" efforts in the international language are automatically banned, and although Zamenhof and others wrote and recited Esperanto poetry (the British anthem also has been translated!), the Idists and Jespersen took pains to impress the world with the fact that their new languages were only auxiliaries for practical international intercourse and were not destined to supercede national languages. These practical aims lie mainly in the realm of communication

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recommend itself and probably repelled speakers of English and French alike. Behind the pseudonym Hoinix hides J. G. Henderson. This incredible Mr. Henderson gave the world two other international languages, *Lingua* and *Latinesce*, equally and happily forgotten.

<sup>42</sup> Chappellier, Paul: *L'Esperanto et le système bilingue. La langue internationale réalisée par l'alliance du Français et de l'Anglais* (Paris, 1911).

<sup>43</sup> See Diels, Hermann: *Internationale Aufgaben* ..., pp. 35-36.

<sup>44</sup> Couturat, Louis: *Pour la langue internationale*. Coulommiers, 1901, pp. 6-7.

<sup>45</sup> See pp. 55/5<sup>dig</sup>-56/6<sup>dig</sup> above.

among learned persons and of occasionally gathered international congresses and meetings,<sup>[46]</sup> of commerce, and of tourism. "*La langue internationale devra servir: 1° aux savants de taut ordre, ... [à] tous les hommes d'étude; 2° aux industriels et aux commerçants; 3° aux voyageurs et aux touristes.*"<sup>[47]</sup> Let us examine the alleged realism of these projected fields more closely.

First – concerning international congresses of learned men and diplomats and deputies of various organizations – the idea that the use of an international language will absolutely relieve the participants involved from learning one another's native tongues is fallacious. Or can it be said that science and all international intercourse will, as it were, be born together with the international language, cancelling all that went before? Does anyone suggest that all publications of the past – scientific, diplomatic, philosophical – that all archives and private documents be translated into the new international language for the convenience of those "intellectuals" who wish to remain ignorant of any other foreign tongue?

Second, commerce has done well, exceedingly well on an international scale so far. Indeed in its most efficient form, in trusts and cartels, it covers the whole world with a network of intricate interrelations. However, whether this system has proven beneficial to the interests of humanity is still a doubtful matter in the mind of nearly everyone. Also, this expansion was accomplished without the aid of an international language, and on the whole it seems that a firm engaged in international dealings (and there are relatively very few such) finds no difficulties in attending to its correspondence and personal contacts by means of bilingual secretaries and interpreters. However, say the interlinguists, much expense of human power and money could be saved by employing an international language.<sup>[48]</sup> That would be a most cogent argument, indeed, if the human power thus removed from unproductive toil could be or would be employed productively. In the existing circumstances, and surely for quite a span of time to come, unemployed workers are, except in wartime, not put to productive work automatically and with certainty. We are still laboring under the pangs of the Industrial Revolution, and the machine has not yet been entirely subdued. In other words, the use of an international language in commerce and industry might save money, but it would not enhance productivity unless it were coupled with, or preceded by, some other social adjustments.

Third, as for tourism, the less said the better. Even today, a man who knows English can without any difficulty travel around the world, and if he really has to learn English in order to do so, he will derive from his efforts the not inconsiderable advantage of being able to read Shakespeare. As for the endlessly advertised prize that, if there were an international language, a traveler could talk to any grocer or peasant or bootblack or vendor in the bazaar without difficulty and – how wonderful! – haggle about prices, prospective tourists may rest assured that they can obtain anything the strange world beyond one's boundaries is willing to sell, no more no less, the deal being closed in any odd language, with gestures if need be.<sup>[49]</sup> What Bréal calls "*un billet de*

<sup>46</sup> The number of the last has been increasing steadily. See Shenton, Herbert N.: *Cosmopolitan Conversation* (New York, 1933), containing abundant statistical material.

<sup>47</sup> Couturat, Louis: *Pour la langue internationale*, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> See Clark, Walter J.: *International Language, Past, Present, Future* (London, 1907), pp. 4, 42, 44, 73.

