OKLAHOMA INDIANS AND THE "SUMMER INSTITUTE OF LINGUISTICS"

By W. A. Willibrand

Each summer a unique school, internationally known as the "Summer Institute of Linguistics," holds its eleven-weeks session on the campus of the University of Oklahoma. It seeks to train students in techniques for the study of unwritten languages and has among its ultimate goals the development of literacy programs and the translation of the Bible into the vernaculars of tribes in isolated areas. A practical aspect of the two-summers’ course has to do with listening daily to the native speech of Oklahoma Indians and partially reducing it to written discourse by using phonetic symbols. The institute is affiliated with the University but its instructors are not members of the University faculty; they are for the most part institute-trained descriptive linguists drawn temporarily from missionary areas in foreign countries.

One of the staff members, however, Elliott D. Canonge, has his "field" in Oklahoma. Canonge's career is similar to that of many past and present instructors of the institute. Along with his wife he is one of its alumni. In 1945 he enrolled in its classes and he has been on its staff since 1947. At the end of each summer session he returns to Walters, Oklahoma, where he is active as a translator of the New Testament and as a linguistic and cultural investigator among the Comanches. To date his work has included the initiation of a literacy program through the compilation of Comanche primers, the recording of Indian folk tales, and the translation of the Gospel according to St. Mark. His chief support comes from the Wycliffe Bible Translators, a fund-raising corporation associated with the "Summer Institute of Linguistics."

Each year Canonge, because of his year-round residence in Oklahoma, has the assignment of engaging a varying number of Indians to serve the students of the institute as linguistic informants. He secures a ten-day group and an all-summer group. The members of the ten-day group are on hand only during the final two weeks (ten class days) of the session. Through them the first-year students receive the most vital part of their practical introduction to field work. This is important since the zeal of many students takes them into tribal missionary areas after only one summer course. From the all-summer informants the second-year (second summer) students also gather linguistic data, a great deal of which goes into term papers and into ten days of supervised "Indian" conversation at the end of the term. At
both levels of instruction, and also in the intermediate course which is required of students who do not make a B average during the first summer, the Indians play an important part in the crucial final ten days of practical work. Academically the student body of the institute is a mixed-up lot: there are high school graduates, college graduates and people with advanced degrees, including the doctorate; all of them find that it is no easy matter to make a careful partial analysis of an Indian language. By the end of his (or her) first summer the student must take down phonemically and translate a brief Indian folk tale. On the basis of this text and of other data gathered from the informant he prepares a series of assignments which include "card files, and statements on the phonemics, morphology and syntax of the (informant's) language."

As a rule each informant has six students who report to him individually at a given hour five days a week. If an hour a day does not suffice, the student can make tape recordings of his conversations with the informant and thus have the material to study certain phonetic or morphological problems at his leisure. To be sure it is not certain that he will have much leisure, and if he is one of the many who have brought their families to the campus he will also have certain domestic responsibilities, especially if his wife is also a student of linguistics. Among his expenses will be the enrollment fee and the informant fee, which provide the institute with a small amount of working capital out of which each Indian receives board and room plus $12 a week for his services.

In 1951 the all-summer group of informants consisted of eleven bilingual Kiowa men and women. The following year there were nine Kiowas and two Comanches in this group and in 1953, nine Kiowas and three Comanches. More tribes are always represented in the ten-day group which serves a larger number of students. In 1951 there were in this group 2 Kiowas, 2 Cheyennes, 8 Arapahos, 5 Comanches, 2 Shawnees, 6 Choctaws, 1 Sac-and-Fox, plus two Asiatics; in 1953, 5 Kiowas, 2 Comanches, 2 Shawnees, 1 Cheyenne, 2 Cherokees, 5 Choctaws, 6 Arapahos. During the past three summers the total number of informants has varied from 35 to 39, depending upon the total enrollment, which fluctuates from around 200 to 225. The summer enrollment in University classes is usually around 3,000.

It is apparent that the Indians thoroughly enjoy their experiences as linguistic informants. There are several reasons for this. A helpful and friendly spirit of Christian brotherhood greets them in the different University buildings occupied by the Institute. They are treated with respect and enjoy housing and eating facilities exactly like those of the students and members of the
staff. There is no racial segregation, although the Indians prefer to eat at separate tables with their own people, probably because of their tribal and intertribal interests. Culturally they take pride and satisfaction in the fact that others are interested in the sounds and the structure of their languages and that even a short elementary study of them will facilitate the mastery of other languages by the future translators of the Word of God. Perhaps the experience of these people will help hasten the day when funds will be available for each tribe to produce its own trained linguists who will devote their lives to a scientific study of their mother tongue. This would expand the possibilities of linguistic scholarship in America and supply an abundance of the material which is essential to the satisfactory progress of anthropological studies. Whether the motives be religious or scholarly, the studies involved in the reduction of unwritten languages to writing heighten the cultural consciousness of those who speak them and tend to bring isolated tribes into closer contact with other peoples. The inner cultural relationships of certain tribes become apparent through the comparative study of living languages and dialects. It happens too often that unwritten languages pass away before they have been recorded and studied by competent scholars.

