

A Case for Early Bilingualism

by Bernard FONLON, M. A., Ph. D., Dip. Ed.

Moreover, it must be remembered that an early start with languages may save the adult person years of laborious work later on, at a period when his energy and time could be put to better use.

Professor Paul Christophersen (1).

A poet once boasted :

*...we are the movers and shakers
Of the world forever...
With wonderful deathless ditties
We build up the world's great cities,
And out of a fabulous story
We fashion an empire's glory :*

*One man with a dream, at pleasure
Shall go forth and conquer a crown ;
And three with a new song's measure
Can trample a kingdom down 2.*

This is far from idle bragging. We need but a cursory glance at the story of the world to see unmistakably the tremendous power that language possesses to overthrow and destroy, to pull down and demolish ; to plant and to build. Any movement that ever shook the world to its foundations, that ever sent kingly crowns rolling in the mire, had its writers and its orators. Witnesses, Voltaire, Rousseau, the *Encyclopédistes* ; Mirabeau, Danton, Robespierre and the author of the *Marseillaise*, with reference to the French Revolution ; witnesses, Marx and Lenin, with reference to the Russian.

Writers, by spreading certain ideas abroad, create a ferment in the minds of men and, one day, a domagogue from a soap-box whips the smouldering passions blazing.

(1) Inaugural lecture delivered on Foundation Day, November 17th, 1948 at University College, Ibadan.

(2) Arthur O'Shaughnessy : *The Music Makers*.

On the constructive side, there is the immeasurable influence that the great scriptures of the world — the Bible, the Koran, the Vedas — have wielded, generation after generation, and will continue to wield, till God knows when, on the lives and the destinies of peoples without number.

The power of the word, the power of literature, to incarnate a people's spirit, to inspire genuine, generous heroism, was recognized even from very early ages. The consciousness of this has given the world immortal epics like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, *Beowulf*, *das Nibelungenlied*, *les Chansons de Geste*, the *Arthurian Legend*.

We have seen, even in recent history, how one man's mouth can galvanize a worsted people back to victory ; how one man's mouth can sweep a gifted, powerful nation off its feet, into madness and disaster. Witness, Churchill ; witness, Hitler. For man are wont, in moments of crisis, to turn to a talented tongue for inspiration and direction. And so it is that, wherever people gather for a purpose, the man with the gift of the word wields tremendous influence ; and it is to him, more often than not, that leadership goes. If the store of a person's language contains no more than the hackneyed phrases of the street and the office, he can hardly ever hope to make an impression on others.

There can scarcely be any doubt about it, therefore, that a good education in language is one of the most effective ways of launching a young man into life.

So much for the power of speech on others. What about the influence of language on the speaker himself ?

Language and Personality

A command of language or the lack of it can have very far-reaching psychological consequences. For there is hardly a greater social handicap than incorrect speech. Those who have never sojourned abroad may not fully realize what this means. But those who have spent long student years in England, let us say, where being black already makes you the victim of so many irritations, know what a torture social life can be to a person who is plagued by the constant fear of being betrayed by faulty pronunciation or grammar. That can cripple a personality and ruin a career that would otherwise have been brilliant. In fact, one of the reasons given for the failure of students abroad is insufficient language education in preparation for higher studies.

On the contrary, those who have had the experience can bear witness what a tremendous asset a command of speech can be, how much self-confidence it inspires, how many disabilities fade away before the chap that is armed with it.

As certainly as a poor possession of speech cripples a young-man's psychological growth, just so certainly does a brilliant grasp of it help to build up a solid and outstanding personality.

All what I have said so far hardly needs the saying, for it is all so obvious. But language exerts on us other influences, perhaps far more important, which, however, are not immediately perceptible. A look at the processes of thought, will illustrate what I mean.

The Working of the Mind

When the eyes of a child open onto the world, for the first time in life, he begins by seeing the couple of people about him, and at each act of sight, an image is registered on his retina. This image is next stored up in the imagination, to be called up and recognized by the memory, when the same face presents itself again.

Mental pictures, images, or phantasms, as they are variously called, play a very active part in our mental life. For, whenever we hear any familiar object named, especially a concrete one, the tendency of the imagination is to throw up an image of it in our minds as though upon a screen. In fact, one of the qualities of good poetry, for instance, is the power to evoke, in our imagination, pictures that please us. The emotions that surge up within us, when we read a good piece of literature, are enriched further still, if that piece of literature, by means of associations, can cause to well up in our minds memories and images of pleasant times and places from our past, especially from our infant days.

But an image is only an image of something material, something concrete and individual. And human knowledge, as we know it, could not exist, if the mind of man were unable to do more than that. For science exists, because the multitudinous essences that the world contains are divided into classes each with characteristics that are common to every member of that class.

Science is of the universal not of the particular.

Thus, the child, from contact with the couple of people whom he knows and recognizes, is soon able to separate, from the images of these familiar individuals, that which is common to them all. And so, by the time he begins to babble, seeing a man at

a distance, he will chirp, as if announcing a great discovery, 'That's a man', without knowing what particular man it is.

His mind has reached the stage where, from the concrete, individual object, it is able to abstract a universal **concept**. It is with concepts for material that the human mind works. And the power to form single concepts, in this way, is the first mental process — **Simple Apprehension**.

When our little youngster, whose eyes are beginning to see more clearly, looks at **his father**, let us say, at a given moment, he sees that he is **big**, that he is **black**. If this dad of his is with a number of persons, he will notice that some are **as tall as he**, others **taller still**; that they are **wearing clothes**, all of them, but that while some are barefoot, others are shod. They take their places **at the table**, and the youngster perceives that, whereas a **while ago** they were **standing**, now they are **sitting**. Food is set before them, he sees them **eating**; the food disappears gradually into their mouths and soon it is completely **eaten**.

Thus it is that, when the budding mind opens onto the universe, it is first struck by the concrete object. In that act, it perceives this concrete object as extended in space; as possessing certain characteristics; as related to other things about it; as occupying a certain place, at a certain time; as being in a certain posture; as further distinguished, if a man, by his attire; as performing certain actions; as suffering others.

In other words, **being** is perceived by the mind as having various modes of existence. First, there is the concrete thing, the **substance**, which is endowed with independent existence, which can exist by itself. This substance has further determinations, further characteristics, **accidents**, as they are called, which cannot exist by themselves, independently of the concrete object.

Of these characteristics, two are inherent in the substance itself — **quantity** and **quality**; for the first property of matter is to be quantified, to have parts beyond parts, to have extension in space. It is next determined by other properties like colour, weight and hardness, for instance.

Furthermore, as it is but one among the myriad things that fill the universe, it possesses other determinations which are external to it, which it has with reference to other things.

Thus you have the various **relations** between one thing and another — equality, difference, the bigger and the smaller, the good and the better, cause and effect.

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Thus you have the various determinations of **place** indicated in speech by such words as in, out, at, by, above, below, on, under.

Then there is the fact that cosmic movement gives to the existence of each thing a before and an after, a beginning and an end, duration in **time**.

Then there is the fact that, among things in the universe there is mutual interaction, some doing, some suffering, in other words, **action** and **passion**.

The importance of all this in speech is that it is these categories — substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, action, passion — that supply the basis for the division of language into the various parts of speech.

Substance gives us the substantive or the noun, and the pronoun; quantity, quality and relation, give us the adjective; place gives us the preposition; time and place and quality of action, give us the adverb; action and passion supply us with the verb, active and passive.

The perceiving mind, in seeing each concrete object, is able to separate its properties or characteristics from the substance itself, is able to see these determinations, not as things existing by themselves, but as **belonging** to the concrete object, as identified, to some extent, with it. It is the ability of the mind to do this that gives us the most important verb of them all — **the verb to be**. The child looks at a man, sees his colour, sees it as belonging to the man and blithely announces: he is black.

