

# FAITHFUL ECHO

by

Robert B. Ekvall

*Foreword by Arthur H. Dean*

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***about the author***

The author, Colonel Robert B. Ekvall (U.S. Army Retired), is presently with the Far Eastern and Russian Institute at the University of Washington in Seattle. Including work as a missionary in Tibet, his exciting and varied life might well be summed up by the notation in his Army file during World War II: "No formal military training; well fitted for combat."

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**TO YOU,  
ALL MY PRINCIPALS,  
TO WHOM I HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL  
IN MY OWN WAY**



# Foreword

In the summer of 1953, immediately following the Korean Armistice, I accompanied Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, Walter Robertson, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Secretary of the Army Robert Stevens, Kenneth Young, the Director of the Office of North East Asian Affairs, and Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge to Korea.

As Deputy to the Secretary of State, my immediate job was to assist the Secretary of State and the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs in connection with the release of prisoners and in working out the many details involved in our relations with the Republic of Korea, which, once fighting had ceased, would once again be free to take up the manifold duties of civil government in a beautiful but war-torn country.

The first job was to try and work out a treaty of mutual defense between the United States of America and the Republic of Korea and to provide for the retention of the South Korean Armies in the United Nations' Command, at that time led by General John H. M. Lee at Tokyo and Major General Maxwell D. Taylor in Korea.

The Armistice which had just been signed at Panmunjom called for the setting up of a political conference which was to attempt to work out the basis for the unification of North and South Korea and to take charge of the prisoners who had not as yet been exchanged.

On the way back, Mr. Dulles and Assistant Secretary Robertson explained that this complicated matter of the Political Conference was going to come up before the General Assembly of the United Nations immediately upon our return, and it was arranged that I should work with Ambassador Lodge and the ambassadors of the other fifteen nations which had contributed troops for the United Nations' Command in connection with the fighting in Korea.

After a few weeks of debate at the United Nations, it became apparent that it would be necessary to go to Panmunjom to discuss the question of setting up the conference at a meeting with the Chinese Communists, the Korean Government, and the North Korean Communists in Panmunjom itself.

Inasmuch as the Government of the United States did not recognize either the *de jure* or *de facto* existence of either the Chinese Communist Government or the Communist Government of North Korea, and as we were to negotiate in the very heart of Korea with troops on both sides of the 38th parallel, and our negotiations would vitally affect the future of that country, its people, and the peace, the preparation for the conference was intense.

Everything had to be carefully studied and formulated; every move had to be tested and retested. We were operating within the precise boundary limits of the armistice agreement; we were dealing with people whom we did not recognize and who might not carry out their agreements. The question naturally arose as to how far we could go in the way of concessions and whether, if we received any concessions in return, they would be worth anything.

At the time of the preparation for the conference, we

had no way of communicating with the Chinese Communist Government or the Communist Government of North Korea except through a government that did recognize the existence of Communist China and which had not itself furnished troops to the United Nations Command in the Korean War. We are greatly indebted to the Swedish Government for its good offices in this respect.

The actual negotiations were carried on high up in the mountains of Korea, at Panmunjom, in a tent placed athwart the 38th parallel of latitude. In the center of the tent, at right angles to its length, there was a narrow green baize table. Down the center of that table ran the 38th parallel.

The Chinese Communists and the Korean Communists entered from the north with no right to cross to the southern part, and we entered from the south with no right to cross to the northern part. The stove was on the Communist side. It was either completely out, or so hot as to make the windowless tent almost unbearable.

Huang Hua was the Chinese Communist ambassador. He is an accomplished linguist, and his interpreter, Pu Shou-ch'ang, an accomplished Chinese and English student, indeed, a Ph.D. from Harvard. He had been at Harvard at the same time as was my deputy, Kenneth Young. The official languages of the conference were Chinese, English, and Korean.

Every statement had to be carefully and precisely formulated the evening before and then translated into Chinese and Korean. Since the Chinese and English languages are in no sense similar in structure, many hours had to be spent in making sure that what we wanted to be said could be said correctly and precisely in both the Chinese and Korean languages.

Dr. Ekvall's scholarly ability and his facility in turning a phrase were of inestimable value.

At the meetings themselves, which frequently became heated—at least on the Chinese and Korean side—the Chinese ambassador used to hurl charges and countercharges against the United States of America, its allies, its President and its generals, and particularly against its ally South Korea and its President, Syngman Rhee, and daily called the undersigned, as the negotiator for the United States of America, the Republic of Korea, and the other fifteen nations which had contributed troops, a repetitive series of filthy names and epithets.

In this book, Colonel Ekvall states his recollection that although Ambassador Huang Hua could speak perfect English, in the negotiations with him at Panmunjom he never spoke it. My recollection varies only slightly.

Huang Hua tried repeatedly to say that the United States Command under General Mark Clark had connived with Syngman Rhee to release the prisoners in June of 1953, a month or so before the Armistice. That night, by the dim light of an electric bulb in an army tent, I made a careful review of all the conversations between General Mark Clark and the Chinese Communist General Li Sang Jo, and the next day quoted General Li Sang Jo's apology to General Clark for having originally made this charge. Ambassador Huang Hua's face became purple and he cursed me in English, which he had not spoken up to that time. I promptly complimented him on his beautiful English pronunciation.

The system of not having simultaneous translation is not quite as time wasting as is often supposed. While the Chinese tirade went on, Colonel Ekvall used to whisper to me its general nature and purport so I could begin to

write out my reply and pass it back to Colonel Ekvall and Lieutenant Campen, my Korean interpreter, so that they in turn could begin to put my reply into the Chinese and Korean languages.

When the charges run thick and fast and replies have to be made quickly and on the spot, this imposes an enormous burden upon the translator—his throat becomes dry and his tongue sometimes thick.

The strain on the translators on both sides of the narrow table was quickly noticeable. Often, even though the precise meaning and purport of the Chinese words were not known to me, the staccato cadence of Ambassador Huang Hua's speech, the swelling of his face and the distension of the cords of his neck and veins on his forehead were enough to convey the idea that he was enraged and was denouncing the United States and its allies in violent terms. After a short while the repeated sound of certain words becomes a general clue to the nature and content of the verbal barrage.

The nature and method of negotiating with the Communists is always a difficult one. Generally speaking, before they make the slightest concession they launch an attack which mounts in intensity. Often one can sense that they are going to make a concession by the very intensity of the mounting onslaught.

By the pale, sickly light of an electric bulb high in an army tent, it was necessary nightly to pore over documents and the minutes of the armistice negotiations for many hours before statements or replies could be formulated. Then the daily instructions from the State Department had to be decoded and put into effect.

In all of this labor, Colonel Ekvall's work as a translator was invaluable, as were his judgment and knowledge

of the Chinese character, a hobby of mine for many years. I commend Colonel Ekvall's book and hope that it will serve to explain in some measure the very useful role that a translator serves. Language, however, is a tool and is only as useful as the skill of the one who makes the statement.

Unless one has studied at great length and with infinite care the issues involved in the history of the two nations and has carefully formulated each possible solution and the risks involved in each proposal, both in relation to continuance of the possible conflict and the effect upon the lives and fortunes of the people on whose territory the war is fought, and the interrelations of the particular conflict with the over-all and long-range policies of Communist China and the U.S.S.R., facility in language can be a dangerous as well as a useful function.

Having also attended briefly in the United Nations on the Korean questions and served as Chairman of the United States Delegation at the two Conferences on the Law of the Sea at Geneva in 1958 and 1960, I experienced interpretation where a simultaneous system of translation is in use and several translators may interpret a single speech. The dulcet tones of a lady translator can sometimes be heard at the same time as the raging and ranting voice of a Communist orator, and the effect is often ludicrous. I think seriatim translating by a single translator after every two or three sentences or a paragraph has much to commend it because one can hear the tones of the speaker. Translation, of course, is not a mere faithful word by word rendering of the grammatical structure of a sentence, but rather it is a faithful rendering of the content and true purport of what the speaker is trying to say in an

effective reply. Colonel Ekvall is an artist at this type of translation.

I commend this book to the reader interested in the meaning of language and in the problems of the translator and of his principal. Fortunately, each was sympathetic to the other's problems.

ARTHUR H. DEAN

*New York,*  
*May 23, 1960*



# Preface

This book seeks to promote awareness of the problem of communication in a world which must communicate and arrive at understanding or dissolve in conflict. Even the brutes can make war, but it is speech which distinguishes man from other creatures, and language is indeed the universal link between the members of the human race. Yet for man, in the crisis of his present need to understand and make himself understood, the link of language seems at times to fail: though language is universal there is no universal language. The confusion of tongues still exists.

Thus there arises the need for the interpreter and his role. This book presents some aspects of that role from the point of view of one who was an interpreter. It makes no claim to being a scholarly treatment of the function of language, yet semantics, comparative linguistics, the transference of concepts from culture to culture, and many aspects of the problem of communication in international relations appear in anecdote and brief analysis. Scholars and students in all these areas of study and research may find something in it of interest or by way of illustration. As such it is offered to the reader.

ROBERT B. EKVALL







# I

“Yes, we do have a Chinese interpreter.”

As the United States colonel uttered the words, I echoed them in Chinese. The echo was the voice of a stranger, self-conscious and formal with the catch in it that comes from a dry pulsing in the throat, and a breathlessness like that which follows a plunge into icy water. The carefully intoned Chinese syllables, that can be made to sing so precisely with meaning, sounded slightly pompous and empty, matching, too, something of the many futilities uttered again and again in the truce negotiation hut of Panmunjom.

In the silence that followed, the Chinese and Koreans across the conference table turned their eyes on me, picking me out from among other United Nations Command personnel in the room and identifying me as the first non-Chinese interpreter who had spoken for the United Nations.

Colonel Ju, North Korean staff officer and communist spokesman, stared impassively, yet with a certain intent comprehension. In the war against the Japanese, he had spent years in China with the Eighth Route Army, and was known to speak Chinese fluently. Somewhere a smile struggled and died; then he spoke.

“I withdraw my objection. The meeting can go on. The three languages, Chinese, Korean, and English, are of

equal rank and validity. Thus all meetings must be held in the three languages.”

The words were spoken in Korean. They were repeated in English, then in Chinese, and the meeting stumbled on at its slow trilingual pace. There was plenty of time in which to get my breathing under control before Colonel Odren answered in English and that answer was successively echoed in Korean and Chinese.

At the beginning of the staff level meeting that afternoon, Colonel Odren had been in a hurry, and right after the Korean interpretation of his opening sentence, without allowing me time to give the Chinese interpretation, he had hurried into his second sentence. Also, I had been slow. It was my first time at the conference table, and I had failed to catch my cue and cut into what closely resembled a game of verbal ping pong. Promptly, and with the obvious enjoyment of having caught the Americans technically at fault, Colonel Ju had called the turn.

“The meeting cannot go on. I see you have no Chinese interpreter. In the procedural agreement concerning the conduct of these meetings, it is stated that the three languages, Korean, Chinese, and English, are of equal rank and validity.”

But Colonel Ju had been wrong. We did have a Chinese interpreter, and, faintly smiling, Colonel Odren told him so. Underwood, the United Nations Command English-Korean interpreter, echoed the statement in Korean, and I finally caught my cue and announced in Chinese the same foolish fact, for it did seem foolish to speak of myself so in the third person. Yet with those words, hurried, breathy, and unsure, I introduced myself, not only to the staff level meeting of the afternoon, but to the strangely interesting role of being the essential echo in

international meetings and conferences at many levels. Since that afternoon there have been many meetings, but the opening syllables are always somewhat like that first half-embarrassed self-introduction. There is always that slight catch in the throat, that moment of tension, for each time it is the beginning of an adventure in linguistics wherein surprises and unknowns await in ambush and threaten semantic confusion.

They asked me later what that first experience was like. My answer still holds good:

“It is like walking down a narrow alley in the dark, expecting a dog to jump out from behind each bush and snap at your ankles. He generally does.”

## II

The immediate causes and events that took me to the truce negotiation hut at Panmunjom in the spring of 1953 were sudden and short in sequence, reflecting oddly the vagaries of army routine and decision. Three weeks prior to that afternoon I had been in a hide-out, a valley sleeping in the sun, just behind the Berkeley, California, hills. I was a lieutenant colonel in the Officer's Reserve Corps, but the Korean war, as such, had passed me by. The army had recalled on “extended active duty” young company grade officers to lead patrols and command combat units. It had no further use for lieutenant colonels who were more than mature and also somewhat irregular. Accord-

ing to army standards, I was very much a "civilian soldier" even when in uniform, although my physical characteristics and certain mannerisms, acquired from experiences in strange places, helped me masquerade at times almost as a West Pointer. The army, I was sure, had no further use for me.

