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I S E A

(The Institute for the Study of English in Africa)

by

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THE need for efficient centres for the study and teaching of English has been felt ever since Defoe and Swift presented their proposals for an Academy for the 'refining and ascertainment' of our tongue. But it is a far cry to the days of refining and ascertainment, and Defoe's vision of the reform of our language in the hands of a 'Society wholly compos'd of Gentlemen; whereof Twelve to be of the Nobility, if possible, and Twelve Private Gentlemen, and a Class of Twelve to be left open for meer Merit, let it be found in who or what sort it would.'

The world crisis of communication — the great debate of rich and poor, Western and non-Western peoples — did not press uncomfortably upon Defoe and Swift as it does upon us, nor, perhaps were they more than fitfully aware of the future of English as a world language. In the great dialogue upon which our future and perhaps our survival may depend, one hopes that the teacher of English has an honourable role to play, particularly in a Republic such as our own, whose complex structure of populations and traditions makes it almost a microcosm of the world beyond its frontiers.

If, however, the teacher of English is to sustain his honourable role, he must become aware of the revolution over the past century in studies of language and of language learning that has established a model of language and of its role in society very different from that of Swift and Defoe. This renaissance of language studies is at present affecting teaching practice in a rather slight and occasional way. The formal grammar taught in most of our schools probably still owes more to Swift's near-contemporary Biship Lowth than to the more recent labours of such men as Sweet, Jespersen and Fries.

In place of the 'Society of Gentlemen' for which Defoe once hoped in vain, are now almost innumerable agencies, official and unofficial, for the study and teaching of English. Perhaps the most powerful groupings are those represented by the Press and the mass media on one hand, and by school systems and Departments of Education on the other. Amidst these fell and mighty opposites there is a clear need for centres of study controlled by neither but responsible, in a way, to both: such units as the English Language Institute of the University of Michigan, the British Council's English-Teaching Information Centre, the Communication Research Centre of London University, and the Boston office of the Commission on English.

In South Africa, a powerful tradition of concern for English and of fundamental research into language and language teaching has been established by such bodies as the English Academy on the one hand and on the other by the Department of Phonetics and General Linguistics of the University of the Witwatersrand. The Language Teaching Study Group represents another important Project (in Defoe's sense) in this field, and the Institute for the Study of English in Africa, I hope, yet another.

The Institute was officially established during the Jubilee Celebrations of Rhodes University in June 1964. Its primary aims were then outlined as follows by Professor Guy Butler: 'In the broad field of the study of English in Africa, the Institute will sponsor research, collect information, provide liaison with South African and overseas scholarship, and organise conferences and courses of training for teachers and others interested in language.' Its rather cumbersome title (conveniently encapsulated in the initials ISEA) is not intended as an advertisement of status or authority: it is simply a reminder of the continental setting of the problems confronting us and of horizons shared with a larger world.

The origins of the Institute can be traced back in three different ways. In the first place they go back to a tradition of Teachers' Conferences and Refresher Courses organised by some of the Language Departments of Rhodes University, dating back to 1956 or earlier. In another way, the Institute owes its existence to the generosity of newspaper and publishing houses which, together

with the Oppenheimer Foundation, have sponsored our first operations. From a third point of view the Institute is primarily the child of the energy and inspiration of Professor Butler.

Institute undertakings to date include two teachers' refresher courses and four research projects. The refresher courses, generously supported by the Cape Education Department and each lasting a week, dealt with *English in the Senior School* (September 1964) and *The Teaching of English as a Second Language* (September 1965). Each was attended by over 100 delegates; in the case of the first conference from all parts of the Republic and in that of the second mainly from the Cape Province.

The second refresher course was opened by Dr. G. J. J. Smit, Superintendent-General of Education for the Province of the Cape of Good Hope. The panel of speakers included representatives of Departments of English and Education in six different universities and four training colleges as well as four Principals and Vice-Principals of High Schools: a reflection of the range of friendship and support which we have had the good fortune to attract. Six of the papers presented at our refresher courses have been circulated as the first and second numbers of *ISEA Proceedings*. Supplies of *Proceedings No.* 1 are already exhausted, but copies of *Proceedings No.* 2 and of three short Institute Reports are available on request from our office.