The **Copula**, as the verb to be is sometimes known, enables the mind to advance from the simple apprehension of concepts to the next important mental process, the process of linking concepts up or putting them apart by affirming or denying: the Judgment.

Equipped with the ability to do these things, the growing mind, becoming more mature and more inquisitive, plunges into the exploration of the universe, acquires more concepts, deepens the knowledge of those in possession, and establishes richer and profounder judgements. And, as man pushes his investigations deeper into every field, and checks his findings by experiment, scientific principles are established. And these the mind uses, in turn, as a springboard for launching into further exploration to attain more truths, to acquire greater knowledge. This is the last of the mental processes: reasoning, inductive and deductive.

The gathering of concepts or ideas, from the world about us, from the accumulated knowledge of the ages, the effort to explore them, to see more thoroughly what they contain, to see in what relation they stand one to the other, in order to pass valid judgement on them, to make correct statements about them, the effort to see what follows from putting one statement with another to discover further truths — these are the activities which develop and enrich the mind.

Without them, there is no possibility whatsoever, of mental development.

And so it follows that, the more thoroughly, the more methodically the mind is exercised in each of these processes, the sounder will be this development, the richer will be its resultant store of learning.

But where does language come in in all this?

It is precisely towards that that I am driving.

Language and Mental Development

Since each substance, each concrete thing, is composed of parts, each concept, each idea formed by the mind, is, by the very nature of things, a sum of several notes or properties. In fact, when we see how much time and labour scientists spend in the study of the nature of each tiniest thing, we see that it is practically impossible to cram into one concept all the characteristics that the thing holds in itself. The most we can do is to put into the concept the main properties sufficient to tell us what the thing is and to help us to distinguish it from everything else.

Since the concept therefore is composite, a sum of several notes, it is difficult for the mind to express it, as such, as a unit.

And here it is that language comes to the rescue.

For, thanks to this that we not only think but can hear and speak, we are happily able to baptize the ensemble of the notes composing one concept with a name: a being with a body, a being that lives, that thinks, that laughs = a man. For every concept in the mind, therefore, there is a corresponding oral sign, a name, a word. And each word is a union of two important elements, a semantic and an acoustic — a union of sense and sound.

And as concepts are the basic material of our mental acts, so words become the basic material of the oral counterparts of those mental acts.

What is more — and this is the principal point at which I am driving — since it is so difficult to cram into one concept all the notes of the thing, it very soon happens that words usurp the place of ideas in our minds; for they are simpler and easier to hold. And so we find ourselves thinking, not in ideas, but in words; in fact, when we reflect as we think, we actually hear ourselves thinking in a definite language. There, we have come to the point where words have replaced ideas completely. In fact, with certain persons words so completely usurp the place of concepts as to blot out all but the whole of content and meaning, so much so that, even when these persons talk and mean, so much of what they say would be, as Shakespeare said somewhere, so much sound and fury signifying nothing. But that is the extreme; the abuse, not the use.

The important point to make, however, is that language substitutes itself for ideas in our minds to such an extent that it becomes the very warp and woof of our mental life, the material of our thinking and reasoning. And, as I have already stressed, it is by thinking and reasoning that the mind grows.

Language, therefore, is important not only because of its power over men's minds and feelings and reactions, not just because its command gives leadership to certain individuals in a community, not only because a firm grasp of it helps in the building up of a solid personality, but, above all, because it is the indispensable instrument for the furtherance of mental growth, of intellectual development, in each and every one of us.

A language with terms clearly and distinctly defined extending over every field of human learning and experience is one of the highest achievements that a people can claim to its credit, one of their dearest possessions. For the more perfect the language, the more effective will it be, as an instrument, in this all important task — the intellectual development of those who wield it, on whom it is wielded.

Language and National Character

From the consideration that language becomes inextricably blended with the very substance of our minds, another fact emerges.

It is the intimate union that must consequently exist between people who own the same language, since it creates a likeness, a oneness, in them, in that which is the highest thing in man, namely, the mind.

Thus, governments which strive, as in Israel, to give their people a common language, even if they are motivated by an emotional or rabid nationalism, are doing something that is solidly backed up by reason and psychology.

The union is consolidated further still by the fact that this language stores up not merely the cold and neutral meanings of words; it also enshrines the common experiences that the people in question have garnered from the impact of their surroundings, the memory of their fathers, their common experiences in time as a polity, their triumphs, their woes, their loves, their hates. These, therefore, reinforce that oneness of mind, that oneness of thought already forged in the people by their common language. And, surely, a common mind will tend to rouse in the said people certain common emotions, which emotions, in turn, will surely excite certain common reactions.

Thought, feeling, will and action are the basic elements of conduct and, therefore, of character — the basic elements of personality. For, after all, what else is a person but an entity that thinks and feels and wills and acts? And what else is personality but that height of human distinction attained when thought and feeling and will have become so developed, so refined, so ennobled, so endowed with power and beauty as to give rise, with constancy, to action of a marked kind, action that stands out, that impresses, that commands respect, that inspires even awe?

A communion of thought, a communion of feeling, a communion of will, a communion of behaviour — those who say that there is such a thing as a national character are not just talking airy nonsense. And thus, incidentally, the contention that there is such a thing as an African Personality is not to be lightly brushed aside. There is a least common psychological denominator that all Africans share.

However, the point I am making is that language is a very powerful instrument in forging national unity, in creating a comradeship among all those who use it.

Language and Learning

But to go back to the point of the importance of language for intellectual development: I was saying that the mind is capable of summing up these concepts in names. These names, or words, or oral signs, become still more concrete and definite

by being committed to writing; and becoming thus the object, at once, of ear and eye, they become more surely the object of the mind.

In other words, the external world of things has an internal counterpart, the world of thought; this latter creates a third counterpart, external like the first, the world of verbal expression. There are three terms, then, in this equation: the Universe, Knowledge and Language. Whatever has real existence, therefore, is capable of becoming knowledge, capable of becoming language.

Therefore, there is no domain of human learning, whatsoever, that does not come under the imperial rule of language. In fact, what does studying mean, in practice, for the most part; in what does it consist for every one of us? Normally, we do not go out ourselves to explore the universe and garner our own concepts and do our own reasoning and come to our own conclusions.

Learning consists, to a large extent, in studying the accumulated knowledge stored up for us through the ages, in books, in language, that is. And it is only after years of doing this that we can venture to undertake independent research in order to contribute, if we can, something of our own, something original, to the store of human learning.

Therefore, the study of any branch of knowledge whatsoever that we take up is also and necessarily a study of language.

Today, when all the insistence is on science and technology, so much harping on the overwhelming importance of language will strike some as a startling irrelevance. But the fact still remains that, if we begin by giving our children a firm grounding in speech, we will thereby immensely facilitate their grounding in science, in technology, in economics. For the ensemble of human knowledge is like a tree with first the trunk and then the branches: we must first clamber up the trunk to reach the branch of our desire.

There is, therefore, an essential foundation to be laid in language as an indispensable preparation for any further studies.

This is a most natural process; for, notice this that, next to being able to put his hand into his mouth, to crawl, to stand up, to walk, to run, the skill a child masters is to speak; and this even when no one makes any special effort to teach him. In fact, he masters it so fast and so well that, before long, he is the noisiest talker around the place.

A careful, diligent, study of language, at the start and all along the student's career, is not a luxury but a prime necessity in Education.

And the earlier this training is started the better.