Moreover, in that California hide-out I was neck deep in the task of writing something tentatively entitled "The Universals of Tibetan Religious Observance and Their Function." It was to show how religion—in this case the Lamaist Buddhism of Tibet—formed and controlled a doctrinocentric society and influenced every aspect of its culture. When completed it might become a pilot study or model of how to evaluate other societies controlled by religion, either Buddhistic or Islamic.

So my time was divided between the University of California Library, lengthy sessions of fact finding and argument with the brother of the Dalai Lama who was in Berkeley at the time, spasms of intensive writing, and some very pleasant hours spent on the nearby tennis courts. The hide-out was perfect—we didn't even have a telephone—and the book had begun to grow page by page and then chapter by chapter.

But that book was never finished; it still awaits completion. For one day on the way back through the village from the post office, everyone I met told me that the sheriff was looking for me, and back home I found a note on my door telling me to get in touch with that office. Such a summons, even when the first of a lifetime, is distinctly disturbing, and I was immensely relieved to learn no laws had been broken. I had only to call Washington and ask for operator sixteen.

A voice said, "Colonel Ekvall? This is General Powell."

I had been out of the army for over two years and thought never to return to it. I had even lost my army manners, so answered, "Yes," with that rising inflection which means, if it does not quite say, "So what?"

"General Powell, G-1. We've had quite a job locating you. Finally called your publisher in New York and they gave us your address."

G-1—personnel. My neck crawled and a premonition snapped me back to old habits. "Yes *sir*." Even before he spoke further I knew that I was back in the army.

"We need you at the truce negotiations at Panmunjom. We would like to call you back on extended active duty. That is, with your consent." The language was all consideration but, the tone was urgent.

When and for how long? What should I do about my family? What about my engagement to teach in the fall of 1953? These and many more were questions which could scarcely be asked, much less answered in a three-minute telephone call, but I learned enough. I asked for a day, my answer to be given in another telephone call twenty-four hours later, but I already knew I was on my way. I could hardly stay on in Sunshine Valley writing a book when I might be of some help at Panmunjom. Six days later, with three shots in each arm to remind me painfully that I really was back in the army, I was on my way to the Far East and Panmunjom (English translation—the Inn with the Planken Door), that little island of truce talks in the midst of a battlefield, that place where men talked across a green-topped table of a truce, an armistice, and peace. But as they talked on in the three equal languages—English, Chinese, and Korean—time went fast and agreement came slowly and artillery and mortar fire raised clouds of dust on the nearby hills while other men died.

# III

The basic causes, the more remote sequence of events that took me to Panmunjom, extended far back in time and were laid in distant places. They derived from my birth and childhood on the Sino-Tibetan border, where I learned to speak Chinese as a second mother tongue. That early natural childhood use of words had nothing to do with interpreting. I spoke Chinese when appropriate because I thought in Chinese when appropriate. It was somewhat like throwing a mental switch and moving to another track: the switch was thrown automatically whenever I heard Chinese spoken.

Yet somewhere in that happy bilingual state of semantic innocence, the problem of interpretation, as such, did arise. I remember, somewhat vaguely, my first experience in the search for semantic equivalents as I explained *Robinson Crusoe*, page by page and scene by scene, to my Chinese playmates, after which we staged, with the help of imagination and a packing case, a shipwreck in the back yard.

I grew older and learned other languages the hard adult way. But because of that early bilingual experience, I stubbornly resisted transposing, word by word, from one language to another. Instead, I persisted in trying to think, even if haltingly, in the new tongue until it became truly mine.

Later, as missionary, anthropologist, and still later, as an army officer, languages were to become tools for the accomplishing of tasks. The tools were edged and whetted for the splitting of hairs, polished to the brilliance of new and strange phrasing or weighted and blunt for hammering out truth on the anvil of argument.

As a missionary, long before the tools were capably used to influence and change others, the gain was my own. Basic concepts on which belief is grounded or from which motivation springs lost some of the narrowness of purely Western meaning when uttered in Eastern speech and, so spoken, became more the rounded whole of human desire and aspiration—the common cry of all the sons of Adam—more universal and therefore more truly Christian. In the process of being rethought in Chinese or Tibetan old truths took on a new depth of meaning, were garbed in nuances, luminous and rare, and moved nearer the manifestation of their primal glory. Of all gains, the first gain was my own.

Then with the heft and feel of the tools of speech, there came a sense of power. Language could tear to pieces and build anew the conceptual world of a man—Confucian scholar, peasant, herdsman, or lama. Once that world was newly formed in a man's thinking, his attitudes and habits changed until such individual change widened, like ripples in a pool, to modify the pattern of communal living. Great was the power of speech.

In the narrow sense of the word, this use of language was not interpretation, yet in a broader sense it was a sublimation of the function of interpretation. For each such fragment of time, whether under a tiled roof among many tiled roofs within the walls of a grey Chinese city, or in a tent among those making a circle on the bleak

Tibetan plateau, the place of my stay became a humble approximation of the "House of the Interpreter."

In ethnology, language was a probe to be used in ascertaining the many detailed fragments that go to make the whole of a culture. By patient use of that probe, tribal history, kinship relationships, social attitudes, patterns of group behavior, and even the elusive subtleties of motivation were traced and identified in a comprehension that remained Tibetan in thought and word until the necessity of recording the result in English drove me to the distasteful labor of translating.

Language, however, was more than a tool: in itself it was a source and proof of some of the aspects of culture. The very number of Tibetan terms for horse—nine in common use—was an index of the importance of the horse in a nomadic culture. The incidence of loanwords furnished clues concerning past cultural contacts; place names helped outline history which had never been recorded; and differences of structure and phonetics within a language aided in determination of differing rates of linguistic change which in turn contributed to the establishment (or delimitation) of the central and peripheral areas of a culture.

Quite apart from all considerations of form and meaning I came to realize and rely on the emotive power of the mother tongue—what the Chinese, with deep psychological insight, call *ju-yü*, the suckling speech—to trigger emotional responses and evoke action. Linked with this is the special power and influence of dialect, as such, to reach deeper than formal comprehension. But this strange power operates at optimum only when phonetically perfect, an accent which passes unchallenged in the dark.

This experience of, and experimentation with, the

power of speech was not something which took place in the vacuum of a linguistic laboratory, academic and undisturbed. Nor even, necessarily, in the process of peaceful persuasion or leisurely fact finding. The best of such experience irrupted in moments of hazard or danger. Speech had found its ultimate use when the rifles finally wavered and turned away as the Chinese bandits faltered before a bluff and let my party pass to safety.

My voice in the dark, insistent and heavily accented in their own dialect and slang, brought a troop of the Moslem cavalry of Big Horse to a halt in the streets of the city they were about to loot and turned them away from the compound where over two hundred Chinese huddled in mortal terror, hoping with slight assurance, for refuge. It was speech, blistering invective strangely mixed with Confucian platitudes, that turned vengeful Chinese militia away from the great gate behind which were sheltered several score Moslem women and children and gave them their lives. It is true that, somewhat ridiculously, I sat in front of that gate with a rifle across my knees. But that was merely an empty gesture; it was language that wrung assent from the officer in command and sent the soldiers on their way.

Again and again throughout those years I sensed issues of life and death hanging upon a phrase or turning upon a sentence. It was language, touching pride, respect, humour or the consciousness of a common humanity, that could evoke or restrain action. Language proved itself the universal link between the members of the human race. The great weapon, the final defense is a word fitly spoken.

Happily, not all of my linguistically oriented experiences had to do with danger and crisis. I remember the

amazement of a Chinese innkeeper as on a cold dark night he finally opened the doors to a traveller who had talked him into taking just one more guest and by the flare of his torch, discovered that the traveller who rode in was a "foreign devil." I remember the Tibetan refugee who halted her horse on a dust track to tell me all the details of her tribe's rebellion against, and flight from, Chinese suppression, answering my questions as one Tibetan to another until she belatedly noticed my blond hair and blue eyes under my great Tibetan hat. Such are the physical attributes of certain demons in hell, and, lo, one now stood on the trail and talked with her. Sheer panic sliced a phrase neatly in two and sent her horse down the trail at a mad gallop.

All this and much more of long experience that bore testimony to the power of speech I remember from a past that was part of an unsought preparation for my task.

## IV

It was knowledge of the Chinese language that suddenly, in the spring of 1944, made me an army officer. General Stilwell, himself an excellent speaker of Chinese and keenly aware of the power of speech uninterrupted and unmutilated by interpretation, had stated that he needed Chinese-speaking Americans in northern Burma. His chief of staff, General Haydon Boatner, who also spoke Chinese well, made a hasty trip to Washington. Following a Pen-

tagon conference on the Far East, I was brought to his attention. After two years of internment in Indochina, I had been repatriated two months before and, like many others, found myself in Washington trying to help the war effort. But a desk job, even with the Office of Strategic Services, is a poor way in which to help win a war, and until the meeting with Boatner, the G-2 conference had seemed very much like the many other futile meetings I had attended.

“Yes, I have heard about you.” General Boatner’s face was completely noncommittal about what he had heard, but possibly there was amusement in his sudden brusque appraisal. “How would you like to go to Burma?”

I thought I would, but not as a civilian. A civilian with the army can be forlorn creature, and besides, I had worn a uniform for two short months in 1918.

Could I pass an army physical? How much was I making? Could I get released from the job I then held?

The army physical was, I was sure, no problem, although I was still thin from internment in Indochina.

“Take a 50 percent cut in pay and I’ll try to get you a commission, though they’re tougher to get now than a year or two ago. Send me a statement of vital statistics.”

I sent the statement and nine days later I was a captain in the Army of the United States. Fortunately, from among the things I had started to learn in 1918, I remembered how to salute. They kept me in Washington just long enough to give me the first two thirds of the necessary shots and to let me finish a paper I was doing for the Office of Strategic Services, for that was part of the bargain that released me from that agency. Six weeks later I was under fire in the jungles of northern Burma.

For nine months, in the rough and tumble of jungle

warfare or the long stalemate of the siege of Myitkyina, I put to full use all the principles of security and survival I had learned as a missionary among the nomads of Tibet. Even marksmanship and the cleaning of firearms came in handy as I taught cooks and clerks, suddenly made fighting soldiers on the perimeter of Myitkyina, how to load and fire. My card in the field file carried the odd notation; "No formal military training; well fitted for combat."

Knowledge of the Chinese language had been my ticket to Burma, but once there it became an adjunct, though important, to action. When I found myself in command of a detachment of Merrill's Marauders, and we had to get mortar and machine gun ammunition up front, it helped me effectively to beg men from each Chinese unit which passed until there were enough of them—each one capable of carrying his weight in ammunition—to constitute a transport unit and get the stuff to the head of the column, stretched like a slender twisted thread of sweat and anguish through a jungle too dense for movement.

Chinese, particularly Chinese slang, helped me gain and direct loyalty and a certain eager initiative from a detachment of Chinese Sixth Army soldiers assigned as a work detail to the Myitkyina task force headquarters where it fell to me to get some *bashas* (temporary bamboo structures) built when officially there was no bamboo to be had for construction. After an appropriate pep talk in Chinese, without need of interpretation, they brought me at next dawn all the bamboo required with no questions asked, though we cut it up in a hurry. It is true the British civil affairs officer a day or two later made a great fuss about some bamboo which had mysteriously disap-

peared from certain of his stockpiles. But he had been holding that bamboo far too long, and in the meantime the command post *bashas* had been built to the amazement of the G-4 who was still seeking bamboo "through channels."

Chinese came in handy when, as officer-messenger, I visited frontline command posts, charged with telling some Chinese unit commander how unsatisfactory had been the part his detachment had played in the attack of the previous day and how they must do better or else. At least I had no interpreter with me to water down, for considerations of face saving my close adherence to the strong language of General Boatner's original message, but at the same time there was nobody else present at the talk to spread an exaggerated version of the reprimand to all the eager ears which had no business to hear.

Knowledge of Chinese also helped me organize the enplanement of two Chinese divisions which were flown over the Hump in the late fall of 1944. Much of the enplanement was carried out after dark with no lights permitted, for Japanese bombers still visited the area. It is in the dark, when no gesture, signal or even facial expression gives any assist to communication, that speech has its final test of usefulness, and long lines of men moved from the shadows of the revetments into the dark planes in what was officially characterized as "the fastest enplanement of troops yet known."

