

'Basic English' Booms as Post-War World Language

850 Words to Serve All Needs

By MARGUERITE YOUNG
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CAMBRIDGE, Mass., Sept. 14—Basic English, the simplified language of only 850 words which experts regard as the coming common tongue of the whole world, already is on the march.

Approved by Britain's Prime Minister and President Roosevelt—and expedited by various educators, including the enthusiastic Walt Disney—Basic English is preparing to follow advancing Anglo-Allied armies and to move into other friendly lands.

Dr. Ivor Armstrong Richards, co-father of the pocket language, has written a movie visualization of it which Disney is animating. A preliminary reel has just been shown, in New York, to a group of teachers from South America. Dr. Richards expects the movie to be used by Americans in teaching Basic English to people in all occupied countries as they are freed from Nazi rule.

The professor is hurrying back to his once-quiet headquarters at Harvard University. He was in the Canadian Rockies when Winston Churchill, in his address here Sept. 6, spoke strongly for the spread of Basic.

'MOST POTENT FACTOR'

Girdling of the globe by the English language would make a bigger chump than ever of Rudolf Hess, Hitler's one-time deputy fuehrer, who once prophesied that English soon would be "no more than an unimportant Germanic dialect." Germany's Bismarck had decidedly different ideas. As Churchill pointed out in his recent address, the Iron Chancellor noted that the most potent factor in human society at the end of the 19th Century was the fact that the British and American people spoke the same language.

Chinese flyers in training at Luke Field, Ariz., are learning the blunt-spoken English from a textbook for teachers, prepared by Richards and his half-dozen associates this year. Cornell University teachers who are training selected soldiers for the Army of Occupation in Italy are using the same book. So are civilians hurriedly preparing at Harvard for overseas administration in occupied territories. In Camp Devins, Mass., doughboys having little schooling behind them are studying Richard's primer called "Words on Paper." With that primer, an unlettered person who speaks English or any other language, can learn Basic within a month.

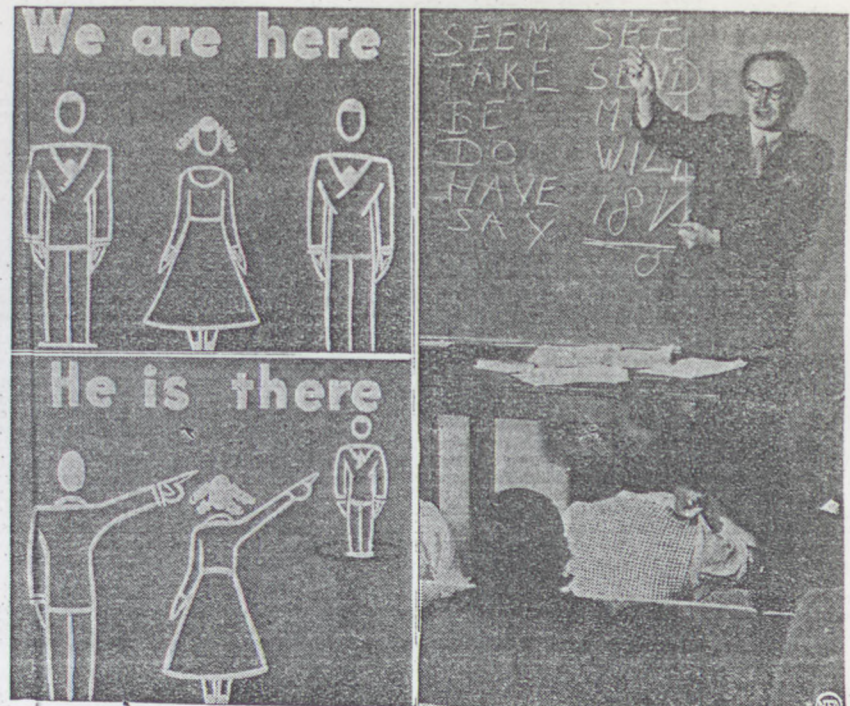
Army officials say they are not yet instructing regular soldiers and officers in Basic; they are too busy teaching a minimum of the foreign languages. However, Christina M. Gibson, chief researcher for Richards, says State Department would be interested in any program to teach the simplest tongue in foreign countries.