My principal contention, therefore, is that, in so far as intellectual formation is concerned, language education should be the central preoccupation, the fundamental principle of the primary school. Every subject that is taught there, let it be what you will, but let it be language first, and anything else after.

When I was in school, I was wont to hear some teachers remark, with regard to the examination answers of the pupils: "It does not matter how he puts it, the essential thing is that he should have the idea". I say no to this: it **does** matter how he puts it; and all pains should be taken to see to it, not only that he should know it well, but also that he should say it well, should write it well.

If nature has made things easy for us, by making language so effortless for children to master, surely, would it not be a grave fault on our part to be slovenly and haphazard in assisting nature? Would it not be unpardonable negligence to put off serious, methodical help until the best time is over?

In this matter, more than in myriad others, Shakespear's saying rings with resounding truth, namely, that, in the affairs of men, there is, often-times, a tide, which must be taken, at the flood.

The Importance of English and French

The primordial rôle of language in the life of the individual and in the life of the community, therefore, can hardly be called to question. We have seen what a power it is in binding a people together in mind and heart and will, in giving to a nation its distinctive personality, in bringing closer together the far-flung peoples that share it.

The language problem, for countries in Europe, has ceased to be an acute headache, because, for most of them, its difficulties have long been solved and, even where some still exist, the means to solve them are ready at hand. Here in Africa, the linguistic question assumes staggering proportions and, even where a solution is thought out, the means to apply it are, more often than not, dishearteningly inadequate.

To us in Africa, the language problem is still a front line issue,

because, not only must it be solved to facilitate contact of African with African, often even in cases where the two are next door neighbours, but also because it is a problem inextricably welded to that of our urgent political, economic, technical, social and cultural development. And, so far, there is not a single African language, with the possible exception of Arabic, developed enough to offer itself as an effective, all-round instrument of modern technical progress. And since development cannot wait until each African nation, or Africa as a whole, has forged a language fit to be the vehicle of present-day development, we have no choice now but to adopt, on our own initiative, the languages once imposed upon us by our colonial masters, the languages that were once the instrument of our humiliation.

And yet not all of them can satisfy our need with the same degree of effectiveness. In Somalia, for instance, Italian will have to yield to English; and, I can foresee that, when the present Portuguese colonies become independent, the position of the Portuguese language will be badly undermined because of the imperious needs of African and world co-operation; for neither Italian nor Portuguese has a world-wide or an all-African mission.

Only two of these languages have this two-fold mission — English and French. And because of this, they have earned for themselves the distinctive title of Languages of Wider Communication.

As these two languages offer, for a long list of countries, the best linguistic solution available for problems that cannot wait, problems of internal and external communication, of the transmission of science and technology, problems of the acceleration of modernization in places where rapid political changes are taking place, there is hardly any country, the world over, where the study of English or French or both is not pursued with relentless energy.

The Soviet Union, for instance, bent on world control and on victory for socialism, has the good sense to realize that the Russian language, in spite of the numerous millions that speak it, can never win for Russia control over mankind, nor victory for socialism. In the Soviet Union, fifty per cent of the children go through an eleven-year intensive course in English.

Why belabour a fact that imposes itself with such overwhelming clarity? With English and French you can make your way without much difficulty right round the world.

English, however, is by far the most important of all the languages of Wider Communication, so much so that, even in places where French is dominant, there is an increasing demand for English. This does not mean, however, that the importance of French is lowering. In Africa, especially, owing to the fact that almost half of the independent African States have French for official language, and owing to the present drive towards a closer coming together among the African peoples, the demand for French is on the rise, even in areas where English is the dominant language. It is borne in upon African leaders everywhere that, if African unity is to be achieved, it is imperative to begin, right from now, to teach these two languages, together, everywhere in Africa.

If this is so for every African country, how much more is it for Cameroon where both languages declared official have become constitutional? To us, therefore, the teaching of English and French must become a foremost national duty.

What Sort of Bilingualism

The constitution of the 1st of September 1961, makes Cameroon a bilingual State by law, with English as the language of the federated State of the West, French as that of the federated State of the East and both as the languages of the Federal Government. This is similar to what obtains in Canada where, out of some ten federated States, one is French and the rest are English.

Belgium, on the other hand, furnishes the example of a unitary state with two languages, French and Flemish.

But in spite of the fact that these two States have been bilingual now for quite a length of time, not every Canadian speaks both English and French; not every Belgian speaks both Flemish and French: the vast majority of Canadians and Belgians have remained monolingual.

A bilingual State, therefore, does not necessarily mean bilingual individuals, bilingual citizens.

But, for us in Cameroon, it would be singular blindness to advantages staring us in the face, a lamentable lack of idealism, to rest satisfied with having created a bilingual State.

The target to aim at, for us, should be, not merely State bilingualism, but **individual bilingualism**: that every child that passes through our education system shall be able to speak and write both English and French.

The Need for an African Language

Having thus defined my terms, I must confess that the expression, Cameroon bilingualism, is a misnomer. It would be more correct to speak of **Cameroon trilingualism**, because, ever before the Cameroon child comes to school to learn English and French, he should have already learnt his own native language.

For, on this question, all confused thinking must be dissipated, and the point must be made abundantly clear that English and French, for all their overwhelming importance in our development and in our day to day affairs, are only **official languages**, are not our **national languages**, because they are foreign.

It is a matter for very deep regret, indeed, that we haven't one Cameroon language common to all Cameroonians. In fact, the ideal should have been one African language spoken and written throughout all Africa.

Thought, as I have said, is the basis of all culture, because every human achievement, however tremendous in the end, begins as an idea in somebody's mind, just as any man even though his name should later fill the earth and his power should shake the world, must begin life as a tiny ovum in a woman's womb. I have also shown how intimately, how inextricably thought and language become welded together.

How else then can a people's thought, a people's culture find genuine, authentic expression except in that people's own language?

Unless it is forged anew by Africans, a foreign language, however highly developed, however indispensable, cannot be the genuine, authentic expression of African culture. The clamours for national languages among the African peoples cannot, therefore, be dismissed, with a sweep of the hand, as the ravings of rabid nationalism; they are justified by the very nature of things. And, with African unity rising in the offing, the clamour should now be for an all-African language.

But the question is, can there be found, out of the hundreds of languages of the African Babel one which can seriously put itself forward as a candidate for this lofty office, as capable of becoming the vehicle of science and technology to the African people?

Whatever be the answer to this question, there are two African languages, which, right now, are consolidating their hold over extensive areas of the African continent. All along the arc

that sweeps from Mauritania through Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt to the Sudan, Arabic rules without a rival. To these Arab countries can be added those like Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Somalia, Zanzibar and all the other countries in Negro Africa with large Muslim populations, where the study of Arabic is sure to receive a new and vigorous impetus. Then there is Swahili gaining ground in Tanganyika, Kenya, Uganda, the Rhodesias, Rwanda, Burundi, the Congo.

Already Arabic is playing an increasing part in the confidences of African States, and Swahili has become an official language in Tanganyika. In West Africa, however, no language has anything like the influence even of Swahili in East Africa, not to talk of that of Arabic in the North.

Here in Cameroon, as I see it, the problem of an African language can hardly find a solution except in the hypothesis of Cameroon accepting an all-African language decided upon at a continental level or a regional one decided upon at a West African level. We are proud of our country as the muster ground of all the African races; yet, with its hundred or more languages, Cameroon is also the country where the **African Confusion of Tongues** is worst confounded.

Notwithstanding, each of them is a living language, vital in the daily lives of thousands of individuals. I think it imperative, therefore, that each Cameroon child, before embarking upon the learning of French and English at school, should have learnt his own native tongue at home; for, now with so many of our customs fast disappearing, an African language well mastered, even if it is spoken only by a few thousands, is still an authentic root anchoring its speakers on the African soil and in the African past.