But in all these and many more odd jobs, language was an able assistance to effort. It did not in itself constitute either the problem or its solution. It remained for another task to take me close to interpretation as a function in itself.

In the half-dug-in, sandbagged task force command post

on the edge of the Myitkyina airstrip, a staff conference took place each afternoon at five o'clock.

It was attended by a strange assortment of officers: the Chinese commanders of the Chinese troops fighting and digging their way toward the Jap lines; the commanding officer of Galahad—the Merrill's Marauders detachment—haggard and yellow from weeks of K rations, dysentery, and Atabrine; the British commanding officer of the ack-ack stationed around the field; the Air Force officers charged with the timing and delivery of bombing and strafing missions when most needed. They came to give a reckoning of what had happened or had mishappened during the past twenty-four hours, and to listen to the plan of what should be done during the next day. In grim concentration they crowded close in the sandbagged space before the board, plastered with maps and charts and suddenly blacked-in figures giving the exact times or numbers of yards which were matters of life or death importance.

The staff conference was high level but there were interruptions and distractions that disturbed it. Sometimes they came close to breaking it up. The Jap artillery would occasionally range the area or Jap planes would pay a visit. Often our own planes, back from missions over Japanese positions only a few hundred yards away, would celebrate by buzzing the field, reducing all speech to a meaningless making of faces.

Yet such interruptions or distractions came from without and were occasional. The real interruptions and distractions—built-in and permanent—developed within the staff conference itself, for it was bilingual.

The task force chief of staff, marking the map and spelling out the schedule of operations for the next twenty-

four hours, spoke English, as did the officers directing air strikes and artillery and mortar barrages. So too did the commanding officer of Galahad, who felt very much alone in his sector of the perimeter, with the Irrawaddy River on one side of him and a Chinese unit on the other. His patrols were never sure whom they heard whispering in the jungle darkness. They swore that sometimes the Japs spoke Chinese, and one patrol had confidently answered what they thought was a Chinese greeting only to be riddled at close range with automatic fire.

The other front line unit commanders spoke only Chinese. The commanding general of the 10th Division was there, reporting the gains or losses, in terms of yards or men, of the previous night, listening to the plans of the attack his men were scheduled to make the next night, and having inarticulate ideas of his own about how to penetrate the enemy lines and roll up the defense. The regiment and battalion commanders, each with a special part in the costly advance, spoke only Chinese as did the officers of the transportation units who kept the food and ammunition moving from the airstrip to the front lines between the carefully timed concentrations of artillery and mortar fire.

Between these two groups, trapped by the need for a two-way exchange of information, were the official interpreters: young Chinese students with widely varying knowledge of the English language. Some were extremely competent; but even perfect familiarity with textbook and classroom English may falter when confronted with American slang and idiom compounded with the military jargon of a staff conference.

From the time of the original successful attack on the airfield in early May to the final day of the siege on the

3rd of August, the battle of Myitkyina was a classic example of confusion and plans which went awry. This has already been recorded in any number of official reports and studies, as well as in vitriolic personal memoirs. The blame has been placed all the way from Washington through Mountbatten's headquarters in Kandy to intrigues in Chungking. But there on the spot, General Boatner knew enough Chinese to suspect shrewdly that some of the confusion originated in the staff conference itself. As a result of that suspicion, I received my most important or at least most nerve-racking—assignment.

“Hang your ear over the sandbags—I don't want you inside or conspicuous. Whenever a mistake or omission is made in interpretation, interrupt at once and set the record straight.” Thus I became, not an interpreter, but an interrupter of interpreters. Also I was to remain inconspicuous.

It was a thankless job. Of course, all the interpreters hated me with a deep, special hatred. At various times efforts were made to get rid of my presence. And their principals—a staff officer expounding a situation or plan at top speed or a unit commander telling in loving detail his troubles and the toll of his losses—bore with ill grace and ill will the aggravation of interruption. Boatner himself would turn red with rage and his sharp “Well, Ekvall” sounded frequently like a court-martial sentence. Yet slowly the value of a check and recheck of what was transposed from language to language became established.

The chief of staff was telling of a planned attack, his pointer moving restlessly over the situation map on the board. “The enemy position, point X [the pointer stopped its movement to rest purposefully on the black X] will be boxed in, and reinforcements cut off, by mortar and artil-

lery fire and airstrikes during the attack. The 1st Battalion of the 38th Regiment, in two waves of company strength each, will advance behind a barrage that starts at 0745 hours. They will dislodge the enemy, dig in, take all defensive measures, and hold against the enemy counter-attack." As the interpretation started, he muttered an aside: "Not lose it like the last time the Nips counterattacked."

But as he was muttering, the glib paraphrase in Chinese was under way. "The American chief of staff says that the 1st Battalion of the 38th Regiment in two companies are to follow a barrage that starts at 0745 hours and drive the enemy from the point he shows on the map marked X. It will be like a box because of mortars and artillery fire and blows from the air. The troops are to stay there."

I interrupted in English: "The interpretation is not exact and not complete." And again in Chinese: "The interpretation, not exact, not complete."

The chief of staff jerked upright; the Chinese officers turned toward me with strange intentness or whispered with their Chinese interpreters; the commanding officer of Galahad groaned, "Oh God, can't we ever just fight a war in English?"; and the back of General Boatner's neck swelled darkly red. No matter how they glared, I had to continue in Chinese, my voice consciously stressing the omissions: "The correction. *During the attack* the point will be cut off on all sides by mortar and artillery fire and bombing from the air *to prevent enemy reinforcement* and the troops *will dig in, take all defensive measures and hold against the counterattack.*"

Questions and answers, denial and assertion followed. It had been said. It had not been said. Say it again. But

after his first exasperated explosion, the back of General Boatner's neck lightened in color and the Chinese commanding officers nodded attentively, even appreciatively.

It is not easy to interrupt a staff conference that deals with the success or failure of an attack where every misunderstanding will be paid for in casualties. I wiped the sweat from my face and lay in wait for the next mistake or omission, wondering, too, when someone would turn on me.

Once, a staff conference, a simple one without complications, went off without an interruption and I relaxed, inconspicuous at last, against the sandbags. But as Boatner passed me on his way out he growled, "Damn it, Ekvall, what's the matter? You asleep?"

There was no way out. I was damned if I did and damned if I didn't. But, on orders, I kept on interrupting the daily staff conferences until Myitkyina fell. This, too, was a part of the preparation for my task in the negotiation hut of Panmunjom.

## V

Following the Burma interlude, two rounds of experience, one in Chungking and one in Peking, taught me something more of the function of interpretation.

Simultaneously with the end of the Burma campaign and the opening of the Burma Road I found myself in the wartime United States headquarters in Chungking.

There I translated French intelligence reports for a week or so and then was assigned as liaison officer between G-2 of the United States headquarters and the Chinese military intelligence establishment. The Chinese language became once more a tool at my disposal for the unearthing of facts and for getting things done.

Once a week the Sino-American joint staff met in the United States headquarters. General Wedemeyer, as newly appointed chief of staff to Chiang Kai-shek, in his capacity as commander in chief of the China Theater, was intent on repairing the breach in Sino-American cooperation left by his predecessor. The weekly joint staff conference, attended by high-ranking United States and Chinese officers, was at once a symbol of this renewed stress on cooperation and joint planning and action and a forum where disagreements concerning policy and strategy were aired and argued into some degree of compromise rather than allowed to fester into greater misunderstanding and cross-purpose. The meeting was also, inevitably, bilingual.

As briefing officer, I had been placed in the staff conference to get at first hand the report the chief of the Chinese intelligence gave at each meeting. I sat between, and behind, General Wedemeyer and his intelligence officer. My services as interpreter, or even as monitor of interpretation, were not needed. At this level, only the most highly qualified interpreters functioned and the performance they turned in was superb. They were, however, strictly official, i.e., they only interpreted official pronouncements. But not everything said in the staff conference was of an official nature.

A statement or suggestion would be made by the United States command, either by General Wedemeyer in per-

son or through his authorized spokesman. The appropriate Chinese officer would respond in agreement, disagreement well veiled in circumlocution, or counterproposal. However, before that reply was ever uttered or even formulated there would be much said in quick asides and mutterings between the Chinese officers at the table. The formal reply was duly and accurately, even brilliantly, interpreted, but no one was authorized to interpret, and no one did interpret, those other quick asides and *sub rosa* consultations.

They had a flavor all their own and, uttered in the real or fancied safety of noncomprehension, were uninhibited and candid, often oddly at variance with what was finally and formally spoken for official interpretation. The official response might be vague or blandly noncommittal, but the *inter alios* comment which preceded that response might have been bitterly critical, revealing both suspicion and hostility. Some who officially had little to say in support of United States policies were revealed by their asides as being staunchly pro-American; others whose urbanity never showed a public flaw would mock and jibe with acid disdain and deep suspicion in those whispered consultations.

In his book *La Machine à Lire la Pensée*, André Maurois has developed with humor, irony, and rare understanding the complications and consequences which would arise from direct comprehension of what is thought without having to rely on what is said. The Chinese asides, uttered in the careless assumption that they were well-veiled in noncomprehension, produced somewhat the same effect. Hearing them gave one the feeling of possessing psychic understanding disdainful of mere speech.

One day, when the asides had been spirited and long,

a whispered question and answer exchange between General Wedemeyer and myself resulted in passing on to him and his intelligence officer a recapitulation of what had been said in Chinese. From that day on, as the Chinese muttered to each other, I whispered to General Wedemeyer, providing him with a direct knowledge of the innermost machinations of the Chinese officers. It was a new aspect of interpretation and another stage along the road to Panmunjom. This role of eavesdropping interpreter was not glorious, but it was useful in fostering comprehension and understanding; useful even if at the risk of some injury to sensibilities, preconceptions, and complacency.

The end of the war found me in a hospital. While on a special mission at the front I had blundered into a confused fire-fight in a village street. Months later I emerged from the hospital at Atlantic City just in time to be caught in the whirl of Marshall mission preparations and was once again scrambled at high speed through Pentagon procedure and rushed to Peking to take my place in the effort of that mission to mediate between the Communist and Nationalist Chinese.

At executive headquarters in Peking most of my work had little to do with the Chinese language. On the side, I familiarized myself with Peking and polished my back-country Chinese with the big city accent. I had my minor linguistic triumphs at many Sino-American parties and banquets and made the most of the uninhibited social and official contacts with the Chinese officers—Nationalist and Communist—in the headquarters.

The headquarters was tripartite in organization—American, Nationalist Chinese, and Communist Chinese. Each American officer had two Chinese counterparts with

strangely conflicting views. The many interlocking official and social contacts—the emblem of the organization on the official shoulder patch was the interlocking rings of a Ballantine Ale ad—afforded a splendid opportunity to note and compare the different beliefs, thinking, and even language of both Chinese Communists and those other Chinese who gave their loyalty to the Nationalist Chinese Government in Nanking. I soaked up impressions and information, increasingly amazed at the deformation of traditional viewpoint and character achieved by Communist indoctrination.

Under the influence of the new doctrine, even language had changed. The Chinese Communists, to a certain degree which varied according to individual predisposition but which had nothing to do with variations of dialect, spoke differently from the Nationalist Chinese. It was manifest even then that they intended, among all the other “reforms,” nothing less than a revision of the Chinese language itself.

In Peking, as during all previous periods of association with the Chinese, I was frequently called upon to interpret in haphazard, impromptu fashion, conversation, speeches, toasts and—worst of all—jokes. This sort of thing requires not the exact style of conference room interpreting but a sort of running paraphrase stated as an indirect quotation such as “The general says . . .” or “The colonel on this happy occasion wishes to propose. . .” Often the general or the colonel appeared as an unhappy figure standing with raised glass but halted in mid-course by the sudden realization that he is not being understood.