<sup>49</sup> Apparently some English tourists do not even like to be addressed in a familiar tongue: "Any visitor to any foreign country will remember how persistently and shamelessly the local inhabitants, even the school children, force their crackpot English on the long-suffering tourist, especially the Teutons. Some of these pests are seeking money; most are seeking what money will not always buy – an English lesson." (Roust, H. V.: *Basic English and the Problem of a World Language*, London, 1941, p. 8.) I do not know who the "Teutons" are, and grammatically it does not become quite clear whether they are the nasty foreigners or the long-suffering English travelers. Nor do I see why seeking an English lesson, not money, should be so

*circulation pour les hôtels*"<sup>50</sup>] and the ability to bargain (with presumably congenitally slippery foreigners) are ridiculously meager and discouragingly undignified results of a linguistic revolution (and, be it added, of a modern language course at school!). The earnest tourist who really wants to become acquainted with a foreign country will have to learn its language so that he may read its books and papers, especially old books and old papers which, it may be presumed, will not all be translated into the international language.

By timidly restricting itself to "practical," "realistic" goals, the international language movement has deprived itself of, rather than enriched itself with, good reasons for its realization.

Advocates of the immediate unconditional adoption of an international language have well been aware of the fact that only very few persons in each nation would master the language or take the trouble of finding out how it works, unless necessity pressed them. It is curious to note in this connection that one of the most inveterate and, alas, most eminent enemies of the international language scheme, Karl Brugmann, concurs with those of its promoters who wish to restrict it to a secondary role as international linguistic hand-maiden.<sup>51</sup> Although the name be Brugmann, this is not good company for an interlinguist to keep! Descartes, on the other hand, while admitting the possible necessity of restricting an international language to writing only, – makes no virtue of respecting patriotism and sectionalism for the sake of appeasement:

"... s'il [the author of the international language] veut qu'on apprenne des mots primitifs, communs pour toutes les langues il ne trouvera jamais personne qui veuille prendre cette peine; et il serait plus aisé de faire que tous les hommes s'accordassent à apprendre la Latine ou quelque autre de celles qui sont en usage, que non pas celle-ci, en laquelle il n'y a point encore de livres écrits, par le moyen desquels on se puisse exercer, ni d'hommes qui la sachent, avec qui l'on puisse acquérir l'usage de la parole. Toute l'utilité donc que je vais qui peut réussir de cette invention, c'est pour l'écriture. ..." <sup>52</sup>

It seems appropriate here to consider the technical obstacles to the spread of the international language – no matter of what type, provided the plan of campaign includes that it be learned like any foreign language – and to become consciously cognizant of the basic fact that in reading and writing, indeed even in speaking, a very large proportion of the population of the countries of the world, not necessarily illiterate in any degree, masters its own native language but imperfectly, colloquially and ungrammatically.<sup>53</sup> If such is the proficiency attained by a majority of speakers in their respective mother tongues, the propagators of the international language rightly did not expect their new language to reach any but the strata of higher intelligence. Particularly,

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reprehensible. It all becomes even more confusing if one realizes that the author advocates, in this same pamphlet, Basic English as a world language!

<sup>50</sup> Bréal, Michel: *Revue de Paris*, 1<sup>er</sup> septembre 1901, pp. 222.

<sup>51</sup> See Brugmann, Karl: *Zur Kritik ...*, p. 28.