I notice that, in some Cameroon homes, the children are not taught their native tongue at all, or are taught it badly, French (or what is worse, in the case of some West Cameroonians, pidgin English) being spoken all the time.

Is this a healthy practice? Will it not have the effect of severing one of the last ties that bind these children to Africa and thus render them more completely deracinated? Is this negligence not fraught with the danger of unfortunate psychological after-effects, especially if these children do not grow up to occupy positions as privileged as those their parents now occupy, and have to live in surroundings where neither French nor English is the wonted medium of expression? I am inclined to think so, but

I do not know for certain. That is a problem for specialists, for psychologists especially, to delve into. It is, in brief, the question whether it is necessary, for psychological health, that a person should have the feeling and the satisfaction of belonging somewhere.

I was saying that the expression, Cameroon bilingualism, is a misnomer, because, in fact, every Cameroon bilingual will be a trilingual. But since I am talking of language in the schools and, as yet, no Cameroon language is being taught nor has become the general medium of instruction in all our schools, I will continue, in this essay, to speak of Cameroon bilingualism.

Levels of Bilingual Achievement

In the teaching of English and French in our schools and colleges, the ideal to aim at should be to produce citizens capable of handling both languages with consummate skill, capable of producing in English or French, as they please, works of art or science of the highest merit. Obviously, only a very limited few indeed, for all our effort, will ever be able to attain such a height. But the truth is that such a linguistic feat is by no means outside the bounds of possibility; for, as certainly as there are people with a particular genius for this, that and the other thing, just so certainly are there individuals with a special gift for languages.

More numerous, however, will be those who will hit the best lower target: the level of those who master one of the two languages consummately for artistic or scientific expression; but who, though less efficient in the other, possess that other sufficiently enough in the sense that they grasp it thoroughly and can translate from it with skill and exactness, but cannot, however, wield it themselves, with the same measure of ease and grace.

The lowest level is within the reach of any child who, being put through a well organized and well equipped language teaching course, is prepared to exert the minimum of effort. Though unable to scale the higher reaches of vocabulary and phraseology, he will, at least, acquire, in both languages, a firm grasp and fluent use of the ordinary words and phrases of every day life. This is the farthest that the general run of citizens will ever be able to reach. But it is well worth the effort.

Of these three levels, each person will attain that to which his talents, aided by his energy, will bear him. But what is of supreme importance is that the education system, through its

organization, through the means it puts within reach and through the methods it employs, should make sure, that, at each level of attainment, the linguistic knowledge and skill of those prepared to exert themselves to the utmost, should be as thorough as possible.

In the first part of this essay, my argument was that, since language is so overwhelmingly important in life and in studies, it is imperative to begin the thorough and systemic teaching of it to children, as early as possible in their childhood, that language should be the central concern, the pivot round which all effort should revolve, in the primary school.

My present contention is that, if the importance of bilingualism, in our national life, has become so primordial, we must begin it early enough to bear it through successfully; in other words, the teaching of English and French together, here in Cameroon, should start right from the very first day that the child takes his seat in the infant school.

Considerations Urging Bilingualism

As far as I can see, the primary school, for decades to come, will be the only school for the vast majority of Cameroonians. Therefore, if we do not make our primary school bilingual, our bilingualism, in addition to being very poor, will be the privilege only of the few who will be lucky enough to go to college. But if unity of thought and feeling is to be fostered among our people, the majority of them must understand each other, the primary school-leaver in the West, for example, should be able to read the popular press of the East, to listen to eastern radio programmes, and vice versa. An ordinary chap from Boumba should be able to sojourn in Kumba and mingle with his compatriots without the present language difficulties. Our primary school, therefore, should be able to give to our children that basic bilingualism necessary for this mutual understanding, namely, a good grasp of the vocabulary and the phraseology necessary for the transaction of every-day affairs.

Furthermore, the formal and immediate aim in the teaching of language is to get the children to master speech so thoroughly that, in speaking, conscious effort should be spent mostly on thinking out **what** to say and not on **how** to say it, that is, not on words and the rules governing their use. What a burden speaking would be, if the speaker had to pause to decline every noun and to conjugate every verb that he wanted to use. In other

words, there can be no fluency in talking without the acquisition of speech automatisms, of speech unconscious habits. If this is so, I can see no other period of life more natural for acquiring these automatisms, especially where more than one language is concerned, than in early childhood.

External determinations, therefore, like our own purpose for bilingualism, like the general aim of language teaching, speak in favour of early bilingualism.

But the over-riding question is, not whether the thing *should* be done, but whether it *can* be done; whether it is possible in itself, from its very nature. Is it possible, therefore, to teach two languages to tender-aged children without seriously impairing their mental and psychological growth? Is infancy, in the nature of things, the best time for introducing bilingualism into the children's lives?

Considering what experience shows, what authorities say, considering the nature of the faculties and the organs used in human speech, — I say yes.

The Witness of Experience

The ease with which children learn languages is a very common experience, especially in a country like ours with a babel of tongues. In towns where several peoples mingle, it is very common to see children who speak one language with their parents at home, another with their teacher at school and a third with their chums in the street. And what is more, very often, in such mixed communities, they acquire greater fluency in the language of their playmates than in that of the school or even that of their parents. In fact, a bilingual person's best language is not necessarily his mother tongue, but the language which exerted the greatest influence on him in his childhood.

Once teaching school in Nigeria, I had in one of my classes a youngster who spoke the main Nigerian languages, Ibo, Efik, Hausa, Yoruba. How had he learnt them? His father, an Onitsha man, was a civil servant and had been moved East and North and West and he had picked them up as they went from one place to another. How was it like learning all those languages? Did he remember feeling any strain? Not at all; he couldn't even remember how he had learnt them.

It is astonishing the ease with which very young children change from language to language, as they move from country to country.

In an inaugural lecture on Bilingualism delivered on Foundation Day, November 17th, 1948, before the Staff and Students of University College Ibadan, Dr. Paul Christophersen, gave an account of an experiment that was carried out in a girls' school in Istanbul.

A kindergarten class was started, consisting of twenty boys and girls of about seven years of age, consisting of twenty boys and girls of about seven years of age. A large number of different nationalities were represented, including Turkish, Greek, Jewish, Armenian, Iraqi, Syrian and Bulgarian; and all, except a few British and American children, were entirely ignorant of English when they entered the school. Amongst them they spoke some fifteen different languages. There was therefore no common medium, and so the children were taught entirely in English and by an English teacher. I ought to mention that the rest of the staff were English, or English-speaking, and that in other parts of the school there was a large number of English-speaking children. No formal method was followed in the teaching, and grammar was never mentioned. The teacher spoke to them in simple, but perfectly normal, idiomatic English. The result obtained seems almost miraculous. After nine months these children had, so far as speech was concerned, become English. During school hours, in class, in the playground, and at lunch, only English was used, and there was no sign of mental translation or any kind of mental strain. In their homes these children would go on speaking their several languages, but in school they would with equal or perhaps greater ease speak English³.

Another country where the language problem is as vital as here, is Israel. The Jews of the *Diaspora* or the Dispersal are scattered, as we all know, all over Europe, the East, North Africa and America, north and south. In each country, they use the language of that country in all other activities, and ancient Hebrew, enshrined in their sacred books, for religious purposes. When the movement of the *Return* began, the Jews coming back to Israel constituted, linguistically and culturally, quite a motley gathering, in spite of their communion of religion and race. It was thus that the idea was born to cement national unity by turning ancient Hebrew into a modern language, a language not only of daily dealings but also a medium of artistic and scientific expression.

