

CORRESPONDENCE

The Problem of a World Language

(See Pierre Delattre, *A Foreigner Views Basic English*, B. A., Spring, 1944)

Dear Sir:

Dr. Delattre points out some serious disadvantages of Basic English: the irregular spelling, the difficulties of pronunciation, the use of numerous figurative and idiomatic phrases, the irregularity of the tonic accent. I think is right in all these points. And yet, he does not even touch the decisive point of the problem raised by Basic English. Fact is, we need an international language. In the future we shall need it ever more urgently. Therefore, we shall have it. The question is whether Basic English is the best possible solution. If so, it will be used as international language in spite of all its disadvantages. Man never has perfect tools. He uses the relatively best available.

There are two ways leading to an international language: we may carve out a simplified part from a natural language, like Basic English, or we may create an artificial language, like Esperanto. The latter way has, as Dr. Delattre mentions, the advantage of a much greater simplicity and regularity. On the other hand, Basic English or Basic Chinese has the great practical advantage of being immediately understandable to millions of people.

I have no doubt that in a few decades at the latest there will be an international language of simple structure in general use as the second language of all people on earth who can read and write. But nobody knows today whether it will be a basic language or an artificial one. Therefore, both ways must be tried out.

If the choice is in favor of a basic language, English has certainly the best chance, considering both the distribution and the grammatical simplicity. The advantages will outweigh the weak points explained by Dr. Delattre. If English is chosen as raw material, then it seems to me, Ogden's Basic English will remain the model in its fundamental features, which Ogden has chosen with great ingenuity; points of detail are, of course, debatable. The chief points of Dr. Delattre's criticism apply not so much to Ogden's work as to standard English; they concern features which we cannot change unless we choose the second method.

The construction of artificial languages has made considerable progress in the half century since the creation of Esperanto. In recent years, systematic research work in this field has been made by a number of experts, especially under the auspices of the International Auxiliary Language Association, New York. The most recent independent project of an artificial language has been constructed by Lancelot Hogben.¹ The famous biologist and popularizer of science has successfully entered a new field. His system is of especial interest as it is the first attempt to combine the advantages of the earlier artificial languages—regular syntax, univocal meaning, phonetic spelling, easy pronunciation—with those of Basic English: word economy and analytical structure. His language avoids all inflections; the words are un-

changeable as in Chinese; their functions are indicated by their place in the sentence structure.

A good deal of further work must be done in this field. Criticism of existing projects is not enough—constructive proposals for improvement are required.

—*Rudolf Carnap*. University of Chicago.

¹L. Hogben, *Interglossa: A Draft of an Auxiliary for a Democratic World Order, Being an Attempt to Apply Semantic Principles to Language Design*. With Illustrations in Isotype by Otto Neurath. Pelican Books A 130. Published by Penguin Books, New York, 1943. See also Frederick Bodmer, *The Loom of Language*, ed. by L. Hogben. Norton, New York, 1944.