She was not surprised when Churchill reported that President Roosevelt is sold on Basic. Miss Gibson previously had translated one of the President's firesides chats into Basic, sent it to the White House, and received "a most generous response."

USED IN ORIENT

Other conspicuous enthusiasts are the Chiang Kai-Sheks of China, and Madame Ivy Litvinoif of Russia. The Russian diplomat's wife tried the easy-English personally, then taught it to Russian soldiers. China's Ministry of Education once adopted essential principles of Basic for all its English teaching; a training school still teaches Basic in Yunnan Province.

Two facts on which Richards bases his belief in the ability of Basic to enable all people to talk the same language are:



Dr. I. A. Richards is shown, right, as he lectured a class of Latin-Americans on Basic English. At left are two flashes from the preliminary sketch-draft of a Basic English movie being prepared by the Disney Studio.

would say much, forming a limited but powerful language. That was 20 years ago. For the last 10 years Richards, supported by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Payne Fund, has worked intensively, developing Basic. Now many classics, from The New Testament to "Arms and the Man" and "Black Beauty" have been translated. Richards admits Basic's limitations, however. It grows tiresome, he says, and is not intended to be a primary language for anyone.

That, Richards says, partly disposes of critics' objection to the "cultural imperialism," they fear might result from a worldwide extension of Basic English. He holds moreover, that the democratic behavior of those who carry Basic to the four corners of the planet must justify it.

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Regular English already is, today, either the mother tongue or the government language of over 600,000,000 of the 2,000,000,000 people on earth. And English is the easiest language to learn. Basic is startlingly easier than full English.

The Basic System's 850 words do the work of 20,000 ordinarily used by college-schooled people. Instead of 4000 verbs normally employed by the educated, there are only 18 in Basic.

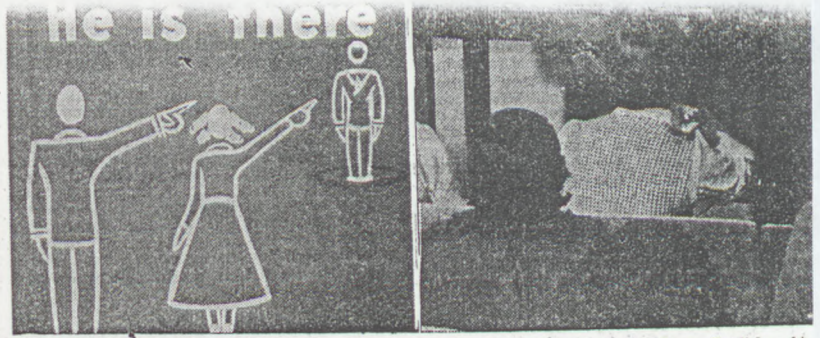
The key to the simplicity and range and power of Basic is its 650 nouns and 62 pronouns and prepositions, and the reasoning way in which they are put together. Richards says the unobtrusive little words such as "out" and "in" always were hard workers, and had been growing in power among the common people for a long time before Basic made more of them.

FEW WORDS SAY MUCH

It was while Richards and C. K. Ogden of Cambridge University, England, were working on a philosophical book called "The Meaning of Meaning" that they discovered the possibility of picking out a few words which

would say much, forming a limited but powerful language. That was 20 years ago. For the last 10 years Richards, supported by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Payne Fund, has worked intensively, developing Basic. Now many classics, from 'The New Testament to "Arms and the Man" and "Black Beauty" have been translated. Richards admits Basic's limitations, however. It grows tiresome, he says, and is not intended to be a primary language for anyone.

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