<sup>52</sup> Lettre à Mersenne, *loc. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>53</sup> "How many of those who speak English can write it beyond the stage: 'Hello, Joe! How are you? I am just fine having a helluva lot of fun with the guys.' As regards speaking [an acquired language] it presupposes a very rare quality of hearing well and being able to imitate the sounds, and then reproduce them correctly, not only in brief yells of the aforementioned type, but in long and well-modulated sentences. This is difficult, even for ninety-nine percent of those speaking the language as their mother tongue, and as regards a foreign language very few human beings become bilingual, trilingual and above that." (Nykl, A. R.: "Remarks on Recent 'Linguistics,'" *The American Slavic and East European Review*, IV (1945), p. 196.) I can only corroborate Mr. Nykl's statement in every word from my personal wide experience acquired as a mail censor in the United States Army during several months in the late war.

it may be added, since there is now no reason to expect that, say, an English-speaking student would learn *and retain* the international language more willingly and efficiently than he now learns and retains French or German which he "takes" at school, *unless* the study of the international language becomes a virtue through necessity. In 1893 Gustave Meyer answered the question whether a world language was desirable and possible with a decided "yes."<sup>54</sup> But he also stated with refreshing bluntness that the great majority of the inhabitants of our globe has not the slightest interest in the creation of an international language.<sup>55</sup> In his opinion, the solution of the problem is bound up with the solution of the greater problem of the evolution of humanity along humane lines.<sup>56</sup> I do not know that Meyer's harsh judgement about the interest of the masses in an international language can, after half a century, be so extensively revised as to warrant new international enterprises of the *same type* now. A *new* manner in which to facilitate the spread of an international language, whatever it be, is suggested by Pei,<sup>57</sup> whereby the international language should be imparted to children like a native tongue, and not taught like a foreign one, from kindergarten on. As for the older generation, it may do as it pleases and either learn or scorn the international language, its members "will be dead within a century anyway." But that scheme optimistically presupposes, of course, the good will of the world's governments.

A sociologist is of the opinion that

"an auxiliary language program must create a demand by revealing the need in terms of existing waste, embarrassments and inadequacies, together with possibilities of economy, achievement and satisfaction,"

and that

"demand does not become effective unless the public knows what it needs in terms of what it may have."<sup>58</sup>

I wonder whether that is not a great deal more true in concrete matters which improve the life of the individual materially (the "high standard of living" comes to mind here) than in matters of a spiritual nature without immediate tangible rewards for all. Have not Judaism and Christianity, and, for that matter, other religions, preached for many centuries to "love thy neighbor as thyself"? If these great social agencies which have certainly shown man "what he may have" did not succeed in producing brotherly love (although the fault lies, to some extent, with these agencies themselves), can a linguistic reform accomplish that? At any rate, for the time being and, most likely, for a while to come, the international language movement will not arouse the masses and "... its clientèle will be first of all the intellectual élite ...."<sup>59</sup> However, this intellectual élite, if it consist of men worthy to be so classified, is the group that has the least need of an international language. Not only do many of its members master already more than one national language, but by definition they should belong to a class of persons among whom the psychological damages caused by international unintelligibility tend to be comparatively small. They are among those whose critical powers are developed to a relatively high degree, preventing them from falling prey too easily to those rabble-rousing demagogues who want to

<sup>54</sup> Meyer, Gustav: *Essays ...*, II, pp. 26-27.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>57</sup> Pei, Mario A.: "A Universal Language ...," p. 130. See p. 59/8<sup>dig</sup> f. above.

<sup>58</sup> Shenton, H. N.: *International Communication*, p. 57.

<sup>59</sup> Guérard, Albert L.: *A Short History*, p. 204.

make it appear more worthwhile to die than to live for one's country. (But there are many exceptions, and it has been the thankless task of this paper to bring some of them to light.)