When the Indian informants are asked why they enjoy their stay in Norman, the first thing that usually occurs to them is the religious motive. The writer has been present at a number of interviews between a student and his informant. He recalls the aged Comanche woman who sat there with an air of calmness and dignity, piecing a quilt as she answered the student’s prepared Comanche question. When the visitor asked why she enjoyed her work on the campus she replied promptly and sincerely, “I feel I am serving the Lord in His work.” In answer to the same question a Kiowa woman said: “I am doing my little bit towards spreading the Gospel.” A man of the same tribe expressed interest in helping students who want to help other people become Christians. These Indians seemed to be true to the faiths originally taught them by Protestant missionaries. One Menonite Cheyenne woman expressed regret that the missionary teachers of her childhood had been unsympathetic towards the preservation of her language among children. Like many others, she is interested in “keeping up” the Indian languages. One Kiowa informant is learning a phonetic alphabet so that he may become literate in his own language, which, thanks to the Institute, now has a primer and a Christian hymnal. Another Kiowa has these booklets in his possession and jokingly refers to the fact that he has not learned how to use them.

The Indian informants go about their business with ease, dignity and a sense of humor. Alert to the needs of the students
they pronounce clearly the sounds which are peculiar to their separate languages. They translate words, phrases and sentences promptly and help students with conversational exercises. The visitor soon realizes that the Indian has much more to give than the student can absorb in two or three short summer terms. Methods vary according to the problems in hand. If a student happens to be studying the cases, plural formations and classification of nouns he may ask the informant to translate simple sentences like the following: "He sees a house. He sees two houses. He sees some houses." If interest happens to be centered on possessive usage the student will ask for the translation of a number of carefully prepared English possessive constructions. In all of his investigation the student remains alert to speech sounds, which he records as accurately as possible in phonetic symbols. Here lies the beginning of the procedure used in the development of a working alphabet for an aboriginal language.

When all the assignments that grow out of listening to the informant have been approved by teachers, the student may be said to have made a modest beginning in linguistic research. Thanks partly to the patience of an Oklahoma Indian, the future translator may now be assigned to a tribe in the mountains or the jungle of some foreign country. Here, under the guidance of trained people, he must first adjust himself to a primitive mode of life before he can enter upon an exciting career of linguistic discoveries. Such discoveries often lead to learned papers and to master's and doctor's dissertations. Wherever he goes the student is now a member, not of any school, but of an international corporation known as the "Summer Institute of Linguistics". He feels the challenge of published research and other material by older members of the institute; and well he may, for the 1951 edition of the Bibliography of the Summer Institute of Linguistics is an impressive publication of 325 items. It includes books and articles of general linguistic and ethnographic interest, and learned papers on different aspects of some thirty languages which have been studied by members of the institute. The research of these scholars finds outlets in internationally important journals of descriptive linguistics. A number of names appear in the list of authors, among them the following: Pike, Nida, Baer, Cowan, Gudschinsky, Pittman, Townsend, Waterhouse, Wonderly, to mention only a few. Some members like the Elsons, the Leals, Eunice Pike, and others have been busy on literacy programs, which include the compilation of primers, readers, story books, hygiene booklets, reading games, picture books and newsheets. In the pedagogy of this work the Handbook of Literacy by Sarah C. Gudschinsky deserves special mention.

1 For mention of the work of William Townsend among the Peruvian Indians of South America, appearing in a recent issue of Time magazine, see Appendix.
We know the author’s names of the literacy materials and of the scholarly articles. Anonymous however are the sources, that is to say, the numerous informant successors of Oklahoma Indians. The latter are not entirely anonymous; instructors and students call them by their first names, a common practice among the members of this unusual and unbourgeois institution of higher education.

The institute has a rather unique and unconventional history. In 1934 an experienced missionary by the name of W. Cameron Townsend started Camp Wycliffe, a summer linguistic training school for missionaries, at Sulphur Springs, Arkansas. The little school remained there for two summers and was then moved to Siloam Springs, Arkansas, in 1936. Here it held its annual sessions until 1940, when it returned to Sulphur Springs. In 1942 it came to the Oklahoma University campus at Norman; but here most of the extra facilities were needed for military personnel during the following two summers, so the institute moved to the campus of Bacone College, at Muskogee, Oklahoma. It returned to Norman in 1945 and has been held there ever since. During its first year at Siloam Springs, Camp Wycliffe began to be called “Summer Institute of Linguistics.” Today it is affiliated with the University, but it recruits its own staff and has an independent administration. The University grants credit for courses taken at the institute.