(3) Bilingualism : pp. 3-4.

In Israel, they have found, not only that the learning of this additional language comes with greater ease and speed to youngsters, but also that children can play a leading role in spreading it among the grown-ups.

A former director-general of the Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture testifies :

One would have thought that the arrival of hundreds of thousands of immigrants, speaking seventy different languages, would imperil the long and patient effort undertaken to bring Hebrew back to life as a living language of every-day use. The danger of a Babel of languages has been avoided because the system of education was sufficiently expanded to take in the children of the immigrants rapidly, in one way or the other. All these children, feeling the need for a common language to communicate among themselves have adopted Hebrew with astonishing rapidity and, back from kindergarten or from school, have brought it home to their parents 4.

The Witness of Authority

If ever there was anyone supremely qualified to speak with authority on this problem, it was Professor P. Christophersen, who relates the Turkish experiment referred to above. Dr. Christophersen is a Dane with a Doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Copenhagen and therefore a scholar in his own language. He is also an authority in English and holds another Doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Cambridge. At the time he delivered this lecture, Dr. Christophersen was Professor of English at the University of Ibadan, with English lecturers of English birth working under him — a foreign authority in the English language recognized by the English themselves.

On this question of teaching more than one language at a time to little children and on the various objections raised against it, this is what he said :

Undoubtedly, in many cases the effort required to master two languages instead of one does indeed diminish the child's power to learn other things. But is not the gain so great that it is worth even a year or two's retardation? Many of the most valuable citizens reach maturity fairly late. Moreover, it must be remem-

4) M. Avidor : Israël Aujourd'hui, N° 1 : L'Enseignement et ses Problèmes.

bered that an early start with languages may save the adult person years of laborious work later on, at a period when his energy and time could be put to better use.

I do not on the whole think that the argument against bilingualism in childhood is very strong, but another and more powerful degree of perfection in either of his two languages as the same person in his one language. The Austrian philologist Schuchardt said that if a bilingual man has two strings to his bow, both are rather slack. There is undoubtedly something in this, although the argument in my opinion has been given undue preponderance. It must be remembered that the balance between a bilingual person's two languages is not something absolute and static : it may change from period to period of his life. It can be changed by an effort of will. If a bilingual person decides to concentrate on one of his languages and let the other one drop, he can achieve 100 per cent efficiency. And he will still have an advantage over the unilingual person in the wider background that his other language has given him.

Jespersen in his book on 'Language' asks, 'Has any bilingual child ever developed into a great artist in speech, a poet or orator?' The question is rhetorical and not meant to be answered, but I intend to answer it. Yes, there are many examples of bilingual people who have become great writers. In the English-speaking world, the name that first springs to one's lips is Conrad. Strictly, Conrad was not bilingual as a child : he was seventeen before he ever set foot on English soil, and although he had read a good deal of English literature, the language was up till then a foreign tongue to him. But he made it his first language and partly dropped his Polish mother tongue. If we want an example of a bilingual child, there is Hilaire Belloc, who was educated partly in France and partly in England, and who decided to settle in England and concentrate on English, in which he wrote both prose and poetry. Further afield, there is Rabindranath Tagore, who wrote chiefly in Bengali, but translated some of his own works into beautiful English. It is not irrelevant to mention here the Scottish and Irish writers who use both English and Gaelic and Welsh writers who use English and Welsh as their media. Nor is it without interest in this connection that Milton, although he was hardly bilingual or trilingual in our sense, wrote poetry in English, Italian and Latin, and that the medieval poet Gower wrote poems in English, French and Latin.

The list could without doubt be increased considerably. Even so, it may not appear very impressive, but it must be remembered that the number of bilingual persons in the world is only a tiny fraction of the number of unilingual people. On the whole, the bilinguals have probably got more than their fair share of great writers.

The Witness of Logic

The basic mental processes which find immediate expression in language are not beyond the ability of the tender-aged child.

As I said before, these principal logical processes whereby the mind acquires knowledge are three.

First, the formation of universal concepts from individual concrete objects by means of abstraction.

Next, the process whereby the mind, perceiving agreement or disagreement between two concepts thus garnered, unites or divides them by means of *is* or *not*, that is, by affirming or denying.

The bat is a mammal.

The bat is not a bird.

Last, the process whereby the mind recognizes agreement or disagreement between two concepts by comparing them with a third and thereby arriving at new knowledge.

Animals that suckle their young are mammals.

But the bat is an animal that suckles its young.

Therefore the bat is a mammal.

Here, two concepts, **mammal** and **bat** are compared with a third : **animals that suckle their young**.

All animals that suckle their young are mammals. Sounds very simple. But before the zoologists arrive at such a general principle, how much observation and study of individual cases, how much expenditure of physical and mental energy!

For, the search for knowledge is very like mountain climbing : by laboriously examining particular cases, we scale the windward steep and attain the peak, attain a general principle ; then with that principle for guide, we descend to discover the individuals that dwell adown the leeward side. An ascent — induction ; a crest — a universal principle ; a descent — deduction.

Reasoning, whether from the general to the particular, from the abstract to the concrete, from the whole to the part, from a

law to a fact, or vice versa, reasoning, deductive or inductive, that is, involves delving for causes, drawing conclusions, solving problems — a strenuous exertion of the mind.

But none of these enters into the essence of language learning. In teaching children languages, we do not ask the budding mind to investigate the proximate and ultimate causes of things, to unravel baffling puzzles or to dig for deep-buried reasons!

All the mental effort necessary is that which is enough for the Judgement, namely, the ability to form mental images, then concepts, and the ability to see that some concepts are linked and that others are not.

The fact that this mental effort is well within the reach of children is born out by the fact that, from about the age of three or so, as I have observed before, children are the biggest talkers, and often, they show proof of an understanding and speak their mind with a candidness that surprise, and even embarrass, the grown-ups.

The ability to learn the meaning of words and the ability to use them in saying something about something else — these are the basic logical operations needed for learning a language — operations simple enough for tender-minded youngsters.

A difficulty is brought in by the fact that, since they are being initiated into bilingualism, they will have to learn, at least, two words for every concept and two sets of sentence patterns ; for each language has not merely its own vocabulary, but also its own rules of syntax, its own system of sentence construction.

In such a situation, this should be the golden rule : avoid confusing things.

I said somewhere above that it is possible for a child, during the same period, to learn one language from his parents at home, a second from his playmates in the street and a third from his teacher at school. His parents and their home, his chums and the street, the teacher and the school — these are three distinct sets of persons and surroundings and circumstances each of which, in fact and in the child's mind, is closely linked with a definite language. Once in each of these circumstances the child switches his mind to the corresponding language as naturally as we switch from one radio station to another. In fact, unless he is old enough to know, or except it is explained to him, he may not realize that he is speaking three different languages at all.

Confusion sets in when one and the same person speaks to the child, haphazardly, now in one language, now in another.

In initiating children into bilingualism, therefore, extreme care must be taken to link each language in practice, and thus, in the child's mind, with definite persons, with definite surroundings and with definite circumstances.

The child's mind for language ripens early and becomes immediately capable of the logical processes necessary for speech. As I see it, therefore, no serious argument can be drawn from maturation for language learning against early bilingualism.

The Witness of Psychology

In learning a language, or any other thing for that matter, it is intended that the thing once learnt shall be retained, can be recalled consciously or unconsciously, immediately or with effort, and can be recognized when heard or seen. The mental power that retains, that reproduces, that recognizes things as having once been learnt is the memory.

