

jective. The Word of God spoken through human agents cannot have, in any stage of its expansion, an author in the human sense of the word. The great mediaeval cathedrals also had no human authors, they were collective works of whole cities, of whole nations. As such, they were acts of faith.

Our common work is also an act of faith, or better, it can be justified only as an act of faith. Like the heroes of the faith in the Old Dispensation, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, we are called to work for a future, which we do not know and cannot know. But there is one thing we know; the day of opportunity, when it comes, must not find us unprepared. That is why we have no time to lose in finishing our New Testament.

Practical Limitations to a Phonemic Alphabet

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There seems always to be a tendency to ride a good horse too hard and too far. That is almost what has happened with regard to phonemic alphabets, which are based on the principle of only one symbol for each sound and for strictly consistent representation of related sounds. As we noted in a previous article, phonemics has brought so much order out of former chaos and has 'made so much sense' where formerly there was such a tendency to disregard phonetic distinctions which were important to the speaker of the language, that as a result it has been easy to overlook some of the other factors which must be considered in constructing an adequate alphabet. Even at their worst, phonemic alphabets are usually very superior to most of the 'home made' variety of alphabets which just 'grow up like Topsy'. However, even with strictly phonemic alphabets there are some areas for improvement.

Reactions to Phonemic Alphabets

Completely phonemic alphabets have been employed in a number of languages throughout the last ten or fifteen years. They usually met with considerable success, but here and there problems arose. Enthusiasts for strictly phonemic alphabets were at first quite puzzled, for obviously a phonemic alphabet has a fundamental advantage in indicating just those sounds which are psychologically significant to the speaker of the language. There is economy of effort in the one-to-one correspondence, and yet some people who were learning to read their own language just did not react enthusiastically to them. What were the difficulties?

The responses of the persons learning to read such phonemic alphabets included such comments as, "Those letters look funny". "Why isn't the word written like Spanish? (or French, or Portuguese, depending upon the dominant language of the area)". "Our language isn't like that". "This word should have an extra letter, even if we don't pronounce it". "Are you sure this will help us learn Spanish?" Such comments as these

do not indicate just what the problems are in each instance, but once they are interpreted in the light of the particular situation, it soon becomes clear that there are some real problems, even in fully phonemic alphabets.

Two Fundamental Principles Involved in Systems of Writing

There are two fundamental principles which it is entirely too easy for phonemicists to overlook in the preparation of alphabets for the practical use of every-day people. Of course, in a strictly scientific treatment of the language written for the use of linguists, the phonemicist may use any alphabet he cares to and his choice of symbols is determined only by the problems of internal consistency and functional value of the phonemes in question. However, an alphabet which is to be used by ordinary people must take into consideration the following two principles: (1) alphabets (systems of writing) are largely cultural matters, and the value of existing systems of writing which may be known to the people in greater or lesser degree must be taken fully into consideration; and (2) reading consists of a complex series of reactions to visual symbols; and though such visual symbols should be related to speech sounds, there are certain exceptions to the rule of one-to-one correspondence and the requirement that writing must follow the precise manner in which people speak.

Significance of Cultural Pressure

It is difficult to measure the cultural pressure of an orthographic system which is employed by a dominant cultural group. In general, of course, the greater the feeling of cultural insecurity the more intense will be the response to the cultural pressure of the dominant language. For this reason Indians in Spanish-speaking Latin America insist in so many instances that the *k*-like sound in their language should be written as *c* before *a*, *o*, and *u*, and *qu* before *i* and *e*. This is based on the system in Spanish; and though it seems quite illogical (and it is), nevertheless, the people insist that the exclusive use of *k* (which does occur in a few Spanish words) is not correct. They prefer to go to the trouble of learning the use of *c* and *qu*, because this makes their language more like Spanish and gives them a sense of cultural prestige.