Twice such paraphrasing, which was not haphazard, took me into the innermost core of Marshall mission negotiation. Once, Yeh Chien-ying, Communist commis-

sioner, who was exerting, with a fair measure of success, all his not inconsiderable personal charm to sell himself to Walter Robertson, the United States commissioner, sent word that he wished to see Robertson on extremely important and sensitive business, and since his own interpreter was ill, could Major Ekvall be present? His own interpreter, Huang Hua, later of Panmunjom note in the Ambassador Dean negotiations and presently to be a figure of importance in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Peking Government, was even at that time much more than an interpreter, so Yeh Chien-ying may well have wished to avoid a possible witness against himself on this occasion. But Yeh Chien-ying also wished to bypass any of the other official interpreters who, whether Nationalist Chinese or American, were still of the Chinese race and so to the Oriental mind indivisible parts of the Chinese race-culture mass and, as such, judged to be inextricably involved in the struggle which was tearing that mass apart. Thus I was the one who transposed from Chinese to English and from English to Chinese those matters too confidential to admit of official interpretation.

At another time, under similar circumstances, I was the man in the middle of a triangle composed of the United States commissioner, Walter Robertson, the Nationalist commissioner, Chen Kai-min, and the Communist commissioner, Yeh Chien-ying. As the argument developed, both Chen Kai-min and Yeh Chien-ying lapsed into their common native dialect, an extremely local variation of Cantonese, and were soon shouting at each other in very warm terms of which I had only the vaguest idea and I was forced to request a repeat in standard Chinese so Mr. Robertson might be informed of the details and extent of their disagreement.

Of all my Peking experiences, it was service on Team Twenty-five that in a very special way rounded out my preparation for interpreting and negotiating against the Chinese Communists. In the summer of 1946, a United States Marine column, moving on a routine supply mission from Tientsin to Peking, was ambushed near the village of Anchien by armed forces of unknown (but strongly suspect) identity and forced to fight its way through, receiving in the battle a number of casualties. The Nationalists immediately accused the Communists of making the attack, and the Communists, with equal fervor and finality, accused the Nationalists of making the attack in order to sabotage the Marshall mission negotiations. Team Twenty-five was assigned to investigate the incident.

Team Twenty-five, conforming to the three-ring tradition, was a tripartite organization: Americans, Nationalist Chinese, and Communist Chinese in equal proportion, all amply staffed with great numbers of assistants, secretaries, clerks, and interpreters. The team was solemnly charged with the mission of finding the facts and reporting the truth. The prescribed procedure for Team Twenty-five was naively simple on the surface. It was, in congressional parlance, to hold hearings on the scene and in all the interested headquarters and take testimony from all—soldiers, officers, peasants, travellers, and local officials—who might possibly divulge facts. The facts were to be the basis for a joint report on the Anchien incident.

In the first week of the existence of Team Twenty-five, it became evident that the facts were well hidden, if not lost, in a haystack jumble of propaganda, charges and countercharges, and the proliferating confusion spawned by misinterpretation and counterinterpretation. That the

final joint report would ever contain any truth became more than doubtful.

At this stage I was assigned as special assistant to the United States representative on Team Twenty-five. My job was "to help get things straightened out and check on what really was said."

I had been assigned as the protagonist of clarification. My unmistakable opposite, the protagonist of obfuscation, was Huang Yi-feng, Chinese Communist representative on Team Twenty-five. He is now a high official, yet even at that time he bore the unmistakable mark of communist greatness: he could fight for hours over a nuance; he could shift position without regard to either evidence or fact; and, with strange distorted logic, he could twist all argument into support of the communist position. He was so much the superior in craft and resource over his opposite number, the Nationalist Chinese representative, that ghostly warnings of ultimate communist success began to haunt me as we fought our wordy war. Knowing both English and Chinese, he browbeat the witnesses and interpreters and furiously attacked every interpolation or correction that I made. In session after session, as we went from place to place, we waged, for the sake of the record, semantic war over the meaning of testimony and affirmed fact, and the antagonism between us grew in intensity. In the critical fact-finding sessions held at the Communist headquarters in the vicinity of Anchien, where I scored again and again in the cross-examination of country folk produced as witnesses, the feeling between us reached such a heated climax that the Chinese Nationalist representative spoke to Colonel Martin.

"Tell Major Ekvall to say no more tomorrow. It is the last day. The communist lies have already been fully ex-

posed. No need to say more. I begin to fear someone will throw a hand grenade—after all, we are here in their headquarters—and then no expressions of regret could ever bring him back to life.”

But to give added flavor to the contest, we had that day already employed another linguistic trick. Huang Yi-feng, knowing English, had a considerable advantage in being able to get the sense of the consultations which took place between Colonel Martin and myself. Once, goaded by the obvious satisfaction showing on his face as he shamelessly eavesdropped, and becoming aware of a certain dark Gallic quality in my colonel's face, I suddenly fired a question.

“Eh bien mon colonel, vous parlez français?”

“Oui, bien sûr. Je suis Cajun de Louisiane,” he replied.

After that we went on in full freedom to say anything we wished, while Huang's noncomprehension turned him into a questioning two-headed Janus. Then his hand crashed on the table “Team Twenty-five very special team. Very special people. Americans speak Chinese, speak French, speak everything but English. Why not speak English?”

My day had been made. But back at Executive Headquarters in Peking another reward awaited me. At the highest level the Chinese Communist commissioner had passed to General Marshall the demand that I be returned to the United States immediately as my continued presence in China was prejudicial to the success of the entire Marshall mission. General Marshall, naturally, rejected the demand. Somewhat smugly, I stayed on until the mission ended and another assignment took me to China's far northwest.

So, it was with Team Twenty-five that I received the final touches preparing me to be an interpreter.

# VI

The road to Panmunjom which I had followed, unaware of both road and destination, had meandered through the years. At road's end the powers-that-be designated me an interpreter, and I set myself to the task of echoing other men's words, mirroring other men's ideas.

In true hurry-up-and-wait tradition the army had rushed me to Korea and then forgotten me, leaving me to await further orders. In fact, one disgruntled officer, irked at my rank which he felt was too high for a mere interpreter, suggested that I be declared superfluous and sent away from Panmunjom. I was a replacement for other interpreters who were still on the job. Even they had little to do, for the pace of the negotiations had slowed from a crawl to a standstill which was to last for several weeks. I studied Chinese texts of draft agreements, monitored the few meetings which were held and was briefed on procedures and linguistic conventions mutually accepted by both sides. There was much time in which to orient myself to the new role.

In July, 1953, the deadlock was broken, and in a flurry of plenary and staff-level meetings, the truce negotiations reached completion. During those crowded last days, interpretation was no longer a matter of a practice workout but became the grind of echoing, for hours that seemingly would not end, whatever my principal said.

They had called me an interpreter. Suddenly, with the new assurance those hours conferred, I *was* an interpreter.

With the signing of the armistice agreement, the truce negotiation headquarters went out of existence and the military armistice commission took its place. Most of the language personnel belonging to the old organization left. As the military armistice commission began its work with a great number of meetings on every level, I found myself chief of a would-be language division whose table of organization called for 140 linguists. Instead, we numbered twelve, including translators and Chinese and Korean typists. There were five or more meetings a day and only two sets of qualified interpreters. It became necessary to stagger the schedule of those meetings so we, the interpreters, could go from one meeting to the next. The many and immediate tasks of the military armistice commission—setting up new conference facilities, exchange of POW's, marking of the demilitarized zone, drawing of the demarcation line, etc.—multiplied staff meetings on every level. We often interpreted for eight or more hours a day.

The Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, all suddenly pressured to produce linguists, poured personnel into the language division. They were men who on their records were rated as qualified linguists. We found most such ratings fictitious. Using practical rule-of-thumb tests, we sent them back—at least four out of every five—as fast as they came.

The ones we did keep couldn't interpret as yet, but they showed promise. We set up training courses, rotated them as monitors in the meetings and let them get their feet wet in various interpreting assignments of an incidental nature. The informality of walking around an area with a mixed group of American, Chinese, and Korean

officers, who might be negotiating the boundaries of a joint headquarters area or the location of a POW exchange route, helped lift the curse of the awful freeze that grips the beginner, and set many a fledging interpreter talking in spite of his nerves. As a last resort when dealing with locations and boundaries, one can always point.

By October of 1953, however, plenary sessions of the military armistice commission were no longer held once a day but once a week. Staff meetings had become rare events, interpreters had been trained and assigned to the different observation and inspection teams, and only the joint secretariat meetings dragged on in a dreary daily routine in which there was much talking but little accomplished. It was a period for coasting along on the momentum gained from past effort, but I drifted into a new assignment. By Department of State request, I was relieved as chief of the language division and loaned, as interpreter, to Ambassador Dean.

The preparatory political conference, as it was called, lasted more than six weeks. Meetings were held six days a week. The initial tacit agreement was that each meeting would not last longer than two hours, but soon three hours became the minimum length, and the record was a five-and-a-half-hour session. Frustration lengthened the meetings: the less there is to be said, the longer the time it takes to say it.

Huang-Hua, Yeh Chien-ying's onetime interpreter whom I had known in Peking and who had once been so conveniently "sick," appeared with the rank of ambassador at the conference table as the head of the Sino-North Korean delegation. His eyes widened in a half-expressed, ironic greeting when he saw me, but I had lost any sepa-

rate identity of my own—I was an interpreter—and could have no personal existence responsive to such recognition.

His assistant, Pu Shou-ch'ang, was a Chinese student with a Ph.D. from Harvard who now travels as interpreter with Chou En-lai in all his forays into the Western or neutral world. Understanding all that was said in both English and Chinese, the two of them would watch me with scarcely veiled malice and amusement as I plunged into a freewheeling interpretation of the legalistic and finely nuanced phrasing of Ambassador Dean's brilliant argument and probing riposte and attack.

The preparatory political conference never advanced to the point of preparing anything and soon became bogged down in endless recrimination, ending with Ambassador Dean's famous walkout over the Chinese accusation of "perfidy." That final session was long but with its mounting tension, not in the least monotonous. As the conference simmered and boiled toward its foredoomed end, the sentences became shorter and shorter with less and less of the verbal cotton wool padding which is so difficult to interpret.

The break came after more than four hours of relentless argument and counterargument. Normally, an interpreter begins to "blackout" after about two hours: even words he is sure of elude him, and he begins to draw blanks as he reaches for the equivalents with which he must juggle. But on that day, as the sentences crowded each other and hesitations and verbal circumlocutions were discarded, I reacted to the hot stimulation of the moment with mind and tongue more keenly alert than ever before and, with an odd split perception, heard myself strike off gems of concise near-perfect interpretation.

Ambassador Dean's curt "what rubbish—what garbage"

had a justness of nuance in Chinese that brought a flush to the faces across the table which had not been there when they heard, with complete understanding, the original English. This final word from the American side was spoken by Ambassador Dean and interpreted by me as we moved to our walkout with Huang Hua's shouted supplication "Come back!" following us to the door.

The pros and cons of the Panmunjom walkout have been argued at great length. At certain levels, the impression persists that it was tactical error, if not an actual flouting of instructions, for there was widespread fear at that time that cessation of talking meant the resumption of hostilities. Officially, an interpreter should have no opinions: at least he should never reveal them. But this interpreter will step out of character to state that he believes the walkout marked a turning point in Sino-American relations. Never again, after that clear-cut calling of a turn, will the Chinese take us wholly for granted. As I sense their language and attitudes, we have had, since that time, a psychological advantage which we never had before. At every meeting—I have been at all of them—they have been a little less sure of themselves and of their position since the lesson of that day.

The ghost of Huang Hua's panic, portent of the disgrace which temporarily eclipsed his rising star, has sat at the table to trouble the Chinese and put a restraint on their language. Because of what Ambassador Dean said and did that day, we can, if we wish, press them a little harder when we negotiate. And as to the conference he was charged with preparing, it came about in its own time: perhaps even the more surely because he knew when to leave the table.

At the Asian conference which gathered in 1954, I

again was present, brought in the usual haste from Korea to Geneva, Switzerland. In the official sessions I did no interpreting, for the United Nations Secretariat was amply staffed. But there was full opportunity to admire the performance of the official United Nations interpreters, and also to note the differences, especially in quality, between simultaneous and consecutive interpreting. I had, too, the chance to witness the arrival, with official rank and status, of secondary and little-known Asian languages at international conferences and to hear and note some startling examples of how a misturned phrase, or one either dropped or added, can influence and twist international agreements and understandings.

In the final days of the Asian conference, in a diplomatic aside, Americans and Chinese Communists again faced each other across a table and fenced cautiously in the opening rounds of a new series of talks. The tenuous thread of that coy contact was never broken off and eventually brought about the full-dress Sino-American talks which got under way, with some fanfare, in Geneva in August of 1955.