This is the faculty of the next highest importance in so far as learning is concerned; the first being, of course, the intellect or the understanding. For, however sure the memory, however well retained, readily recalled, easily recognized a thing learnt may be, all this will be of no avail if the said thing is not clearly understood. Similarly, however well understood a thing may be, such understanding serves no purpose if the said thing fades from the mind as soon as it is learnt.

And yet one of the first principles in learning off by heart is that, the clearer a thing is to the understanding, the more easily will it be committed to memory.

About the nature of the memory, there are differences of opinion: some say that it is an entirely spiritual power; others that it is a purely organic faculty, and, in between them, there is the school which asserts that this faculty is both spiritual and organic — a psychophysical composite. Furthermore, there is the popular view that the memory grows weaker with advancing years; but, nowadays, it is claimed that scientific experiments have proved this common opinion wrong. However, whatever the divergencies of opinion may be, certain things are clear.

Among these is the fact that the soul, at least on this side of death, acts by using the body as its instrument; and, therefore, even if the memory is a spiritual power, it cannot operate inde-

pendently of sense and nerve and brain. In fact, observation shows that injuries of the brain, fevers, cerebral diseases, frenetic faculties remain unimpaired. For instance, determinate periods of life, special kinds of experience, particular languages have, derangements of the cerebrum.

It is therefore beyond dispute that the faculty of memory is closely connected with the physical organism. And as certainly as this is so, just so certainly will the condition of the organism determine the effectiveness of this mental faculty.

Furthermore, the organism being material suffers decay with time. However regular the fund of a toiler's energy may be, his out-pour must decrease as his instrument gets blunter.

At what period of life, therefore, is the memory calculated to be most receptive, most plastic, most capable of acquiring its most ingrained habits, its most enduring recollections?

Every man can bear out, as a fact of personal experience, that his childhood memories are among his most vivid.

Language learning is, in essence, memory work; and if there is question of initiating the child into two languages, the right policy is that the teaching of both should begin in childhood.

Furthermore, we all know that, if there are a hundred things clamouring for a man's attention, if his mind is torn between a hundred cares and worries, learning for him cannot be a smooth and effective operation.

We also know that, with each passing year, a man's preoccupations and cares and worries and fears and hopes and ambitions increase. Is it any wonder then that learning gets harder the older one gets? Obviously, overwhelmed by so many pressures, the memory, for all its innate and constant vigour, can hardly achieve its fullest.

For the young learner, these cares do not wait until manhood is attained; they begin their assault right from the beginning of his secondary school career: new subjects come in, old ones become more difficult, more intensive effort is needed, the crowded programme demands more speed, there is competition for top places, and the spectre of the G. C. E. or the **Baccalauréat** begins to loom in the distance.

Compared with all this, what a care-free time the days of childhood are?

A period when the physical organism, the tool of the memory, is fresh, healthy, vigorous, most pliable, unimpaired by years; a period when the mind is unencumbered, free from the burden of cares and anxieties; a period when the memory can be used with maximum effectiveness — such is early childhood.

If there is any other period more suitable than this for initiating children into the learning of two languages, I would like to know which.

From the very nature of the memory, therefore, there is a strong argument in favour of early bilingualism.

This argument is further reinforced by this other significant consideration.

As I pointed out before, such is the power of language over mind that words, in the end, fuse so completely with the ideas they represent, that we cannot think but in the vocabulary of the language that has kneaded and moulded out minds. This is most especially so of monolingual persons.

Furthermore, as I have already pointed out, each language has not merely its own particular vocabulary but also its own syntax system, its own rules for the order of words in a sentence.

In a language like Latin in which the case designations, that determine the relation of one word to another, play such an important part, the position of words in a sentence is not of much consequence.

Brutus occidit Caesarem.

Brutus Caesarem occidit.

Caesarem occidit Brutus.

You can play around with these three words as you please, but in whatever order you put them, they will give you but one meaning:

Brutus killed Caesar.

You can't afford to do that in English.

Brutus killed Caesar.

Caesar killed Brutus.

What a drastic change in meaning is effected by the change in the order of words!

Subject, verb, object: that is the basic word order in the English sentence.

French follows much the same order, but then it abounds in a hundred other distinctive peculiarities, like the object coming before its verb when it is a pronoun, like the strict indications of gender, like the adjective following more often than not after its particular question formulae, and all the numerous traits that mark off the Gallic tongue from its Anglo-Saxon next-door neighbour across the Channel.

As I have said before, all our efforts at learning any language are directed first and foremost at the formation of speech automatisms, that is, at drilling mind and memory so thoroughly in the vocabulary and the phraseology of that language that, whenever we are expressing our thoughts verbally, the necessary words should fall spontaneously into the correct sentence patterns of the language concerned.

The process of forming speech habits begins as soon as the child begins to speak and, as time goes on, linguistic **crystallization** begins to set in, especially if the learning is monolingual: the mind, once virgin land, now begins to take the form of a field plowed according to a definite pattern of ridges and furrows and sown with definite seed. And, before long, this form imposed upon it by the particular language begins to crystallize, begins to harden, to become not only definite but permanent. Mind and memory become, as it were fixed in hard-set grooves because our thoughts have become inseparably wedded to the vocabulary and the phraseology of a definite language.

After this has happened, the learning of a second language becomes a very difficult and tedious affair, because the field is no longer virgin, the land is ploughed and sown, the old language has taken firm possession and leaves little room for the new comer.

Established habits of a first language therefore, are a hindrance to the efficient cultivation of the speech habits of a second.

I once taught English in college to a class of boys that had started the language late. I found it a difficult task because what most of them spoke and wrote was not English at all but an African idiom dressed in English words.

Linguistic crystallization explains why, after early youth, most people lose the ability to learn a foreign language perfectly.

There can be therefore no wiser policy than to initiate children into bilingualism before rigidity sets in, to begin in early childhood, the carefree period of pliant mind and memory.

The Witness of Physiology

Language, as I have said somewhere before, is a composite of sense and sound. And, therefore, just as there are definite mental habits that the speakers of a given language cultivate by having their mind and memory kneaded and moulded by the vocabulary and the phraseology of the said language, just so do they cultivate other habits, physical these and equally definite, by the constant exercise of their speech organs on that language's phonology.

Each sound that sallies from the mouth however brimming with meaning it may be, is, as regards its material composition, nothing else but air expelled by the lungs and sent scurrying up the respiratory system. In order to see the importance of this physiological side of speech, let us follow one such breath of air through the organism.

On leaving the lungs, this breath of air runs up the bronchial tubes into the larynx, the cavity in the throat that holds the vocal cords. These glottal cords, as they are also called, are two small, nearly horizontal, highly sensitive membranes. By being drawn towards or away from each other, or by vibrating like the strings of a musical instrument, the glottal cords produce the voice. They may also become lax or tense in the direction of their length and, by these variations in length, they give themselves variations in tenseness which variations in tenseness give the issuing voice variations in pitch.

From the voice-box, the breath passes by the uvula (the soft, pointed, easily movable organ that depends from the rear of the palate) into the principal resonance chamber which consists of the soft and the hard palate, the tongue, the teeth and the lips, in other words, the mouth. It is the constantly varying shape of this resonance chamber, due to the extreme mobility of the tongue, that gives out-going breath its special quality of sound. The nose too often serves as a second resonance chamber, especially in the case of sounds like the French nasals in the process of whose pronunciation air is driven simultaneously into mouth and nose.

From an examination of this mechanism responsible for speech, two main conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly: that, since, in order to become sound, the breath of air has to traverse the whole system from the lungs to the mouth, the production of one such sound requires the co-ordinated move-

ment, not only of the enumerated speech organs themselves, but also of all the other muscles to which they are attached.