It is true that such ideas of cultural prestige may originate with a select few—a local school teacher or a young man who has gone off and acquired a very limited knowledge of Spanish—but the reaction of "the local boy made good" is sufficiently strong as to influence the entire community.

In some of the French-speaking areas of Africa there is considerable pressure exerted for the use of *ou* for the phonetic value of *u* or *w*. There is often a strong prejudice against the *u* for the high back vowel, as in English *boot*, for the *u* of French is quite a different vowel (i.e. front rounded, as in *rue*, 'street'). Despite the fact that the combination *ou* seems quite awkward to us as English-speaking persons (and in fact, it does lead to certain difficulties for the reader), nevertheless, many persons greatly prefer the *ou* since it seems more like French. When efficiency and cultural prestige are pitted against one another, the latter

almost always wins out in the end. It is not what is easiest to learn, but what people want to learn and use which ultimately determines orthographies.

It should also be noted that a programme of literacy promoted by a mission has relatively little chance of success if it is contradictory to a long range programme of the government. In general, governments are insistent upon teaching the European language or dominant trade language of the area, and ultimately more persons learn their abc's through the government school system than are likely to acquire them through a literacy programme sponsored by a mission. In Spanish-speaking Latin America it can be estimated that fully 95 % of the Indians who read their own language have learned the alphabet in some government school in which Spanish was taught. In many instances the pupil did not learn enough Spanish to be able to understand what he was reading, but at least he acquired a knowledge of the alphabet; and accordingly, anything which is to be directed to him should conform as much as possible to this orthographic system with which he is acquainted.

Reading as a System of Visual Symbols

Though we sometimes tend to overlook the fact, reading is a system of visual symbolization. In a language such as Chinese there is practically no relationship between visual and corresponding speech symbols. Of course, this is a very inefficient way of representing language. Syllabaries or alphabets are much more effective, but even some of these, e.g. English and French, depart a long way from actual pronunciation. The theoretically perfect goal of a system of writing would consist in representing accurately each speech sound (i.e. each phoneme) with only one symbol, i.e. writing just as people speak, but even in such a system there are some necessary limitations. These involve: (1) divisions of words, (2) writing of unpronounced sounds, (3) the preservation of the graphic unit, and (4) standardization of dialect divergencies.

Word Divisions

The linguist finds that in many languages there are no phonetic borders between so-called words. In Spanish the phonetic phrase, consisting of one to several words, is pronounced as though it were a single word. Technically, the phonemist would find it necessary to write such a 'span' as a single word without spaces to mark off words. However, this type of writing would be very difficult to read. We need spaces between words in order to identify recurring units which have meaning in themselves. Of course, we have to make room for compounds and some phrase-words, but in general we find that reading is easier if spaces are put between so-called words.

Writing Unpronounced Sounds

In general it is not a good practice to write sounds which are not pronounced. This just clutters up an orthography and leaves the reader very confused. However, there are certain restricted instances in which such 'extra' sounds may and should be written. In the Tarascan language of

Mexico, practically all final vowels are dropped in speech. Nevertheless, speakers of the language insist that such vowels are "parts of the words". These vowels can be pronounced and are regarded as an integral part of the word, even though in actual practice they are regularly elided. A similar situation occurs in some of the languages of West Africa, where almost all final vowels are lost when they precede vowels in following words. Here again, it has been found wise to preserve these elided vowels in the written form of the language. The fact that in some cases it is advisable to write such 'lost' vowels is no warrant for adding vowels indiscriminately throughout the language. There are two essential requirements for the writing of such vowels: (1) their automatic loss in easily definable positions (this does not justify the arbitrary writing of a vowel for some grammatical 'reason') and (2) the insistence on the part of the speaker of the language that such vowels should be added. Frankly, we do not know enough about all the psychological factors involved in this type of reaction on the part of an indigenous speaker, but those who have dealt with such problems in the field are fully aware of such decided preferences. Some day we may get around to a more satisfactory study of these speaker reactions.