By speaking of the factual realization of an international language, we have come to a vexed question which needs to be illuminated. Since an international language is allegedly somehow related to closer understanding among the inhabitants of the world, it must be assumed that such an international language is either an instrument for bringing about such improvements or the result thereof. The apostles (the term is here used seriously for some, derisively for others) of the universal language movement in all its phases and forms insist, implicitly or explicitly, that once we all talk the same language, our life will not only become easier in practical respects but we shall also have made a great step towards that brotherhood of man which we all of course desire if we are in our right senses. It has been declared that many international misunderstandings which lead to resentment, hatred and, ultimately, armed conflict, could be eliminated if we could make ourselves understood by our neighbors, if we could talk to them, read their papers, listen to their radio, see their films and the like. To point out that there have been and are now raging conflicts and wars, very cruel wars, among speakers of the same language is as simple an answer as it is obvious. Arguing in this manner we are, perhaps, dealing with the question in too popular terms, but in such terms are couched the claims of the interlinguists which they advance to the so-called common man because only fairly tangible advantages will arouse his interest. Naturally, the prospective convert will soon find himself disappointed, simply because he has been led to expect too much. Oversimplification of the issues and over-advertising will, in such serious matters, not be so easily tolerated as in the case of toothpaste and automobiles. No doubt if we speak of international understanding as contained in language we are speaking of a semantic problem. But are our – certainly existing – international semantic problems of such a nature that the acoustic appearance of a common term will solve them? Among the most embattled terms of our day are "democracy," "communism" and "socialism." These words are internationally understood, and they present in all civilized languages approximately the same auditory, or at least visual, impression. It is hardly likely that even an artificial international language would choose other vocables in their stead. But does that imply that all those who recognize the word really mean the same thing by it?<sup>[60]</sup> What is then the advantage of the identity or nearidentity of the sounds? If *Allemand, German, Deutscher, Tedesco* and others were all replaced, in the international language, by a quite neutral sounding new term – for example, *Bodo* – would that in any manner whatever change the individual's attitude toward the concept itself? Would not *Bodo* in fact be and "mean" the same thing as *Allemand, German, Deutscher, Tedesco*, and would it not arouse the identical emotions, favorable or unfavorable, in anyone who knows its "real" meaning? An international language of the type which, like any other foreign language, is acquired by learning vocables, is based on translation, conscious or unconscious. And in learning a translation, can the student be expected to refrain from perpetuating the semantic content of the original, can he be so inspired by a new set of sounds that he fills them with a new semantic content which presumably entails a "better," more humane, less prejudiced attitude toward his fellow men?<sup>[61]</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ogden, C. K., and Richards, I. A.: would call these "symbolically blank but emotively active words." (*The Meaning of Meaning*, London, 1938, p. 125.)

<sup>61</sup> "In all discussions we shall find that what is said is only in part determined by the things to which the speaker is referring. Often without a clear consciousness of the fact, people have preoccupations which determine their use of words. Unless we are aware of their purposes and interests at the moment, we shall not know what they are talking about and whether their referents are the same as ours or not." (Ogden and Richards, *Meaning ...*, p. 126.)

Often interlinguists counter assertions, that an international language will not be used by the masses or not produce the desired results, by pointing out that one or several international languages do exist and that people of different native tongues do use them for oral or written communication. There have been congresses, it is said, at which one or the other international language has been employed by all participants to universal satisfaction. And, it is argued further, since these persons could satisfactorily use the language and enjoyed meeting one another, forgetting their latent national, racial, religious prejudices, everybody will be able to do likewise once an international language is known by all people.

It is true that the more successful international languages are, on the whole, more easily and quickly acquired than another *foreign* language, although even this has been contested, though unjustly, I think.<sup>[62]</sup> But there is certainly a very strong objection to be marked against the claim that the atmosphere of understanding and friendship at gatherings of interlinguists is the *result* of the faculty of intercourse in the international language. This spirit is, on the contrary, the very cause of the gatherings of those persons of good will. They all learned the international language because they believed *beforehand* in international cooperation, because they had freed themselves already of at least some of the prejudices under which others still labored: *they had acquired an international language not in order to learn, but to practice brotherhood of man!* No doubt this new experience enhanced and confirmed their conviction so that the international language must of course be credited with a beneficial influence. But this undoubtedly great value of international intercourse extends today to far too few people. To enlarge the circle of the initiated, the aim of language planners has been to produce better – that is, easier – more logical languages. No doubt this endeavor is aimed in the right direction – if what is sought is an artificial language – and should induce more people to devote some efforts to their own betterment. But, by and large, is the *form* of the language the most important factor to provide this inducement? Is not the spirit of the student the basic condition for advancement? Is not the more basic necessity to prepare men for the acceptance of a common tongue rather than to create one that is as easy as possible and to ram it down their throats? We should think, therefore, that society needs to be prepared along other than linguistic lines for a world-nation and a world-language, that the individual needs to be educated to see the advantages as well as the dignity of his status as a world-citizen. Certain powers in the world at large produce far greater evils than linguistic misunderstanding ever will produce, and a mere linguistic reform cannot be expected to cope with these powers. There are social agencies that exist in flesh and blood, in gold and oil, in guns and airplanes; and they all furnish, ceaselessly occasion after occasion that breeds hatred and war. How can a mere linguistic regularization undo so much damage?

