

1941

G U T E T O

No 2 - Sept 55FE

Nar rekto, kuraĝe
Kaj ne flankigante
Ni iru la vojon celitan;

Ĝe guto malgranda
Konstante frapanta
Traboras la menton granitan.

THE NEW TESTAMENT IN BASIC ENGLISH

(From The British Esperantist, Vol
XXXIII, No. 437/438)

Some time ago the B.E.A. published a leaflet entitled "Basic English", which anyone interested in this project is advised to obtain. The Basic New Testament exemplifies and fully justifies the criticisms and conclusions made in that leaflet.

Some reviews of the book have been uncritically and extravagantly laudatory. The Friend, forsaking its usual cautiousness, says that with 850 words plus 50 Biblical words and 100 poetical words Basic

"can express the sense of anything that can be said in English. The simplicity, clarity, and dignity of this (translation) is truly remarkable evidence of the effectiveness of this simple system as a medium of expression and communication."

On the other hand, The New Testament writes:

"When not floundering about in this kind of periphrastic imbecility, the B.N.T. tends to be straightforwardly flat, vulgar, or silly. Sometimes, however, for a sentence or two, it follows the A.V. closely enough to be quite hear-

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*See also McWest's "Definition
of Esperanto"

able..... By the poverty of its vocabulary, and still more by the ineptness with which it is used, Basic has turned the New Testament into something which has not even the value attaching to a lucid exposition of fact. One can only wonder what further havoc its sponsors are planning."

In order to arrive at a balanced judgment, one must ask what are the limitations imposed on the Basicist, their aim, their possibilities, and whether they are justified by the result. To expect the same literary efficiency from a few hundred English words as from all the resources of the English language would obviously be unreasonable.

What, then, is the real aim of Basic (for its advocates speak with two voices on this point)? Is it intended to be (a) a stepping-stone to the subsequent learning of real English? Or is it advocated as (b) a solution of the international language problem? These are very different things.

Again, one may ask: Is the object of the present translation to introduce the Bible to foreigners who know little English (Surely the hundreds of translations into national languages would better meet this purpose!), or to provide a

reader to help foreigners to learn English; or to be a simpler, clearer, or better translation for English people (if so, are these things true of the B.N.T.); or merely to try out the possibilities of Basic?

It is true that a text in words that are short and in common use may be clearer and stronger than one using an unlimited vocabulary of terms that are archaic, unfamiliar, or polysyllabic. We are too prone to think that obscurity and complexity are beauties. The music student who submits to the arbitrary and galling restrictions of contrapuntal discipline (which forbid him to do almost everything that is possible) gains through them resources, and a facility in their use, which he could obtain in no other way. And a disciplinary course of vocabulary limitation might teach many writers to express their thoughts more clearly and effectively.

It is true, also, that much can be said in Basic English with a limited number of root-words. So also, with a far smaller number, can the Czech student express himself in that Basic Esperanto. And in the early stages much fun can be got from the circumlocutions necessary to avoid roots not yet

known, though badly needed. But to advocate such baby talk as a substitute for the real language, instead of as a means to learning it, is entirely another matter.

In language study it is a sound principle to learn first those forms and words most often used, and read simple texts containing those forms only, before tackling forms less often needed. An immense amount of work has recently been done in the compilation of Word-Frequency Lists (for example, those in Thorndike's The Teacher's Word Book, and (in Esperanto) the researches of Stancliff (Enciklopedio, pp. 566-9; Scionca Gazeto, 1935-6). Many expert teachers have used such researches to produce readers based on vocabularies limited from various points of view. Especially remarkable are the brilliant readers by Michael West in various grades of vocabulary limitation, and those by H. E. Palmer and A. S. Hornby based on their Thousand-Word English (Har-rap, 3/6) (The preface of this work, by the way, throws much light on the whole problem of word-counts and vocabulary limitation). Without the blessing of an "Orthological Institute" (whatever this may be), these men have devoted all the resources of wide practical

teaching experience, and a tireless patience amounting to genius, in order to find out what English forms are most needed in various stages and circumstances, and to produce corresponding texts in perfect English that are a delight to read. Modern Languages (June) writes of a book written in the thousand-word vocabulary:

"It is a revelation to read this piece of simple prose... As a reader for schools in this country, it is excellent; for foreigners....it is magnificent.

With this verdict we agree. Can the same be said of the Basic New Testament? We think not.

We admit that in several places the Basic text compares happily with the ordinary version. E.g., Desiring to put himself in the right (Luk 10/29). "Whatever gets the better of a man makes a servant of him" (2 Pet 2/19).