Each of the Sino-American encounters, from truce negotiations in Panmunjom to Sino-American talks in Geneva, has had its subject, its setting, and its principal participants. These are all matters of official record. Among all the participants, principal and supporting, only the interpreter on the American side has not been changed, and for him alone, as the only constant factor from Panmunjom to Geneva, each encounter has its own special atmosphere, deriving from the nuances of language and carefully shaded phrase and tone.

At the truce negotiations in Panmunjom the war still went on. Words were bullets across the table and for

such combat and purposes, only the most uncompromising syllables had any usefulness. However, in the deliberations of the military armistice commission the tone changed, for there was business to be transacted jointly and joint effort rules out war. Words were no longer bullets. While still hostile, they also made sense and became the agents of half unwilling but necessary agreement. Within the preparatory political conference all was fluid: courteous phrasing and vicious invective were strangely mixed as each side tried diplomacy without quite forgetting the habits of war. In Geneva, diplomacy, sharp with strife but diplomacy none the less, used words and phrases that no longer bristled, and language with all its resources of nuance and implication came into its own.

These talks still go on and seemingly cannot end, Though their subject is the return of civilians, other issues of practical concern lurk off stage and cannot be ignored. The United States of America and the Peoples Republic of China are the two great powers which face each other across the Pacific Ocean, and here in Geneva, in a quiet room in the Palais des Nations, is their only current point of contact.

As I wait for the impressions and judgments each meeting brings, there is leisure in which to tell of the principles and practice of interpretation from the standpoint of one who stands between two worlds that try agonizingly to become one while stumbling and blundering in the unresolved confusion of tongues.

# VII

In this, the era of conferences, there is no end to official and diplomatic contacts and meetings. At each instance of contact there is a need, greater than hitherto known, that the meaning of position, viewpoint, and argument be exactly understood, even when not always crystal clear. By reason of this exigent and urgent need, an interpreter—the interpreter—is becoming increasingly indispensable.

In the army that word has an ominous ring. Army doctrine does not recognize the existence of the indispensable man: the legend is that if one is found he is shot at sunrise—the doctrine must be preserved intact. But why the consternation on the staff of the United States negotiator one morning in the early fall of 1955 when it seemed that I had temporarily lost my voice? I had been swimming the evening before, too late and too long, in the cold waters of Lake Geneva and awoke with just enough laryngitis to threaten the loss of my voice. Hot coffee laced with brandy brought it back, but it still operated uncertainly on two octaves. Only after I recovered my voice, however, was there positive certainty that the meeting of the day would be held as scheduled. The United States ambassador might have lost his voice and some member of his staff could have read his statement. But if my voice had not come back who would have mouthed Chinese across the table?

A number of factors have combined to make the function of interpretation a crucial one in international relations. At a time when contacts between peoples and nations are more frequent and more important than ever before, there is no longer a diplomatic language. French, which took over from Latin as the diplomatic *lingua franca*, has lost that position, not to one language but to the harsh logic of world developments and to the gradual encroachment of a number of languages.

There was a time when Western diplomats, including Russians, met to settle the affairs of the world and create peace by treaty. They all spoke French and the pacts they made were written in the same language. Europeans no longer settle the affairs of the world. Russians will only speak Russian; the English language has shouldered French aside in general world-wide usefulness without gaining for itself the exclusive status necessary to a diplomatic language; and French, which still fights a rear guard action at diplomatic functions and in social contacts, is now only one of four language recognized as official in the United Nations.

English and Russian, the languages of the two great opposing world powers around which blocs have formed, are the two rivals. In the offing, however, Chinese, a totally different language but one of historic power and influence, is being groomed by intensive revision and diffusion to challenge the two Western rivals and make the contest a triangular one.

The rise of a new and ebullient nationalism throughout the world has also been a determinant in creating a new confusion of tongues. The use of European languages such as English, French, and Dutch has been labelled the stigma of a residual colonialism, and they are losing their

wide usefulness. Nations and people are turning back to the language of their forefathers. In the Philippines they are trying to shelve both Spanish and English in favor of Tagalog, and in Indonesia they are creating a language out of a patois to take the place of Dutch. In such efforts there are not only linguistic difficulties: India is torn with communal riots and the continuing strife of language loyalties, and governments can fall, as in Ceylon, for the same reason. Yet the process, charged with feeling, goes on, for his natal tongue is one of the most emotionally precious possessions of man. Because of disuse he may forget much of it, and he may become more proficient in other languages, but the language he first spoke will always have a special dearness.

The Communists, both Russian and Chinese, with considerable skill, have channelled these loyalties and attachments and used them to strengthen their control over the many races within their orbit. They have built up, and given systems of writing and a new assurance of a continued existence to, languages which had almost ceased to exist. The Yakuts, the Samoyedes, the Lolo, the Miao, the Ch'uang, and many other ethnic units or fragments are newly linguistically alive and proud. It is an artificial arrestation and even reversal of the normal linguistic trend whereby at the expense of the weaker languages belonging to stronger or dominant cultures take over. This mischievous compounding of the confusion of tongues is of considerable interest to the linguist, but it is creating new problems in international relations and is fundamentally divisive in its effect. Linguistic self-determination is challenging age-old groupings of peoples and threatening governments.

Linguistic nationalism manifests itself strangely. At

Panmunjom, the three languages, English, Chinese, and Korean, were, according to the official formula, equal. This regardless of the fact that most, if not all, of the Korean negotiators spoke Chinese, and the Korean language itself, though of a different family and structure from Chinese, has been so interpenetrated by Chinese loanwords and linguistic influence that entire phrases in a formal Korean speech can be identified by one who knows Chinese. Chinese and English were also officially equal in spite of the fact that most, if not all, of the Chinese negotiators were known to have excellent command of English, whereas none of the American negotiators knew any Chinese.

This affirmation of equality was carried to ludicrous lengths. When Chinese and English interpreters met to work out the texts of agreements or joint releases, the American Chinese language interpreter spoke in English and the Chinese English language interpreter spoke in Chinese, so even the editing of texts was carried on and complicated by an oddly disjointed exchange of ideas on two linguistically different planes.

One of the Chinese staff officers and Communist negotiators, Pu Shan (Harvard Ph.D. and former professor at a midwestern college), spoke much better English than his interpreter; possibly even better than some of the American officers against whom he negotiated. By the rule, however, he was limited to speaking only Chinese and adherence to the rule worked a real, and for us amusing, hardship on him. He was a forceful and polished orator in Chinese: his periods, his phrasing, were both sententious and brilliant. But all this excellence was lost on the American officers who faced him across the table and so he developed the habit of looking at me when he made

a point, for he knew that I, at least, would feel the impact of his crisp, well-turned aphorisms. He would conclude his remarks with a certain smugness and then would lean back waiting for them to be interpreted into English. But as his interpreter put his polished rhetoric through the meat grinder of interpretation and turned out mutilated and tortured phrases, the satisfaction would begin to fade from Pu Shan's face; impatience and even pain would begin to show. He would twist and fidget until he could stand it no longer—he had long ceased looking at me—and then would stop his interpreter with a fierce whisper: “No—no, not that. Here read this.” He himself would write out the English interpretation of what he had said and pass it to his interpreter to read. But the fiction was maintained that the three languages were “equal.”

Huang Hua, the Chinese negotiator, had himself been English language interpreter for the Chinese Communist commissioner in Peking at the time of the Marshall mission, and Western newsmen discovered at the Asian conference in Geneva in 1954 that, as spokesman and press officer, he could do an excellent job in adequate and fluent English. But during six weeks of negotiating against Ambassador Dean he never uttered a word—in greeting, argument or even incidental half pleasantries—in English, nor did he correct his interpreter when the usual awkward mistakes were made. But his knowledge of English was an asset to him, for he understood all that Ambassador Dean said *as* it was said without having to wait for an interpretation—time gained for him in which to think out his answer and counterattack.

He listened to me, I knew, with amusement and a touch of malicious curiosity to learn how I would put into his mother tongue what he had already understood

so well when it had been said in English. Once in awhile I thought I detected in his gaze grudging agreement with the choice I had made in word or phrase, but mostly he was amused. Then, one day, I caught him doing my job.

The Chinese take negotiating very seriously and prepare for everything. At the back table were stenographers whose sole task was to make a verbatim record of everything Ambassador Dean said. Others at the same table made a longhand transcript from that record and within a relatively short time after it had been spoken, the complete English text would be on the table in front of Huang Hua for reference.

At the beginning of the meeting on that day, Ambassador Dean had led off with a statement of three short paragraphs. The first two had not been too difficult, but interpreting the third paragraph, made up of phrases that stubbornly refused to come to heel, had left me in a sweat with the unhappy feeling that my rendition had, at best, been anything but polished and, at worst, badly botched.

Thousands of words and three hours later, Huang Hua suddenly counterattacked with "This morning Mr. Dean said"—and went on to quote, in Chinese, Ambassador Dean's opening statement. The first two sentences seemed oddly familiar but Huang Hua was not speaking with his usual fluency. There were hesitations and pauses that in themselves seemed like old acquaintances whom I had known but too well. Then, suddenly, I realized he was interpreting Ambassador Dean's speech into Chinese from the English text in front of him. He was doing exactly, from precisely the same text, what I had been doing three hours earlier.

Of course, it was well done. Ruefully, I realized that

his phrasing was smoother and rang more truly Chinese than had mine. Chinese, after all, was his official as well as natal tongue, and in addition, he had the advantage of translating a revised version, of being able to use all the tantalizingly just and perfect second-choice words and phrases the interpreter thinks of after the words are spoken but never gets a chance to use. However, he, too, stumbled and had some trouble with that notable third paragraph.

At the Asian conference, and at the conference on Indochina held in Geneva in the spring and summer of 1954, two new languages, hitherto unknown in international conferences, moved onto the stage with a certain self-conscious bravado. Nam Il, spokesman for the North Koreans, spoke fluent Russian—he had been a school-teacher in the Soviet Union—and was reputed to be equally fluent in Chinese. He greeted me once, I remember, in Chinese when we suddenly met in the lounge of the Palais des Nations. Dr. Pyong, spokesman for South Korea, spoke and wrote effectively, even eloquently, in English. In the conference room, however, both spoke only Korean: neither one wished to expose himself to the charge of being a linguistic satellite or of slighting their common mother tongue. There were no Korean interpreters on the United Nations staff, so interpreters were brought from Panmunjom to go into the glass stalls and even onto the floor on the days when Korean, in its turn, was the language of the day.

In the conference on Indochina, by the logic of history and acculturation, French was the dominant language. The delegates from South and North Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos all knew French and it was expected that all would use that language. In most of the sessions

only consecutive interpretation was employed, and to simplify procedures and save time, it had been hoped that the conference languages might be limited to three: French, English, and Russian. But the Chinese would only speak Chinese. They did, however, provide their own interpreters, and as they were not one of the principal participants in the dispute, they did not insist that Chinese be one of the official languages.

The representatives of South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos all spoke French, but when the turn came for Pham Van Dong, the representative of North Vietnam, to speak, he brought the harsh, querulous vocables of Vietnamese to the conference table. Another little-known language thereby gained recognition and status, while he jibed at the delegates from South Vietnam with acid scorn for being more French than Vietnamese, traitors to the ancient culture and language they possessed in common.

Pham Van Dong was fluent and incisive with a peculiar burning intensity as he made the harsh consonants and sing-song tones of Vietnamese heard as the equal of English, French, and Russian at the big conference table. But one day, in a long statement of position that was of basic importance, he spoke with a strange hesitation, faltering, feeling for words, changing them when he had found them, and referring again and again to his manuscript. Suddenly, as only an interpreter who has engaged in similar vacillations in the search for words to match other words can know, I knew he was not speaking but interpreting: I was sure that the paper in front of him was not written in Vietnamese.

The word was passed to the French observers who had a better position in the room from which to do some snooping while I cross-checked with the delegation from

South Vietnam who also had begun to look ironically amused. Then Pham Van Dong's interpreter read from a French text an "interpretation" that was smooth and precise, having all the authenticity of an original. There could no longer be any doubt. The French observers, using a glass, definitely identified the language of the manuscript which Pham Van Dong, the bitter nationalist with all the searing hates of an oppressed people concentrated in his voice, who would not soil his tongue with the hated language of the colonialists, had prepared. He had written his argument in the French he would not speak and he interpreted from that into Vietnamese; his interpreter read smoothly and easily in French from the original text.

