

Editorial

WHY LINGUISTIC INSTITUTES?

There is an urgent national need for trained linguistic scientists. Right now the shortage of competent linguists is so great that government agencies and foundations are desperate for people who can direct English-teaching programs in foreign countries, carry on investigations in hitherto un-analyzed languages, train foreign linguists, and prepare teaching materials.

At home the situation is equally critical. Linguistic scientists have been persuasive in their insistence that their discipline can be of great service to the teaching of English, the teaching of foreign languages, the teaching of English as a foreign language, and in fact in teaching reading and literature itself. The actual application of linguistic techniques in most of these areas is lagging simply because people cannot be trained rapidly enough to meet the call upon their services.

These developments of the past four or five years have given a new importance to the summer Linguistic Institutes. Originally begun in 1928, four years after the founding of the Linguistic Society of America, which co-sponsors them, they first served the purpose of assembling a larger staff and a more comprehensive series of offerings in linguistic subjects than any single institution could conceivably afford during its regular academic sessions. With the development of departments of and programs in linguistics at a number of major universities in this country, this is no longer quite so important a consideration as it used to be.

Recent linguistic institutes, however, have developed a number of noteworthy features which in themselves indicate some of the directions which the science is taking and constitute somewhat different foci of interest for the newcomer to linguistics. In the first place, most institutes of the past few years have stressed the interdisciplinary contacts of linguistics, either through a seminar which brings together

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linguists and a group representing some other discipline — anthropology, sociology, psychology, literary criticism, etc. In addition, since 1936 the application of linguistics to specific fields of teaching (foreign languages, English, etc.) has been a feature of many linguistic institutes. Finally, the application of descriptive and structural techniques to historical linguistics has received considerable emphasis. All of these features will be included in the 1956 Linguistic Institute, which is to be held at the University of Michigan.

These developments are significant in terms of the potential clientele of the institute, which in turn will have a direct bearing on the manpower shortage in Linguistics. As the institutes are now constituted, they afford a convenient opportunity for those not originally trained in linguistics to acquire the background and tools to apply linguistics to the fields of specialization in which they were trained. For those whose previous experience has been chiefly in linguistics, and particularly in its theoretical phases, they indicate useful areas of practical application. And as the general scope of the institute curricula widens, this serves to bring together people with a greater diversity of background, making for a livelier and more productive exchange of approaches, techniques, and experiences.

The growing demand for language skills on the part of large sectors of our people, owing to what is often called the communications revolution, combined with the increased strain on our educational facilities because of a larger population, create pressing problems which linguistics, if intelligently developed and applied, can do much to solve. At most we have a period of perhaps two or three decades to bring linguistic techniques to bear upon these problems. The Linguistic Institutes constitute an important resource in meeting the current need.

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