But generally speaking, the wholesale elimination of exact terms drives the Basic writer to vague expressions and blurred images; he must constantly employ a word expressing the genus instead of the species; the continued use of periphrasis and definition militates against conciseness, clarity, and force. However,

ingenius the substitution may be, the result is longwinded and clumsy, and often reads like a succession of cross-word clues.

Above all, the continual and unrelieved recurrence of the verbs to which Basic is restricted is exceedingly monotonous. E.g., She will give birth to a son, and you will give him the name Jesus, for he will give his people salvation (Mat 1/21).

From a literary point of view the lack of verbs is damning. One cannot in Basic agree, ask, beat, believe, build, call, cry, die, drink, eat, fall, forget, forgive, grow, hear, help, hide, hold, hope, judge, kill, know, laugh, load, learn, lie, live, love, need, obey, please, praise, pray, punish, read, serve, sing, sit, smell, speak, stand, suffer, swim, teach, touch, thank, think, understand, walk, wish, or write (though these are well among the English words most often needed): every verb must be replaced by a circumlocution with a noun. At first one smiles at the neatness or ingenuity of the evasion; but after many repetitions it ceases to be amusing and is merely irritating, and finally becomes exasperating. Take a few examples at random (there are a score on every

page).

All the disciples were in fear of putting the question (nana durst ask him) (Joh 21/12). They gave him blows (beat him) (Mar 12/3). If we have faith that Jesus underwent death (if we believe that Jesus died) (1 Th 4/14). Get your husband (Joh 4/16); Let the workers come (Mat 20/8); Get in to the feast (Mat 22/3) (Call thy husband, call the labourers, call to the feast). (Etc. --Ed)

The shifts to which the translators are compelled to resort in order to avoid common verbs like to love, to grow, to feed, may be seen in this dialogue extracted from Joh 21/14-17: "Is your love for me greater than the love of these others?" "You have knowledge that you are dear to me." "Give my lambs food." (Lovest thou me more than these? Thou knowest that I love thee. Feed my lambs. "Have you love for me?" "You have knowledge that you are dear to me." "Take care of my sheep." Now Peter was troubled in his heart because he put the question a third time: "Have you love for me? And he said "You have knowledge of all things; you see that you are dear to me." "Give my sheep food." (Note that the Basic variations of the ques-

Fold Here

tion make the words "a third time" inappropriate).

Imagine the embarrassment of a Basic novelist wishing to report a simple conversation between Edwin and Angelina. ("I love you. Do you love me?" "You know I do"). Should he write "You are dear to me. Have you love for me?" "You have knowledge that you are dear to me"? Or would it be neater to say "I have love for you. Am I dear to you?" "You see that I hav' love for you"? Or should he chuck the Basic dictionary away (to use its own definition: put it away from him with a quick motion of the hand)?

These clumsy evasions are necessitated by the rule "No verbs". But the rule is arbitrary and futile. The verb to love is implicit in its active and passive participles loved and loving (which are allowed; I go fishing (Joh 21/3) surely implies the verb to fish.

Examples of inadequacy:

The drops from her eyes (her tears) (Luk 7/38). Tax farmers. Hole of thieves (den of robbers) (Luk 19/46). Help, Lord: destruction is near (Lord, save us, we perish) (Mat 8/25). When the water came up (When a flood arose) (Luk 6/7-8). A young child folded

in linen, in the place where the cattle have their food (A babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger) (Luk 2/12). When you give the sign, the door will be open (Knock, and it shall be opened) (Luk 11/9). Those young women made ready their lights (Those virgins trimmed their lamps) (Mat 25/7). Let your pleasure be done (Mat 6/10). Take it out and put it away from you (Pluck it out and cast it from thee) (Mat 5/29). Sorrow, sorrow for the great town! (Mat 23/48). (Etc. --Ed)

Imagine the wall-text: "I am the good Keeper" (Joh 10/14)!

Examples of verbosity:

(He) was seated by the side of the road, making requests for money from those who went by (sat by the way side begging) (Luk 13/35). Made division of his clothing among them by the decision of chance (parted his garments among them, casting lots) (Mat 27/35). Out of all to whom the good news has come only a small number will get salvation (Many are called, but few chosen) (Mat 22/14). Do not put your jewels before pigs, for fear that they will be crushed under the foot by the pigs whose attack will then be made against you (Mat 7/76). (Etc. --Ed)

On a Basic gravestone "Write: Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord" becomes Put in writing: There is a blessing on the dead who come to their end in the Lord. (Rev 14/13). Is this the dignity praised by the reviewer in The Friend?