Townsend started Camp Wycliff as a self-taught linguist. Without formal training he had reduced to writing the Cachiquel language of Guatemala and after providing it with a dictionary and a grammar he translated the New Testament into this idiom, spoken by some 200,000 people. Later he labored among the Aztecs where his achievements received the official recognition of scientific groups and of the President of Mexico.

In the summer of 1935 a young New Englander by the name of Kenneth Pike hitchhiked to Sulphur Springs in order to learn something about studying and transcribing unwritten languages. He learned what he could during that summer at Camp Wycliffe and then went to Mexico, where he labored among the Mixtecs, into whose languages he and some friends later translated the New Testament. Returning to Camp Wycliffe as a teacher in the summer of 1936, he was on hand to welcome a new student, Eugene Nida, who had just completed his undergraduate work at the Los Angeles branch of the University of California. Nida proved his worth almost immediately and became a member of the institute staff in 1937. Thus began the close association of two gifted lecturers who are now internationally known for their contributions to the field of descriptive linguistics.
Since 1942 there has been a corporation known as "Summer Institute of Linguistics, Inc.", with year-round headquarters at Glendale, California. This corporation operates three schools, namely the one in Oklahoma and the more recently established ones at Caronport, Sask., Canada and at the University of North Dakota. It also supplies the principal staff of two related schools at Melbourne and London. Townsend is the General Director of this corporation and Pike is its President. The Board of Directors includes these two leaders together with Nida, John A. Hubbard, Richard S. Pittman, E. S. Goodner, Dawson Trotman, Earl K. Wyman and William C. Nyman. Pike is also Director of the institute at Norman, where Nida works with him as Associate Director. The Canadian branch of the corporation is in charge of George M. Cowan and Robert Longacre, and the newly established one in North Dakota is headed by Richard S. Pittman. Ben Elson was Acting Director of the Norman institute in 1953 because Pike was needed to help start the first term of the London institute.²

The permanent position of Eugene Nida is that of Secretary in Charge of Translations with the American Bible Society, New York. Like other members he is loaned to the Institute each summer. During the second semester of each year, Pike serves as an associate Professor at the University of Michigan. Most of the other instructors are paid by their sponsoring missionary organizations. They are people who have completed the usual two-summers’ course at the institute and who have been called back because of their linguistic competence and their demonstrated scholarship. In quite a number of cases they have gone on for advanced graduate study at different universities.

It is chiefly the reputation of the Pike-and-Nida team which draws most of the students and also some visiting scholars to the institute every summer. These two men received their doctorates after becoming directing members of the organization. Nida has done research and checked Bible translations in about forty different countries, which extend from Africa across the Western Hemisphere to the South Pacific. Aside from papers appearing in different journals he has published in rather quick succession the following books: A Translator’s Commentary on Selected Passages, Bible Translating, and Linguistic Interludes, all in 1947; Morphology, 1949; Learning a Foreign Language, 1949; Outline of Descriptive Syntax, 1951; God’s Word in Men's Language, 1952. Kenneth Pike has likewise published a considerable number of papers in the linguistics journal. He has put much of his research material into textbooks. The first of these, Pronunciation, was published in 1942 by the English Language Institute at Ann

² Since the foregoing was written, Nida has severed his connection with the Institute.
Arbor. Four others were published by the University of Michigan Press; *Phonetics*, 1943; *The Intonation of American English*, 1945; *Phonemics: A Technique for Reducing Languages to Writing*, 1947; *Tone Languages*, 1948. We have already referred to his translation of the New Testament.

The schedule of Kenneth Pike during the academic year 1951-52 was characteristic of his activities as a whole. In November he went to Paris to read a paper at a meeting of UNESCO on the problem of the unwritten language in education; from there to England to see about setting up a linguistic institute in that country; then on to the University of Edinburgh to lecture on descriptive linguistics; in December, to Australia to direct the third annual session of the institute at Melbourne. And before he could return to the United States from this last job, his sister, Miss Eunice Pike, was on hand to start his second semester courses at the University of Michigan. But as usual he was on time for his eleven-weeks' summer session at the University of Oklahoma.

The summer program at the institute is characterized by intensive work, a constant use of research materials, good lecturing, an abundant use of exercise and problem material in the drill sections, and an infectious enthusiasm. No linguistic problems seem to be too difficult to attack at the weekly seminars, where the young linguists of the future have ample opportunity to demonstrate their alertness, the adequacy of their background and the soundness of their thinking. When Pike, Nida and a few others flabbergast their listeners with the ever-increasing categories and classifications, the ever-expanding and involved vocabulary of their comparatively new science, there are saving manifestations of humor on the part of their students. The traditional student of language and literature may need to have things explained to him before he can participate intelligently in the seminars. Even the institute's little catalogue could stand some simplification. What, for instance, is "sandhi" or "enclisis"?