The great languages—or if that adjective is offensive, the widely used ones in which meanings of crucial significance are defined—will remain basic. In every conference there is always one language more authoritative than the others, regardless of what the rules of procedure may say. But increasingly, or at least until youthful nationalism, expressing itself in linguistic self-determination, becomes more mature and less emotional, other and strange tongues will be heard. No procedural fiat can make them authentically "equal," but they will have a place and rank, compounding confusion in a Babel at the center of which will be found the interpreter who knows, army legend to the contrary, that he is indispensable.

# VIII

The interpreter's presence is that of a shadow: always in place but never obtrusive. Even in the most informal of multilingual meetings that place is at the elbow of his principal to whom he is a shadow, functioning as an echo. In the lounge of the Palais des Nations his principal may be chatting over cocktails while the interpreter—also, fortune permitting, holding a glass—lurks in ambush for the words and sentences which are his responsibility. At a dinner he sits beside his principal and times his eating, no matter how tempting the fare, so that his mouth will be empty and his tongue uncluttered at the right moment.

One of the most trying hunger experiences of all my life occurred in Kunming, China, in the summer of 1945. The senior American officer gave a select luncheon for the French general and his staff who had just fought their way out of Japanese encirclement in French Indochina. At the table were five high-ranking American officers, five equally high-ranking French officers and one captain, myself, who had been running the errands incident to the making of arrangements and who, as an afterthought, had been invited, à la command performance, also to sit and eat.

It then developed that not one of the guests or hosts knew, or would own to knowing, any language but his own. Ten men were bursting with good will, World War I

shavetail reminiscences of Paris, and, more seriously, pointed questions and pertinent answers about French Indochina, Japanese tactics, and the long road from Hanoi to the Chinese frontier. But the conversational bottleneck was acute. The sweating captain, harrassed to the point where he forgot all his "sirs," was the only channel of two-way communication. It appeared to be a good luncheon, not at all like mess chow, and everyone seemed to enjoy it, but I rose from the table hungrier than when I sat down, for I had not been able even to taste the food before me.

However, a dinner of four, two principals and two interpreters, can be a most satisfactory blending of food and conversation. In such a meeting the talk ranges more widely than at the conference table. Food and drink, music coming in through an open window, the scent of flowers, and the delicate nuance of reference that touches on, without really being pinned down to, serious business and the fate of men and peoples impart to such a meeting a rare flavor, illusive but exciting.

In conferences the position in space of the interpreter varies, and each variation has its advantages and disadvantages. In the plenary sessions at Panmunjom, the interpreter sat at a small table just behind the spokesman at the main conference table. Such an arrangement affords greater opportunity for leaning on all the available props of interpretation: word lists and dictionaries are at hand for reference when semantic roadblocks arise; there is an assistant to look up words, check texts, and hand over documents with pertinent paragraphs marked for reading when the principal suddenly quotes a passage; and, most important, one can sense the very real psychological reinforcement derived from having a backstop.

This arrangement has, however, certain disadvantages. The interpreter loses something of the close rapport with his principal; there is a diminution of the sense of immediacy; it is harder for the principal to consult with his interpreter; there is greater chance of the interpreter's not hearing correctly or not hearing all of what his principal says; and, if he needs to cross-check on what has been said or heard, he has to tip his hand and temporarily stop the meeting by getting up and going to the conference table.

In the great multilingual conferences where earphones are used, the interpreters sit in glass booths and there have all the aides and props we had at the interpreter's table at Panmunjom, but their interpreting techniques, as well as the end result, conform to the somewhat different requirements of simultaneous interpretation.

In staff meetings at Panmunjom and in the Sino-American talks in Geneva I have always sat at the conference table itself, just to the left of the United States spokesman. There, one is right on the front line. There is no place for an assistant, reference books, or any of the other props. All the interpreter may have on the table are such prepared texts as have been given him and the pad on which he makes his notes. His only resource, his only aid or means of reference, is what floats in his consciousness or what he can dredge from the depths of the subconscious. But the stimulation of the front line permeates him and helps him dig deep for the things he knows below the level of conscious awareness.

The interpreter speaks as an echo; he does not use an indirect quotation such as "The ambassador says that he does not agree." He echoes the ambassador, shortly and with no preliminaries: "I do not agree." His voice is the voice of his principal.

No matter what the spatial relationship of the interpreter to his principal or the grammatical person used in the translation, the interpreter must chronologically speak either simultaneously or consecutively. Simultaneous interpretation is a very specially developed technique used in such permanent multilingual gatherings as the United Nations and its subagencies and requires special earphones with selective switches that make possible direct connection with the interpreters' booths from each of which a different language is spoken. Simultaneous interpretation, so called, is actually consecutive by virtue of the necessary interpretive gap of two or three words or even a complete phrase. When done from one language into a closely related language of generally similar sentence structure—such as from English to French—the result is not only a brilliant performance but quite acceptably faithful in sense and nuance. When, however, it is done from English or French into a language such as Chinese that belongs to a different family of languages and in which word and phrase order are radically different, the end product, no matter how brilliantly arrived at, is perforce nothing more than a loose running paraphrase which at best is awkward and which can be grotesque in structure and wrong in meaning. In such a case nuance loses any chance of survival.

No one realizes this more clearly than those first-rate linguists who staff the United Nations meetings. During the Asian conference in Geneva in 1954 I had ample opportunity not only to listen with enormous admiration to the things they did with the Chinese language but to discuss with them the entire range of the problems involved when the languages in question belong to different families and are radically dissimilar in structure. Participial

and pronominal phrases, difficult at best, are almost impossible in simultaneous interpretation.

For highest accuracy and exactitude, consecutive interpretation is necessary. Even in the multilingual conferences there is always one language of the day into which the first interpretation is made consecutively by interpreters who sit at microphones on the floor of the conference chamber. That interpretation is relayed to the glass booths and is the one from which the simultaneous interpretations into the other languages are made.

In consecutive interpretation the interpreter speaks when his principal gives him the opportunity. The timing of that opportunity is often fortuitous—the principal may stop for breath, etc.—but presentation is most effective when the pauses are at relatively short intervals, spaced at the end of a long sentence, two or three short sentences, or a short paragraph. A speaker who is familiar with interpretation techniques has at his disposal a most effective emphasizing device, for by pausing to let his interpreter translate a short sentence, he sets it apart to stand alone with extra weight.

The interpreter comes to know what he has to say by one of three systems or their combinations. There is the prepared statement; the statement written out at the table by the speaker which he then reads and passes to his interpreter as the record from which the interpretation is to be made; and the *ab lib* statement of which the interpreter makes his own written or mental record as best he may for reference when he starts to interpret.

The prepared statement usually is written out, frequently even mimeographed, some time in advance. The extent of that advance notice may be anywhere from

twenty-four hours to the moment prior to the delivery of the speech. To the interpreter, the advance notice never seems long enough, but if the conference is somewhat leisurely in pace, he is reasonably sure of twelve hours.

In the Ambassador Dean negotiations in Korean, under the pressure of meetings held every day, we counted ourselves fortunate if we had the final text of the prepared statement in our hands twenty minutes before the meeting was to start. Even then the text was not a final one, for in that twenty minutes, changes—sometimes of considerable length—would be made. Then, at the meeting, if the other side were speaking first, we could tell from the way Ambassador Dean hunched his shoulders at the table as he listened that he was mentally revising what he had written and changing it into a more effective reply. The result of that revision came back to the interpreters' table in a succession of notes on the order of "Page 15, line 17, change to etc., etc." But even that result would not be final, for he would insert ad lib changes as he read his speech. It made for unexampled flexibility and initiative in negotiating but was certainly hard on the interpreters.

Accidents also occur. Once we had the text an hour or so before the meeting—even time enough in which to put on a bit of polish. As we waited at the interpreters' table we were almost complacent until Ambassador Dean began to read his speech. It was not the same speech as the one we had in our hands. There was a moment of sheer panic. Frantic appeal to the secretary and a hasty sorting of papers from the official brief case finally produced the right text for our use just as Ambassador Dean finished reading the last paragraph.

The interpreter should have time in which to check

over the text for new words or concepts. He should have time to mark off the clauses in the longer sentences and number them according to the order in which they must be spoken in the other language. This done, the interpreter can jump from number to number with some assurance that he is not going to wind up with the cart before the horse and a loose assortment of subordinate clauses for which he can find no place. He should also have enough time to familiarize himself with the basis and logic of the argument or information presented in its entirety so that each sentence may not only be consistent in itself but also in relation to the whole. It is possible to interpret each sentence correctly and yet wind up with the paragraph as a whole wide of the mark.

Time for anything more than the taking of these three steps in preparation is a luxury. Indeed, having the text for a very long time can result in something like over-preparation. The statement has been conned so thoroughly that interpretation becomes the recital of a learned passage. But in the learning the interpreter thinks of so many ways in which to say any particular thing that when he comes to speak his piece, in the confusion of choices he can say none of them. The Chinese push such preparation even farther. It would seem that the texts of their prepared statements are not only put in final form earlier than are ours but they also prepare a complete text in the second language. The interpreter needs only read a predone translation. Such interpretation has a prim finished preciseness but tends to be pompous, often oddly bombastic. The habit of depending on an interlinear translation becomes a handicap, and the interpreter tends to flounder somewhat wildly when ad lib exchanges follow use of, or are inserted into, the prepared text.

One variant of the prepared text technique, greatly in favor with the interpreters, was much used in Panmunjom. The speaker at the table writes out what he is about to say, reads from the paper he has written, and then passes it to the interpreter. The latter thus has before him a complete record of what has just been said and, having heard it spoken, has received reasonable advance notice. It was developed in Panmunjom primarily as an aid to the interpreters but was soon urged upon all the negotiators, and the commanding general of the United Nations headquarters even contemplated making it mandatory in preference to unlimited and uncontrolled ad-libbing.

Gratefully, too, the interpreters noted how the use of this technique cut down verbiage and enforced conciseness and clarity in conference table speech. Writing it out was an effective brake on overfluent discourse, for many an officer was somewhat appalled to discover, when reading the stenographic record of a meeting, just to what degree he had let his tongue run away with his thinking when he had waxed expansive at the conference table. His superiors frequently were even more appalled and sometimes took drastic measures.

But a very great part of conference discussion is ad-libbed: this is referred to in official reports as "in subsequent give and take." Therein comes the real test of the interpreter and his craftsmanship. As his principal speaks—slowly, rapidly, clearly, in compounded confusion, and in every conceivable combination of the four—the interpreter sets down in words, abbreviations, symbols, and even graphs the recall devices of what is said. Swept along in that torrent of words, he hopes forlornly that his principal will speak more slowly, be reasonably clear, and not

stretch each sentence beyond its logical breaking point by linking, chain-wise, word to word and phrase to phrase.

An exact stenographic record is not necessarily the best. Some interpreters who know shorthand purposely abstain from using it, for words can blur the main import. The trees mask the wood. I know one interpreter in the United Nations who uses only a few symbols, relying on the position of the symbols and the connecting lines to aid his memory. Primarily, the record must trigger memory response, not substitute for remembrance.

Ad lib speaking, however, has its compensations. Often the sentences are short and direct, and the interpreter, too, reacts to the stimulus of the moment until he has the sense of placing shot after shot in the target area, knowing that the echo he makes is immediate and true.

The ultimate test of the interpreter comes when his principal says, "I won't stick strictly to the text today but expect to change, add, and embroider as I go along." Then the prepared text becomes a landscape with no landmarks into which intruders surging at top speed bring complete confusion. The phrases of the prepared text are lost, the sense of the ad-libbed is not found, and the interpreter falls stumblingly between the two and hears himself mouthing contradictions, ill-mated phrases, and all their bastard offspring. He is never happy when subjected to this ultimate test.

# IX

The function of interpretation has its detractors and often its practitioners are much maligned. They are called "interrupters" and are blamed for speaking too quickly, too slowly, too loudly, too softly, too much at length, and with too great brevity. At Panmunjom a fellow officer, one of my best friends, once railed, "You're nothing but a damned parrot. He [a rather less than admired spokesman on the United Nations side] says 'Squeak, squeak, squeak,' and you say 'squawk, squawk, squawk.' A hell of a job." It is.

Also with some justification, exasperated bureaucrats and administrators call us prima donnas, too temperamental for any good use. We are nothing if not artists and we operate under terrific pressures. Those pressures, the sources from which they spring, and the interpreter's reaction to them have a very large place in the problem of interpretation.