The Unity of Visual Impression

In many languages sounds in contiguous words affect each other. For example, a word such as *in*, may become *im* before words beginning with *b*, *p*, or *m*; *il* before words beginning with *l*; *ir* before words beginning with *r*; *ing* (*ng* stands for a velar nasal) before words beginning with *k*, *g*, or *ng*, etc. This means that the same unit *in* (as before dental sounds and vowels) also occurs in the forms *im*, *il*, *ir*, *ing*, etc.—in each case the form is determined automatically by the following sound. Such assimilations, as they are called, may be practically obligatory, and yet in some instances speakers of such languages have insisted that such a word be written *in* in each occurrence, rather than as it is actually pronounced. What is behind such a reaction? Evidently, the speaker of the language recognizes a kind of unity about such a word which he finds best reflected in the unity of visual symbolism, namely, the *in* in each instance. These types of modifications occur in all kinds of languages. In Spanish one writes *un poco*, but it is very rare that one pronounces the nasal as *n* before *p*. The *n* is almost always changed to *m* before the following bilabial (*p*) sound. However, the unity of visual symbolism is best preserved by writing *un* with an *n* in each occurrence.

This principle of unity of visual impression is not a warrant for regularizing the grammar of a language, thus smoothing out all kinds of anomalous forms. By no means! This principle only means that when the sounds of contiguous words affect each other in purely automatic ways, there may be some distinct advantage in preserving the basic form of a word rather than writing it in a number of different manners.

Problems Involving Dialect Differences

When different dialects present a multitude of different forms it is necessary to make some choices if there is to be any unity of visual impression and if the same printed materials are to be widely used. On

the whole, it is not advisable to 'make up' an artificial dialect. These attempts are rarely, if ever, successful. It is best to choose that dialect which (1) is the culturally dominant one, (2) is on the whole most regular in grammatical formations, and (3) is most easily understood by the other dialects. At times it is impossible to find all these requirements met in a single dialect, and so some compromises must be made (the techniques for arriving at satisfactory solutions of such difficulties are often very complicated). However, by settling upon one form of the language, one not only tends to create a vehicle of communication which will have wider use than any of the previous local dialects, but the very consistency of writing tends to build up an impression of unity of visual impression. Though writing as each person speaks does have some advantages for the particular dialect in question, nevertheless, after some introduction to the 'literary dialect' readers often gain amazing facility in its use, for reading is fundamentally a system of visual symbolism and is not completely dependent upon corresponding sounds. The big difficulty of course comes in attempting to teach people to read a dialect which is not their own. Accordingly, it is wise to provide primers and some introductory materials in the specific dialect in question. Once the person has learned what reading is, he can then with much greater ease make the adjustment to another dialect.

(To be continued)

A Note on Matthew 6 : 27

Rev. W. M. Scott, chief reviser of the Nepali Bible, writes:—

"In the translation of Matthew there have been some profitable discussions about certain phrases. One of particular interest occurred in connection with chapter 6, verse 27, "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" (part of the Sermon on the Mount). My own opinion for a long time has been that the translation of the Authorised Version is not correct and that we ought to read, "Which of you by being anxious can add a span to his age?". Luke 12 : 25 undoubtedly means that. It is the same word in John 9 : 21 and 23, and in Hebrews 11 : 11. No one surely would think of adding a *cubit* to his stature, although some try to add an inch. Many people, however, *do* give anxious thought to the prolongation of their lives! I find several commentators of the same opinion as myself."

Obedient to the Letter!

A little while ago an African house-boy of the Lunyore tribe asked his master in tones of the gravest concern why he used a white dish for his dog's food. To his master's perplexed rejoinder, "Why not?", the answer was that it was forbidden in Scripture, for did not the good Book say, "Give not that which is *white* unto the dogs"?

Was this a legitimate risk for the translators to take or was there really no other word for "holy"?