In fact, it would be interesting to count them in order to see how many muscles, all told, are involved in speech and to see, from calculation, how much energy is consumed in talking, during a given length of time.

Secondly: since each language contains a specific number of speech sounds, the constant and prolonged exercise of these speech organs on that set of speech sounds results in the formation of a corresponding set of physical speech habits, by the said speech organs.

When you consider the number of speech sounds that each single language contains, and the legions of languages that there are in the world, you will realize how innumerable the said speech sounds must be even after allowance has been made for those that are common to all languages.

No child, before he learns to speak, is determined by any inherent necessity to any particular language; an infant carried away, shortly after his birth, ten thousand miles away and cut off completely from his country of origin, will never have knowledge of the language of his birth. Language, however intimately it comes, in the end, to penetrate the mind of man, is an acquired habit not an innate property.

From this I conclude that any infant born is capable of learning to pronounce each and every one of the numberless speech sounds that make up the world's legions of languages.

But, as I have said before, each language, to be of practical use, can employ only a limited number of these sounds; and, as a result, the speech organs of the members of its group are drilled in the use of only that limited number and form only the speech habits corresponding to that definite number of speech sounds.

It is here, even more than in the case of the action of vocabulary and phraseology on mind and memory, that force of habit produces that phenomenon which I have referred to above as **linguistic crystallization** — the hardening of the speech organism, as it were, into fixed grooves. And this is a thing that happens quite early in life.

When the muscles of the speech organs have thus become permanently and exclusively wedded to the particular set of movements required to produce the sounds of a given language, all other habits of movement become more or less permanently in-

hibited; they are, so to speak, dammed back, jealously crowded out by the set that has taken possession.

It is this linguistic crystallization, this rigidity of the speech organs, that makes the mastering of the new sounds of a foreign language such a difficult task after early youth. Before early youth, when the speech organs are still very pliant, they can be made to acquire the habit of pronouncing correctly the speech sounds of two or three or even four different languages.

Is it not sheer logic, sound wisdom, the assurance of the best results, the forestalling of much waste of time and energy and of much frustration later on, therefore, to initiate children into bilingualism before this rigidity, before this crystallization sets in?

The tremendous advantage of starting early, especially in so far as phonology is concerned, is that habits of pronunciation, after they have once been acquired, are never completely lost. Even if you get out of practice, the ability remains.

There is a strong physiological case for early bilingualism.

The Witness of Personal Experience

When I read the passage in his lecture where Professor Christophersen warns that *an early start with languages may save the adult person years of laborious work later on, at a period when his energy and time could be put to better use*, I couldn't agree with him more. I have had deep, personal experience of the truth of what he says.

In my boyhood days, no French was taught in the secondary schools, not to talk of the primary schools. I began the study of French, all by myself, years after my secondary school days were over, at an age when few would think of embarking on such a course; for then, I was twenty-seven.

Cameroonians had started clamouring for Reunification, and it was self-evident that, in a reunified Cameroon, it would be necessary to know French, and know it well.

For ten years I kept at it with a determination and an intensity of effort that I have hardly ever spent on any thing else. Three years after I started, late luck brought me to the university and I eagerly embarked on French as one of my honours courses. The B.A. done, I did a thesis for an M.A. degree. And that had to be written in French. As soon as that was over, I undertook another for a Ph.D. That, too, had to be written in French.

During my student days, I spent two years in France, and one of these attending courses at the Sorbonne.

And yet, in spite of all the relentless effort, of all the laborious days, in spite of all the listening and concentration and speaking and reading and writing and rewriting, I have failed to become a fluent speaker in French, and there is hardly a chance that I ever will succeed in becoming one.

Why?

Because I started late.

I have given a number of conferences in French in the past; and, each time, I have had to choose the laborious method of writing everything down and reading the lecture out, instead talking at my ease.

Ten years of so much drudgery, ten years that should have been spent at physics, mathematics, medicine or engineering — studies that would have rendered me a useful citizen in a more practical sense — wasted at a subject that is intended as a preparation for more serious things, a subject that should have been done years before!

Of this I am certain, that a five-year-old of normal ability, initiated, when I started, into the study of French and English, by competent teachers, in congenial surroundings and with well prepared text books, would, by now, have acquired a fluency, in both languages, that I shall never be able to achieve in spite of having expended several times over the child's out-put of effort and energy.

Blue-print for a Bilingual Education System

This article urges the need for early bilingualism or more precisely, for primary school bilingualism. But my study would be incomplete, if I failed to indicate where we should go from there, that is, what course bilingualism should take, what place it should occupy in the Cameroon Education System.

To make my answer clear, let me first say that, in my opinion, our education system should comprise:

- the Primary School,
- the Secondary School,
- the Higher School (the Sixth Form or the School of Arts and Science),
- and the University.

Education has been comprehensively defined as the physical, the intellectual and the moral upbringing of man. In all I have said up to this and in what follows after, I am concerned principally with the intellectual side of education.

In so far, then, as mental formation is concerned, my contention, as I have said before, is that, in every thing it does, the central concern of the primary school should be to give the children a good grounding in language, that is, to furnish them with a rich fund of handy, ready works and to give them a good grasp of fundamental grammar.

The main purpose of the secondary school is to introduce the children into the various branches of knowledge necessary for life in the modern world. Through this very activity and through specific language and literature courses, it will also deepen and widen their store of words and perfect their phraseology.

Because this country is underdeveloped, one of its foremost burning needs is for skilled citizens. It will therefore not answer, if our higher education system produces merely Jacks-of-all-trades, chaps with a wide range of general notions but with nothing deep. Rather, it should be geared up to produce specialists in every field. That is why I am firmly of the view that the sixth form (corresponding to the West Cameroon Higher School or the College of Arts and Science) should be given a choice place in our national education system. As this institution does not exist in East Cameroon, it should be introduced.

It is in the higher school therefore, that specialization should begin; for the rôle of this section of the system should be to bring students up to scratch for effective university work. The importance of what I say here will be deeply appreciated by those of us who have studied abroad; for we all know what sufferings some students have had to undergo, what tragedies have befallen some, all because they were not adequately prepared for university studies, before they left these shores. The higher school will orientate students into specific departments — science, maths, arts, languages — and ensure this thorough preparation.

To put it simply, therefore: to my mind, the principal pre-occupation of the primary school, as I have said over and over again, should be language, that of the secondary school, general knowledge, that of the higher school, introduction to specialization and that of the university, specialization.

What then should be the place of bilingualism in this system?

My contention, repeated now *ad nauseam*, is that both English and French should be taught together from the very start of the primary school. But the situation in fact is that, in each federated state, one of these languages is already a dominant language, English in the West, French in the East. Therefore, while both languages shall be taught, the dominant language in each state shall be the language of instruction for the rest of the school subjects.

In the Secondary School, the study of both languages shall be intensified and the dominant language shall continue to be the language of instruction. At this stage, it would be good to get children who show a special aptitude for languages to add Latin and even Greek to their studies; a knowledge of Latin, specially, deepens and widens the understanding of French and English as few other factors can.

In the higher school, the dominant language continues to be the language of instruction. But, as the principal purpose of the higher school is specialization, each student shall do that section of the second language that directly concerns his special field: science students in the West Cameroon higher schools shall do science French; those intending to read law afterwards shall be drilled on French legal texts; those studying literature shall do the literature of both languages. If this is done with the utmost diligence and thoroughness, then the student, coming to the Federal University, at the close of the higher school, will be ready to follow university lectures in either of the two languages. If he is to study abroad, he will have the singular advantage of all the universities of both the English and the French speaking worlds to choose from. When I was studying in France, my next door neighbour, at the hostel where I lived, was a Bengali educated on the bilingual island of Mauritius. He had come to do Medicine in England, but finding no place anywhere, he just crossed the Channel and signed on in the faculty of medicine in the University of Paris.