Complete linguistic competence must be taken for granted: it is basic. But it alone does not make an interpreter. To be really successful, the interpreter must paradoxically combine in his character and personality two contradictions: he may not be stolid and at the same time he must grimly and successfully refuse to panic. Interpretation at its best, and that best is increasingly in demand as the world shrinks to uneasy dimensions, is based on

something very close to inspiration. And that flares its brightest when the nerves are taut and the sharp impact of the unexpected spurs mind and tongue to creative response. There is no time for studious reference such as is permitted the translator. A mere mechanical juggling with dictionary derived equivalents may make some sense but not enough to be called interpretation and to echo faithfully all that is meant in the words that are said.

At the same time, and in the very grip of nervous tension, the interpreter must not panic. He is caught in a torrent of words. Some make sense and some do not. His principal speaks too fast to permit the taking of adequate notes, changes his mind and figures of speech, doubles back out of sentences having no proper end, and links dangling phrase to dangling phrase with reckless abandon. Then he stops for breath and his interpreter must make it all equally clear or cloudy in another tongue. His refusal to panic must be constant and successful.

When the military armistice commission was set up in Korea in the summer of 1953, one of the linguists assigned to the language division was a United States Army officer whom we gladly welcomed without question. He was completely bilingual in English and Korean, having been born and brought up in Korea. He had later married a Korean and presumably they spoke some Korean in their home. Having been called back on extended active duty in much the same manner as I had been, he had a deeply responsible sense of special mission. It needed, we thought, just a little coaching and practice and he would be able to take over as a fully qualified interpreter. But after monitoring some of the meetings, he began to show signs of nervousness. It became a problem just when and how he should be pushed into the deep water of conference

style interpreting and forced to swim in the cresting torrent of words.

Then one day the ideal opportunity arrived. The staff meeting on the final fixing of the military demarcation line was scheduled. Such a meeting is informal, almost, if it had not still been war, pleasantly so, as the members stand around a table and make terse statements about position and terrain emphasized by finger and pencil reference to points and lines on the map.

“You can do it without any trouble, Captain. As a last resort you can always point. This is your chance to get in and get your feet wet.”

“Yes, sir.” The captain said the right words and walked away. But I noticed his hands were spasmodically opening and closing. I had, however, no time to do any further worrying about him: my own meeting was waiting. Sometime later I was called out from the tent—my own meeting ground to a halt awaiting my return—to face a furious Marine colonel.

“Bob, what do you mean by giving me an interpreter who can’t talk? The meeting has come to a dead standstill—he can’t speak. Get me someone who can talk so I can go on fighting this god damned battle of the line.”

“I gave you what I thought was the best we had but I’ll try someone else.” And off I went to the interpreters’ pool to dig up a replacement.

The replacement—we were really scraping the bottom of the barrel that day—swallowed hard and squared his shoulders. “You’ll do all right,” I assured him. “At least you can point to gain a little time.” With those specious words I then hurried back to my own meeting.

Later I tried to cheer up the crestfallen and still-twitching captain. “I know how it is. There are times when the

right words won't come. You just have to scramble around, paraphrase, and keep going. Better luck next time."

"But sir, I knew the words—all the words. *I just couldn't say them.*"

It wasn't altogether his fault. I had thought it would be easy and that he could at least point, but without warning—it frequently happens that way—the language of the meeting had changed and the colonel of Marines had introduced into the argument a somewhat erudite polemic (you wouldn't expect it of a Marine) concerning the iniquitousness of dialectical materialism when applied to the determination of a demarcation line.

The captain deserved credit for knowing the words even if he could not say them. But the experience confirmed his tendency to freeze. He never became a dependable first-class conference interpreter, for in all that turbulent torrent of words that rush to overwhelm him, the really proficient interpreter must never panic.

## X

The conflict between irritation and all its sources and loyalty with all its demands also levies heavy pressure on the interpreter. No man is a hero to his valet. The valet, however, has only seen his master in corporeal undress: the interpreter frequently sees his principal in the BVD's of his thinking and its expression. Not all that is said at conferences, great and small, is the *mot juste*.

The ultimate assay of the thought content and real meaning in any utterance is to put it through the acid test of interpretation. What is good honest metal that rings true with meaning remains in any words and any language. What is gilt and dross, mere verbiage, can be put into another language, but the process reveals how empty of significance it was in the first place, and the interpreter recoils from the degrading and cynical search for something equally meaningless in another tongue. When obliged to do too much such semantic juggling, the build-up of irritation can boil over.

There once was a United States negotiator who quite unknowingly triggered a succession of such boilothers. The man had a mania for words—just words. They were, however, strangely potent, procreative words that, in a geometric progression, spawned other words equally devoid of meaning. The process seemingly could go on without end. Eight hours at one sitting was the record.

Interpreters did everything they could to avoid assignment to those meetings. Fortunately, most of the linguists in the language division were military personnel: an order is an order and can be backed up with disciplinary action if necessary. But the most serious revolt came one day from a Korean language interpreter who was a civilian employee of the Army Department. He was a young American of Korean descent, competent and resistant to the ordinary stresses of interpreting, having, however, some of the headstrong irascibility characteristic of many of his race. For a period of some weeks, until a sufficient number of qualified linguistic personnel arrived to fill up the table of organization, he was the only topflight Korean language interpreter available. Thus, throughout the work-crowded days when the military armistice com-

mission was beginning to function, he and I operated as the first team.

Then one day as we took a short recess after two hours of meeting, his irritation boiled over.

“Colonel, you’ll have to get someone else. I am not going back.”

“But there is no one else. Of course you’re going back.”

“No. I am not going to interpret any more of that crap while the people on the other side of the table sit and smirk. I’ll not be party any longer to such a farce. I’m through. Give me some other job or send me back to my translating in Tokyo.”

I told him there was no other job. And as to going back to Tokyo—if he did not go back with me to the session, due to start in about ten minutes, I would make sure that he would have no job in Tokyo or anywhere else in the Army establishment.

“All right, I quit. I quit altogether. No one can pay me enough to put that mess of meaningless words into good honest Korean while the other side—damn their hides—sits and grins.”

He had a special rating of GSC-11\* and, for his age and background, was fantastically well-paid, but he was ready to throw it all out the window. And the meeting was to resume in less than ten minutes.

I descended to the depths of maudlin appeal. He was right, of course, and I agreed with him, but he and I had been through it together, been through much worse, in fact. If I—a colonel in the United States Army—could put up with it and continue, he could do the same and

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\* At this time the government rating system for civilian appointees, the highest rating being GSC-17.

we must go back together. Finally we did, just under the ten minute deadline. But in addition to all other causes of tension during the hours that followed, I had the constant fear or half expectation of seeing him throw up his papers and walk out.

A story I had heard about the Nuremberg war crimes trials haunted me. There, one day, on his little stand high above the court, one of the interpreters went berserk. Shouting "I am through, I am through. Not another damn word!" he showered the court with the papers and documents in front of him.

In all fairness it must be acknowledged that most of what is spoken at conferences is pertinent and well said, sometimes truly eloquent. But the interpreter, as he reads the text or hears the words, is obsessed with and dominated by the demands of the other language. Those requirements and demands, which stem from the particular rhetoric, syntax, word order, and word structure of the other language, are completely valid and reasonable to him. He violates them only when hard pressed. For his principal, on the other hand, those requirements and demands do not exist. Even if he has been told of them, they remain academic, as he never has to deal directly with any language but his own. Consequently, of five or six equally good ways of expressing in English an idea or clinching an argument, he will—perversely, it seems to the interpreter—use the one form which is the most difficult to put into the other language. When this happens repeatedly, and participial and pronominal phrases, subjunctive moods, and dangerously loaded words of double meaning march against the interpreter in successive waves, it begins to seem a matter of malicious intent.

This source of irritation has no foundation in logic or

reason. The speaker has full right to all the resources of his own language. However equal the languages of the conference may be in terms of protocol, he is under no compulsion to defer to the requirements of the other language; its peculiarities should levy no demands on him. He is speaking English.

The interpreter realizes that his irritation is without any good reason yet he is helpless to resist it and, growing on that helplessness, it burns and eats him. Justified irritation may produce boilothers but it also imparts a fine glow of righteous indignation. Irritation which has no valid reason and is recognized as being unreasonable can only hurt.

The hurt is the greater because the interpreter is tied to his principal by a very special bond. He is his alter ego. More than in any other relationship he participates intimately in the thinking of that other self. He not only comes to know the words his principal will use, so that given the first three words in a sentence he often can forecast in his own mind how it will continue and end, but he thinks along with him. He partakes, too, of victory and defeat.

And from this intimate relationship there develops deep in the harassed spirit of the interpreter an almost mystic loyalty to the one for whom he is but an echo. That loyalty is a torment when his principal talks foolishness; it is a glow of selfless pride, celebrated with the music and banners of the interpreter's inmost being, when his principal speaks well and to the point. He suffers with him, unable to help, when he is on the ropes, battered and without defense when forced into a corner or obliged by so-called "guidance" from Washington to defend an indefensible position. He deeply desires that his princi-

pal, that other self who irritates him so constantly, shall always have the best of it against the adversaries who sit across the big table in the quiet room.

The two irreconcilables, irritation and loyalty, are ever present. Their conflict is never stilled. They drive the interpreter toward quitting or breaking and contribute to the constant emotional pressure under which he works.

## XI

Neither nervous tension nor the nagging conflict between irritation and loyalty generate the most constant and fundamental of the pressures. This basic pressure, heavier than all others, derives from the fact that the interpreter, by the demands of his function, is asked to do the impossible. He is expected to equate word symbols and use equivalents, when in reality there are no equivalents.

Interpretation is grounded in the science of semantics. By that science the linguist knows that (even in the case of the meaning of a word within the same language) what is intended by the speaker and what is comprehended by the hearer are not identical. Between the two the question of the source of meaning intervenes: no single, unique, and definitive meaning of a word exists, for the given word is viewed against a connotative background which varies from individual to individual. When the use of two languages is introduced, the difference

between what is spoken and what is finally heard is compounded.

If we draw a circle to represent the semantic content of a word and take the centering of the word, its placement, to show its nuance and slant, we discover two things. First, it is impossible in the same or any other language to find another word whose circle of meaning is exactly the same size. Second, even the circles which are approximate in size are not centered or placed alike, but are above or below, to one side or the other. They are never exactly superimposed and matching, and as a consequence many circles cut into that of the given word. If any one of those circles cuts into and comprehends more than 50 per cent of the area of meaning, it becomes a candidate for equivalency and is one of the many from which the interpreter, taking into account nuance, circumstance, history and course of the argument, and many other considerations, must select the right word, or one as right as possible. Always, however, there is that 49 per cent or less of meaning which is lacking in the new circle, and the knowledge of this lack reproaches the interpreter with having failed in his duty.

Even in languages closely related and having common origins this nonequivalency is universal and is best illustrated by the difference in meaning in words common to two languages. The French intent when using such words as conference, assist, actual, crudity, plateau, and demand is quite different from the English comprehension of the same words. The French meaning of *actuelle* has the connotation of time in the present but the English connotation is one of fact. A French speaker gives a *conférence*; an English listener attends a conference. And a *plateau des crudités*, which sounds to English ears like

something just short of a mountain of obscenities, is merely a tray of raw vegetables.

When, however, two languages, such as English and Chinese, are at the far poles of structural similarity, belonging to entirely different language families, the chaos of that nonequivalency has no limits. The words which most tempt us to believe that they are equivalents are those verbs of simple action. We are tempted to ask what possible difference can there be between "come" in English and "come" in Chinese? At first glance they are assumed to be exact equivalents. After all, to come is simply to come, not to go or to stand still. But if we examine the most obvious aspects of their use, particularly in the formation of compounds, it will be seen how they then move away from each other.

Though the word "come" in both Chinese and English is a monosyllable, there is, however, a fundamental difference between the two. In English, "come" inescapably carries with it connotations of mood, person, number, and tense. It is indicative mood, it changes form by adding "s" to form the 3rd person singular, and it is present tense. If we assign symbols,  $a$  for mood,  $b$  for person,  $c$  for number, and  $d$  for tense, the meaning of "come" represented algebraically is  $X^{(a+b+c+d)}$ . The Chinese word *lai* (come) has no such qualifications. It is starkly the basic symbol of the idea of coming with no modifications. *Lai* written algebraically is simply  $X$ . In this primitive simplicity and strength it stands alone and can move into combinations with a freedom denied its English "equivalent."