Forgive this tedious mass of quotations, but it is just in the cumulative effect of its wearisome repetition of inadequacies that the weakness of the system becomes apparent.

As a literary game, some wonderful tours de force can be produced in Basic by thought and ingenuity. But at best it is not normal English, and the student who afterwards learns English must learn to forget many of the forms he so carefully practised in Basic.

A particularly glaring example of deliberate illiteracy is the substitution of will for shall. I will (shall) be tired out (Luk 18/75). How long will (shall) I have to put up with you? (Luk 9/41). We will (shall) not all come to the sleep of death, but we will (shall) all be changed. (Cor 15/51).

As shown in the leaflet referred to, to talk of Basic as using only 850 words is profoundly misleading. There is a vast reserve vocabulary, very vague, in-

definitely extensible (except that verbs are barred), and varying with every book and subject. We are told that in the present volume 150 words have been added to the 850 (though no list is given to help the student to learn them). Thanks to these additions, a man may--in this volume--make prayer to God and give praise to God, instead of making requests to a Higher Being and saying words of approval of ~~the Father~~ (though even now he may not pray to God or praise him). Further additional words are italicised: Do men get figs from thistles? He took the dragon . . . like frogs.

The Basic Testament abundantly confirms the conclusion that while Basic may be helpful as a stepping-stone to the learning of English in the preliminary stages (though other schemes are far superior to Basic for this purpose), any claim that Basic is a solution of the international language problem is completely illusory. Apart from its many difficulties, the scheme--itself highly artificial--cannot satisfy those who need a literary medium for the adequate expression of thought, and not merely a code or pidgin. With relief one turns to Esperanto--the embodiment of a reasonably restricted vocabulary without sacrifice of literary power.

Legu SATANAN BULTENON, la duma bul-
tano de la nombroj de SENNACIECA
ASOCIO TUTMONDA.

	<u>NO-INATIVE</u>		
Person	<u>unua</u>	<u>dua</u>	<u>tria</u>
Singular	mi	vi	li, si, ti
Plural	ni	vi	ili, oni

ACCUSATIVE

Nur aldonu "n" al la supra montritaĵ

Fojak (4e to U) received a card in Esperanto from an actor in Northern Caucasia, U.S.S.R. Also, more recently, an appeal for a job in Los Angeles (Hollywood) from a teacher of history and economics in Lisbon.

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QUIETO has been delayed
somewhat by the time it has
been in the hands of the
publishers. The new clubroom
is a wonderful stimulation
to social activity. Whenever a
member finds himself without any-
thing particular to do he wanders
around to the clubroom. If no one
else there he visits Pogo across the
hall or Perofjo across the street
if anyone else shows up. Then
if he still stays in the clubroom or a
nearby neighborhood he takes in one
of the many forms of entertainment
which are available in the Los Ange-
les area. The Esperantists will
carry articles describing a few of
these attractions.

All of the
activity may not be attributed to
the clubroom in Los Angeles. It
is notoriously energetic regarding
the same but, on Sunday, 26 Oct. 1944
there were three parties in Los
Angeles composed entirely of stu-
dents, two of which were due direct-
ly to our new home. And about
these happy occasions counts in
Sunday, 27 Oct. 1944, LA's new club
pub.

Now, to get back to QUIETO
with you and I there will be this
week and the next time in
the 24th calling of Pogo. These

two issues deal with the relative merits of BASIC English and Esperanto. In our estimation, of course, Esperanto has all the merits of BASIC and is, in addition, supranational, flexible and minus nationality. No one could hold a grudge against Esperanto because of hatred generated by economic pressure and national contention for world markets.

English is stilted, German is guttural, French is nasal, Italian is squeaky, Russian is misty, etc., but Esperanto is a clear language. A good Esperantist listening to other good Esperantists speaking together in a dark room would have a great deal of difficulty to determine the national origin of any of the speakers.

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In WINNERS WEEKLY, edited by ALLEN GLASSER, Box 77, Morris Heights, New York, N.Y., appears an announcement of a contest being sponsored by ESPERANTO ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA. In which one may win from \$1 to \$10 without any more knowledge of Esperanto than may be obtained from a dictionary of basic Esperanto. Why not ask Allen for a copy of Vol. 1, No. 9, to learn, for a 3c stamp, how you may win one of the 24 prizes!

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