But, one will say, is it more realistic to insist that the new international language, whatever it turn out to be, should usurp the field of national languages instead of existing peacefully side by side with them? It is and it is not. It is less realistic if we insist on trying to make the international language the cause rather than the result of human improvements, for then we simply deprive ourselves of so many prospective converts who will be deterred by what seems undue radicalism or impractical idealism. It is more realistic, however, if we want first of all to see humanity reach a stage in which it recognizes, and is mentally and physically ready for, political and economical internationalism, in which case an international language is merely one more *expression* of this awareness.<sup>[63]</sup> For we must keep in mind that language is primarily a

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<sup>62</sup> Leskien, August: "Zur Frage ...," pp. 394-395.

<sup>63</sup> Such highly advanced countries as Great Britain and the United States have not seen fit, for example, to adopt the undoubtedly superior metric system, Great Britain not even in its monetary standard. Scientists in both

social act and that it is conditioned by the state of society and *created by society*, that it is the result and not the *cause* of a state of mind.<sup>[64]</sup> The future international language will be as international and as brother-loving as future generations will be. If we insisted on creating for them such a language today, we should incorporate in it our own imperfections and transmit to them our state of mind which, we hope, will not be theirs.

Let us therefore foster and nourish and spread the conviction of the possibility and the ultimate necessity of an international system of communication, but let us by all means refrain from setting our hearts on one and imposing it, or even trying to impose it, on our children: it will not serve them well.

Humanity has hardly produced a more viciously absurd adage than "My country, right or wrong." Largely because of it internationalism is still subservient to national supremacy, the United Nations are unable to infringe upon the national sovereignty of any country, the world-police, if formed, could not intervene against the major powers and the common man is still given to ideas of patriotism-and, for all we know, as of this date, as a matter of self-defense, he may be right.

In propagating an idea, nothing is gained by belittling the difficulties, and promises impossible of being kept are damaging to the cause and the integrity of its 'champions. Therein lies the danger, I think, for linguists and others who promise the world redress from many old evils by means of an international language.

"You scientific people, with your fancy of a terrible exactitude in language, of indestructible foundations built, ... are marvellously without imagination." (H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, I, p. 5)<sup>[65]</sup>

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countries, it is true, have long since measured in cm and kg, but for them it was necessary, not only desirable. They also have developed everywhere, equally through necessity, an international terminology and, in chemistry and mathematics above all, a sort of pasigraphic writing.

<sup>64</sup> I am excepting, of course, that temporary state of mind which literary works of art may create in a receptive person by means of a particularly inspiring, emotive language. "A poem ... has no concern with limited and direct reference. ... Its function is to use an evocative term in connection with an evocative matter. What it does, or should do, is to induce a fitting attitude to experience." (Ogden and Richards: *Meaning ...*, p. 158.) In the same category belong also the calculated effects of the language of advertising and propaganda, although temporary influence has under favorable conditions, a good chance of creating a permanent attitude.

<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, Mr. Wells' formal contributions to the international language controversy (*Saturday Review of Literature*, XXVI, 32 (August 7, 1943), pp. 4-6) lack the pungency of his aphorisms and are ill-informed.