In some ways the supervision seems a bit close and the assignments a bit laborious. Some of the requirements of second summer phonemics may serve to illustrate what we mean. A student is required to read a minimum of fifty books and articles bearing on a research topic on which he is doing a paper. A concise systematic report on five of these readings must be handed in every week. Previous to the weekly seminar, at which a published article is always discussed, every student must hand in three questions or comments to show that he or she has read the article rather carefully. Two phonemic term papers, based on work with informants, must be handed in and the second of these must be "written in a style acceptable for publication." The institute is fortunate in having a relatively large number of teachers to
check on its varied assignments and requirements. Few schools have such a favorable student-teacher ratio: six to one! Even the first year students are required to prepare a series of difficult assignments which are due the last week. There is of course an answer to these observations. The institute seeks to train sturdy spirits for a life of religiously oriented scholarship in the jungle.

The ideas of Pike prevail in phonetics and phonemics. Nida heads the work in morphology and syntax, on which he lectures effectively and sometimes brilliantly. He is well versed in field techniques and he therefore recognizes the primacy of phonetics and phonemics in approaching an unwritten language. His lectures are accompanied by the inculcation of certain basic attitudes. He insists upon the descriptive method, the priority of the spoken language, the equal validity and equal sophistication of languages in terms of structure, regardless of primitiveness in material culture. And like all of his colleagues he has a high regard for religious values while insisting that the institute remain strictly within the realm of science. His basic approach is that languages are primarily supposed to be spoken and he is therefore interested in pedagogical grammar as well as in analytical grammar.

In passing, it should be said that wives of staff members and single women linguists are important members of the organization. Throughout the years women, many of whom spend considerable portions of their lives in tribal areas, have made substantial contributions to the teaching and research procedures of the institute. They teach courses, they have charge of drill sections, they help in the careful briefing of instructors, and in the careful correcting and grading of all papers. Among the women who had a part in the early, wandering days of the school’s development was Della Brunsteter Owl, Oklahoma linguist and research worker among the Cherokees.

Descriptive linguistics has many possibilities in addition to the fact that it is a tool for efficient evangelism. We find some of its specialists in the language and anthropology departments of many universities. Unlike historical linguistics it does not require long years of preparatory training, although such training is decidedly advantageous. It has potentialities for childhood and adult education in remote areas and for international conciliation. Students experience early the joy of discovery and a genuine enthusiasm for making contributions to the field. From the very first they are trained to develop a living interest in living languages and in the efforts that are being made to achieve a better understanding of linguistic problems. The two summers’ course at the institute is a rational preparation for the scientific and spoken mastery of any language, whether literary or aboriginal.
APPENDIX

Under the heading "Education," Time magazine for September 14, 1953, p. 73, this news item on William Townsend's work was published:

LEARNING A WRITTEN LANGUAGE

Spanish is the national language of Peru, but close to half a million Peruvians in the vast Amazon jungle areas speak only primitive native tongues and have no written languages. This block to mass education has long been a worrisome problem for the Peruvian government.

In 1946 the government asked William Townsend of the University of Oklahoma's Summer Institute of Linguistics to head a mission to teach the Indians to read and write their own languages. Townsend, a friendly, energetic man who learned his first dialect (Cakchiquel) in 1917 trying to sell Bibles to the Indians of Guatemala, went to Peru in 1945 with eleven assistants. Before they could teach, Townsend and his teachers had to learn the local tongues themselves. Deciding to concentrate on the 18 most widely used dialects, they set off for the jungle.

On with Roast Tapir. The first language barrier to be cracked was that of the Cashibo Indians, who live along the Aguaytia River. There the linguists had a lucky start. Near the village of Pucalipa, they found a Cashibo named Gregorio Estrella, who had lived on the coast and learned Spanish. Recalls one of Townsend's team: "Gregorio led us to his tribe. They were so pleased when they found we wanted to live just the way they did they built a house for us." As a starter, the linguists began asking the names of everyday things: banana, fire, water, house, etc. It was tough going. They found that the only difference between many words was the presence or absence of a glotta; stop (written ' in the phonetic system devised by Townsend). For example, 'ino ka 'oke 'ken means "The jaguar is at the other side of the river." Pronounced without the stop before the third word, the same sounds mean "The jaguar has come." Townsend's team also found that the Cashibos could put the Germans to shame with multisyllabled words.

With the rest of the languages, Townsend's linguists did not always have the luck to find a Spanish-speaking interpreter. But their approach was always the same: gain the confidence of the Indians by living with them and sharing their food (including such exotic dishes as monkey stew and roast tapir). Once a team had learned a language, it set about publishing a simple reading primer in it.