In some English universities, it is a rule that students reading for honours degrees in science or arts should do a corresponding course in French or German. I have seen students with a programme crammed full battling desparately, at the same time, with a French course which they had to start from scratch. Result: much needful time lost that should have been spent on the essential programme. Result: a grade in the degree lower than

they could otherwise have made, if they had done French lower down.

The university recently started in Yaounde is supposed to be a bilingual university. But the nature of its bilingualism needs to be defined clearly and efforts made, right from the start, to put that definition into effect; else the French element will become so predominant as to make the Federal University of Cameroon, to all intents and purposes, a French university.

Normally, a bilingual university is one in which any student can follow whatever course he pleases in any of the two languages. Such a bilingual university is in fact a double university with a double faculty for every branch of knowledge that is cultivated there, as is the case with the Belgian university of Louvain, where Dutch and French are the languages of instruction. I can imagine that this type of bilingual university would be very expensive to set up.

The great advantage of the type of bilingual education system that I propose is that it makes this costly type of bilingual university unnecessary.

Since the lower stages of the system make the student bilingual, and since the higher school prepares him for his special field in both languages, it would be enough for our bilingual university that lectures can be given in it in either language, and that provision be made for both languages to be adequately represented on the staff.

Furthermore — and this is very important — none of the two languages should be given an official position of privilege over the other in the university. For the fact is that, where two cultures meet in the same institute in this fashion, petty jealousies and rivalries are bound to be aroused and may run riot, if vigilance is lax — one cultural faction trying to seize control of the university by grabbing positions of power, by increasing its numerical strength, by making its language dominant.

We should keep a sharp eye against this type of thing in every Federal institution in this Republic, lest, instead of bringing off successfully this lofty experiment for cultural integration in Cameroon, we end by turning this country into a cultural battleground.

A good amount of the time and energy devoted to language is generally allotted, especially in the higher section of the education system, to studying the language's literature. This, especially

in the country whose language it is and whose culture it conveys, is of the utmost importance, not merely because the learners are made to digest, for imitation, the best specimens of the language, but, more especially, because the study of the country's literature steepens the budding citizen's mind in the national spirit. For literature is the voice and the record of a people, a living influence which, by infusing the same spirit into each passing generation, preserves a people's identity against the ravages of time.

And yet, since we are neither English nor French, my view is that our policy concerning these languages should be a frankly utilitarian policy; we should consider them as tools to be mastered and mastered so well that, in whatever field it falls to each of us to employ them, such use, should be, for everyone of us, an effortless matter of easy grace.

Throughout our education system, therefore, in so far as English and French are concerned, the emphasis should fall more on language than on literature: the policy should be that, in addition to amassing a large, digested vocabulary, our students, in speaking, should be unimpeachably correct in stress, rhythm, articulation and intonation and should master thoroughly the principles of effective composition. Thus, literature, while giving them food for mind and heart (for really good literature, whatever be its origin, has always something to offer to every human being) shall serve, principally, in furnishing them with the worthiest specimens for their imitation. For one of our aims in adopting these languages is to use them to provide ourselves with a literature of our own. That is one of the foremost reasons why we should leave no stone unturned to enable our children to acquire these languages faultlessly and to wield them with consummate mastery.

Yet it will also be of supreme importance to preserve cultural links with England and France. For, in so far as each language is concerned, it is imperative that the version used here should correspond, in sense and sound, as closely as possible to the version used in its country of origin.

Cameroon Atmosphere Ideal for Bilingualism

In the principal bilingual countries in the world, Canada, Belgium, South Africa, there are factors which militate not only against the successful acquisition of the two languages by the individual citizen, but also against the harmonious bilingualism of the State itself.

These incidents lend credence to French-Canadian complaints of discrimination. After the president of the national railroad had explained why the organization had no French-Canadian vice-presidents, students in Quebec hung him in effigy, and the Liberal party leader Lester Pearson called for an inquiry into Canada's biculturalism.

Such an inquiry would probably reveal that French Canadians do indeed have a lesser rôle in government, business and industry than they merit...

The nationalistic fervor of the French Canadians affects the position of Quebec's English-speaking minority. Hugh MacLennan, who lives in Montreal, is not upset by French nationalism, indeed applauds it, and points out that the French Canadians have always been scrupulously fair to the English minority. But he is distressed by the separatists and those who would deny the bicultural nature of Canada. He believes, as do many, that the roots of a true Canadian national identity are to be found in biculturalism⁵.

Unlike Canada, the bilingual Republic of Cameroon was brought into existence by the deep and fervent will of the Cameroon people. Cameroon bilingualism, therefore, has this other advantage that the atmosphere for its growth is not marred by victor-vanquished friction.

I can hardly think of another country where everything augurs so well for bilingualism as here in Cameroon. If we take note of these advantages and strive to strengthen them, if we set ourselves to the task with resolution, with energy and with method, we may, one day, despite our lowly state, give to the Belgians and the Canadians the example of a nation of united and brotherly bilingual citizens.

The Hour has Struck ! Awake ! Arise !

Proving that an early start with bilingualism is the right policy, that the soundness of this policy is born out by experience, championed by competent authority and supported by logical, psychological and physiological data, is not the same thing as saying that there would be no hurdles whatsoever along the road to the achievement of perfect or even middling bilingualism.

(5) *Look* April 9, 1963 : Ira Mothner : Crisis and Conflict in Canada (Article).

There are difficulties — disheartening ones. For one thing, we all know the long years of painful drudgery required, even where one language (be it the language of our birth) is concerned, to scale the upper reaches of vocabulary and phraseology, to acquire the skill to charge speech with power and to endow it with lasting and overmastering beauty. That is not allowed to many. Proof — the relative fewness, in the history of the world, of makers of timeless literature.

For another thing, to carry through such a programme successfully demands large numbers of competent, carefully trained teachers and an enormous amount of equipment, especially of text books prepared by experts. All this entails untold expenditure.

And yet, who would say that merely because staggering difficulties bar the road, a thorough examination of the nature of the problem should be put off and off? It is precisely a thorough knowledge of the nature of the problem that would determine the means and the method demanded to solve it correctly. It is therefore imperative that, in so far as this problem is concerned, we should study its nature carefully, should draw up a comprehensive programme; and while looking for more adequate means, it would be wise to make a start with what we have in hand.

I agree with Dr. Aggrey who once counselled :

Look for what you want,
take what you find,
and use it to obtain
more of what you want.

I say that the hour to begin has struck.

Either we gear up ourselves and set about the task vigorously, now, or Cameroon Bilingualism will remain, forever, an empty expression.

It will not do to let things drift or to handle so important a national enterprise half-heartedly, haphazardly — without thorough, scientific preliminary investigation. Nothing succeeds without preparation, without thoughtful organization, without method, without energetic action.

Even if all the arguments I have marshalled in defence of early bilingualism fail to convince severally, or even collectively, one consideration alone should settle the dispute in so far as we in Cameroon are concerned. That consideration is that it is precisely our constitutional bilingualism that sets on our country its dis-

tinctive seal among the States of Africa; and, consequently, that, since sooner or later all Africa, for her unity, must do what we have done, it has become our noble mission, our special pride and privilege to blaze the trail and lead the way by fostering here in Cameroon a thorough and vigorous bilingualism.

In this enterprise, all expect from the bilingual Republic of Cameroon a more than normal effort.

Just imagine, therefore, what a sorry figure we would cut in the eyes of Africa, in the eyes of the world, if we set about a task so lofty, so inspiring, lackadaisically.



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