The research projects will, of course, take time. During 1965 our first research officer, Mr. J. S. Claughton, began an investigation of some of the difficulties of African teacher-trainees in understanding spoken English. Mr. Claughton has taken his material with him to University College, London but will return in July, 1966 to a lectureship in English Language at Rhodes University and to further study in his chosen field. Mr. K. M. Durham, of Queen's College, Queenstown, has made considerable progress in a study of the teaching of poetry to English-speaking pupils in senior schools. An interim report on his study (Institute Report No. 2) summarises responses to a questionnaire by over 150 teachers of English. Mr. Durham also reported on his findings in an address to the South African Teachers' Association last year which has been summarised in a series of articles in *Education*, the journal of the SATA. He hopes to complete his thesis this year and has already begun work on an anthology of verse for schools, commissioned by an overseas publishing house. Dr. André de Villiers, Senior Lecturer in English at Rhodes University, is working on a report for the English Academy of Southern Africa entitled *Methods and Materials in Undergraduate Courses aimed at Communicative Skills*. This report is based on serveral years' experience in the teaching of Special English courses, primarily for students in the Faculties of Commerce and Law. Professor Butler and I are preparing a report on the *English Language and the English-Speaking Matriculant* for the 1966 Conference of the English Academy.

With these beginnings and other plans ahead of it, it seems fair to say that the Institute is doing some reasonably useful work. We shall be strengthened by new developments at Rhodes University: the institution of courses in Bantu languages and in Speech and Drama, the expansion of the Faculty of Education and of the Language section of the Department of English, and the installation this year of a computer. The Institute has been able to finance considerable additions to the Language collections of the University Library, particularly in the form of long runs of linguistic journals. We hope that all this represents the nucleus of a really effective centre of English and modern language studies.

At the same time there are at present serious limitations upon our work. With one exception all our projects to date have been handled by part-time workers holding teaching positions in the University. The exception represents nine months' full-time study by Mr. Durham. Funds for full-time workers are available but the supply is limited by several factors. There is a shortage all over the world of trained linguists and the Institute is new and relatively little known. Moreover, the general orientation of University departments of English has for many years been towards literature rather than towards the linguistic and educational studies which are the Institute's primary concern and the development of the Institute will depend to some extent upon that of the newly established Language Section of the Department of English, which also came into being in 1964.

We hope that the Institute will also attract established teachers of English for periods of full-time study, to pool their knowledge and experience with that of the university department of English and its research staff. Mr. Durham's appointment will, I hope be the first of a long series. Established teachers, however, find it difficult to take leave for extended periods of full-time study and are often impeded by family commitments even when leave can be granted by the Department of Education concerned. One of our highest priorities is to study the best means of involving classroom teachers in the work of the Institute.

Our future will, of course, depend very largely upon available resources and staff and upon the particular calls which we may be required to meet. It may, however, be appropriate to end this paper with some wishes in rather general terms.

I hope, in the first place, that even if the Institute remains small it will also remain many-sided — concerning itself both with language and literature, both with research and with teacher-training. Just as the committed student of English should aim at

an understanding both of transformational grammar *and* of the Old English *Seafarer*, so we, I feel, must consider English both as a signalling system and as a transmitter of humane values. Mr. Claughton's current project represents the one area of concern, and Mr. Durham's the other.

I hope further that we shall avoid commitment to any particular linguistic orthodoxy. A safeguard against this is the decision by the Board of the Institute that 'The Insitute shall not express opinions on the study or teaching of English'. Opinions in Institute publications are those of the authors, and I hope that these opions will constitute a spectrum rather than a monolith.

Amongst English-speaking people I hope that we shall participate in an awakening on the part of teachers and pupils to the possibilities and satisfactions of language study. I hope that we shall contribute to the restoration of speech to its rightful place in the study of English and I hope that it may be possible to avoid the division in the curriculum between 'Speech' and 'English' which, to me at any rate, might spell the paralysis of both.

Outside the English-speaking community, I hope that the Institute may continue to be of service to teachers and pupils: spreading, for instance, in the Eastern Province some of the techniques for the teaching of English established in the fundamental research of Professor Lanham, Mr. Hartshorne and others associated with the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics of the University of the Witwatersrand, and perhaps developing some methods and approaches of our own. Without aspiring to the status of 'a Society wholly composed of Gentlemen', the Institute hopes that some, at any rate, of its work will deserve currency 'for mere Merit'.

ISEA PUBLICATIONS

Proceedings No. 1: (Supplies exhausted)
L. W. Lanham: The Social Context of English in South Africa.
Patricia McMagh: The Training of Teachers of English.
G. M. Walker: Teach a Poem.

Proceedings No. 2:
L. W. Lanham: Guide-Lines in the Preparation and Use of Audio-Lingual Materials in Second Language Teaching in High Schools.
Leslie Proctor: Audio-Visual Aids in Language Teaching.
A. G. Woodward: An Approach to the Novel.

Report No. 1:
Analysis of Questionnaire: Teachers' Conference; English in the Senior School, September 1966.

Report No. 2:
Attitudes towards Poetry of Teachers in the Senior School, 1965: Analysis of Questionnaire.

Report No. 3:
Analysis of Questionnaire: Teachers' Conference: The Teaching of English as a Second Language, September 1965.

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