In combinations and compounds the problem of equivalency becomes even more acute. In Korea hundreds of hours were spent in the "spare parts" staff meeting of the

military armistice commission, trying to arrive at a mutually intelligible and narrowly definitive understanding of what was meant by "spare parts," "separate spare parts," "repair spare parts," "replacement spare parts," and "component spare parts." The problem was not academic, contrived to amuse some long-haired philologist interested in semantic hair-splitting. It related to problems of maintenance, the replacement of equipment, armament and rearmament, and led to charges and countercharges of bad faith, violation of the armistice agreement, and hours of acrimonious debate in the military armistice commission itself, echoes of which still create sound and fury in public places.

The basic term "spare part" was represented by two Chinese syllables, each a complete and independent thought unit. The first syllable, *ling*, matching "spare," had much less than the needed 50 per cent semantic content of the English word. It was much more like "individual" than "spare" and was much off center. The second syllable, *chien*, was of equally doubtful precision, being more "piece" than "part." Given such primal non-equivalency of the basic term, subsequent combinations based on that term wandered far afield indeed. Eventually the tables in the meeting place became littered with pieces of equipment and their smallest component parts in the attempt to arrive at visual understanding when words had failed.

The search in two languages for mutually intelligible and acceptable terms goes on throughout all of negotiation because again and again a previously accepted "equivalent" will be found to be inadequate or inaccurate in some new context and experimentation must begin afresh. The search for the right word is a private little cooperative

enterprise between the interpreters at the conference table. This cooperation is sometimes carried on unwillingly, but more often in an atmosphere of mutual need, tempered somewhat by a flavor of malice and raillery.

In the Dean-Huang negotiations at Panmunjom, Huang Hua one day, imputing guilt to the United Nations side, suddenly quoted a Chinese proverb: "Having eaten mutton the entire body exudes."

His interpreter, a somewhat nervous lad from Shanghai whom we privately called "the Shanghai kid," was a past master at using all the many conference clichés, but at the introduction of the proverb, his face twitched with uncertainty. Never before had mutton appeared as conference fare, and the word "exude" was oblique, with connotations rather than denotations. Out of his hesitation he abruptly announced, "When you eat lamb chops your body stinks." The interpretation, by lifting mutton to the status of "lamb chops" and coarsening exudes to "stinks," robbed the phrase of all ironic grace: it splattered grossly like a dropped egg. The intended meaning and imputation were, however, completely clear.

Ambassador Dean rolled with the punch. "Your mention of lamb chops reminds me that it is long past the lunch hour and makes me feel hungry. I would like to have some of those lamb chops."

It was my chance to show the Shanghai kid the difference between mutton and lamb chops. Carefully, I let him have lamb chops as they should be in Chinese: "Your mention of the cutlets from an infant sheep. . . ." Even Huang Hua smiled slightly and the Shanghai kid's eyes seemed to go slightly out of focus with momentary shock.

In Panmunjom and Geneva the languages have not been "equal" in spite of what procedural agreements pro-

claim. If equal, English is still the first among equals for a variety of reasons; if for nothing else, because more people at the conference table know English than know Chinese. The search for the right word to match a definition already given to a concept ranges somewhat more widely throughout the resources of the Chinese language than the English language.

Because of its peculiar and special structure the resources of Chinese are bewilderingly rich, if somewhat unorganized, for the needs of diplomacy. Chinese is basically monosyllabic, one sound or syllable representing a complete concept, or thought unit, that can, and very frequently does, stand alone with strength and clarity. Because, however, of the many similar sounds having different meanings, even with the addition of differing tones for identification, the possibilities of misunderstanding—the unintentional pun—are great, and in ordinary speech a great number of disyllabic compound words are common currency. The language lends itself to the use of a great variety of such compound words, many of which may be invented or created as needed.

Antonyms are coupled to express quality: long-short for length, light-heavy for weight. Four-syllable epigrams, which abound in Chinese, may be condensed by putting together the first and third or the second and fourth syllables, but the most widely used form is the linking of synonyms to rule out the possibility of misunderstanding. But there are many synonyms and each combination has a different nuance. Reversal of the order of the syllables will also give still another nuance and even different meaning.

The search for new terms amid resources of such semantic richness can be exciting even when never complete-

ly successful. I have, however, one laurel to cover many scars. One day in Panmunjom, my principal introduced a completely new word, an important concept never used before at that conference table. Even as I began the interpretation—that can never wait for thought or research—my mind began to range frantically throughout the vast chaotic resources of the Chinese language in search for two syllables, thought units, which put together would ring true with the proper meaning. What emerged from that instant of creative effort did ring true. I knew I was understood. I even thought I was right. Later, however, when the concept bounced back, the Chinese term used by the other side was a different two-syllable compound.

I put it down in my notes, “sharpening my sword at the grindstone of the enemy,” and later when back at base camp referred it, with much questioning and argument, to Dr. Li, United Nations translator and one-time professor of Chinese literature at Yenching University in Peking. Together we finally decided that the word they had used was probably the better of the two. After all, even if they were communist they still no doubt knew their own language better than I did. But on the following day, when again the concept was in circulation and I used, with humbled assurance, their term, they switched to mine and threw it back at me. In the search for the right word even pride is at times forgotten.

There is one aspect of the search, however, which is completely futile. Suddenly to be forced to try and find a word which does not exist stirs, in the spirit of the interpreter, the last and sharpest urge to rebel. In the Chinese language there is no definite article “the.” It does not exist. Even to explain its existence requires long paraphrasing and the use of many illustrations. And then one

day at Panmunjom, a staff officer, quite without warning or prior consultation, began a long ad lib argument based on the difference between "line" and "the line" with reference to the military demarcation line. The argument was designed to throw the Chinese into utter confusion—it even sounded convincing in English. But, regardless of what the exigencies of that moment of debate were, the definite article "the" does not exist in the Chinese language.

The sharpened critical sense of the meaning of meaning which finally emerges from much trial and much error not only ranges widely in the search for the right word and focuses sharply on the utterance of each speaker, but turns back, with chastening effect, on the interpreter himself. He hears English with new ears. The juxtaposition of "pure" and "propaganda" in the phrase "pure propaganda," together with other such common monstrosities, shakes his confidence in his knowledge of his own language. Then, when he is confronted with the fact that the same Chinese compound in common use means both "automatic" and "of his own initiative," and another Chinese compound means both "parallel" and "collateral," and it becomes imperative to clarify the distinction between "automatic" and "of his own initiative" or "parallel" and "collateral," he is driven in desperation to the biggest English dictionary he can find so he can know what he is talking about.

Because of all this, with a sharpened critical perception turned inwards upon himself, the interpreter with new humility realizes that improvement in interpretation begins with bettering his knowledge of his own tongue.

## XII

Choosing the right word at the conference table is a split-second decision, although in any conference, ready-made and much-worn clichés are common coin. Choice of the right word in the text of an agreed announcement or joint communiqué, on the other hand, is the end result of argument, hard semantic bargaining, and, if need be, linguistic chicanery which may at times backfire. Such hair-splitting may seem unnecessarily fine, yet it deals with reality, and the results mean loss or gain as may be seen in the agreed announcement that came out of the Sino-American talks in September of 1955.

In the summer of 1955, forty-one Americans, arrested on a variety of charges, were in Communist Chinese jails, brainwashed, broken, sick, and unwilling pawns in a series of intricate moves in power politics. On the first of August of that year, Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, representing the government of the United States of America, and Ambassador Wang Ping-nan, representing the government of the Peoples Republic of China, together with their assistants and interpreters, met in the president's room of the Palais des Nations in Geneva to negotiate the release and return of these Americans.

The wording of the understanding which had brought the United States and the Peoples Republic of China face to face at a conference table was carefully impartial. The subject of the talks was to be "the return of civilians and

other practical matters at issue." The formula tacitly admitted the fiction that there were Chinese civilians in the United States who would equally benefit, though as a matter of fact no Chinese were being similarly held in the United States. At the first meeting, after procedural matters had been settled, it was agreed that the return of civilians would constitute the first item of the agenda. It was also agreed that the meetings would be private in nature, that is, disagreement would remain within the conference room and only agreements would be publicly announced.

The subject appeared too simple and uncomplicated to be true. It wasn't; or at least not entirely so. Behind this simple façade was the extremely complicated range of the different postures, diverse motivations, and opposed policy objectives of the two governments. The summary of these differing motivations and objectives which follows is not an official one; nor is it one admissible by either side. It is a distillation of all the ideas and impressions left in the mind of this interpreter by reason of his function and has validity only in that context as his personal opinion.

The Americans wished to secure the release of all their nationals held in communist China while according the minimum possible degree of recognition—quasi-diplomatic, *de facto*, or whatever other sort—to the Peoples Republic of China and at the same time move forward as slowly as possible—always talking, however, rather than risking war—in negotiation and agreement on whatever else might be comprehended within the term "other practical matters at issue."

The Chinese, by the calculated piecemeal release of the Americans at a rate designed to bring the most benefit in support of their objectives, wished to gain the maximum

advantage from an accumulation of quasi-diplomatic contacts and exchanges, such as a well-publicized official contact in regular meetings and the issuance of statements of mutual agreement. The sum total of all this would be an impressive picture of the United States and the Peoples Republic of China, in increasing harmony, moving toward settlement of such matters as embargo and cultural exchange and finally arriving at a meeting at the foreign ministers level which, inferentially, could only result in *de jure* as well as *de facto* recognition. Such a sequence would enhance the international status of the Peoples Republic of China and, as a useful by-product, would arouse aggravation, frustration, and mounting suspicion of United States motives and policy in the very heart of the government of the Republic of China in Taiwan.

Such was the background, agreed agenda, and masked motives of the talks which began in August of 1955. The talks were not like those of Panmunjom, for though the two interpreters had both been there, everything else was different and the atmosphere was relaxed and easy. With urbanity and even the minimal social amenities the talks moved slowly toward the first agreement.

First, of course, we reached "agreement in principle," which only means that both sides agree to keep on talking. Then we reached agreement "in substance," but much of that substance was unformed, eluding definition. Then, section by section, paragraph by paragraph, and finally, sentence by sentence and clause by clause, the substance of agreement was defined. On the day before the announcement would be made only agreement on two or three words remained as a task not yet finished. That completed, the first agreement between the governments of the United States of America and the Peoples Republic

of China—fashioned, however, as two separate parallel statements by the respective governments—would be ready for announcement to the world.

Propaganda and fictions held as fact frequently victimize their authors quite as much as the intended dupes. The fiction, held as basic truth by the Chinese, that the Chinese language is internationally equal with English, while possessing a certain validity at the conference table, was a handicap when addressing world public opinion and led to strange linguistic maneuvering with unforeseen consequences.

One item of critical importance in the agreement was when or how soon the civilians would “exercise their right to return.” Our aim was the immediate: hours of close and sometimes bitter argument and probing had been spent in trying to determine just when all those who had suffered so long and hoped so long in vain in Chinese jails could expect release. But the stubborn refusal of the Chinese ruled out immediacy for all, though promising it for some. Much hope had been held out, however, that all could leave very soon after we reached agreement on the announcement; such an announcement in itself would be sign and proof of bettered relations between the two countries.

In the English text originally proposed by the United States negotiator, the phrase used was “promptly to exercise their right to return.” A Chinese rendering of the word “promptly” was a matter of some difficulty. The word for “promptly” in the most common Chinese use also means “immediately” and we knew that would not be accepted. In the course of explanation, we defined “promptly” in terms of “without delay.” But the Chinese would not accept such a definition and rejected the word

“promptly” in the English text because it implied a command. Such had not been our intent but, belatedly, it was realized that in certain contexts the word “prompt” did mean something like an order, or at least more than a diplomatic nudge. Disclaiming all intent to give commands, we agreed to drop “promptly.”

In the English text which the Chinese proposed the phrase “as soon as possible” was one we could not accept. Although “soon” was what we wanted, we did not want it dependent on the “possible” which introduced a new concept, not of time but of possibility. The attention of both sides then focused on the term used in the Chinese text proposed by the Chinese. It was a compound, *chin-su*, *chin*, utmost, and *su*, fast. It seemed to embody just what we were seeking, and I proposed as its English equivalent “very quickly.”

The Chinese felt constrained to consult among themselves and after some discussion countered with their own suggestion. The need to have the last word seems to be one of the compulsions of their negotiating posture. They are never willing to accept what has been suggested by the other side when it is in conformity with their own desires but feel compelled to suggest something that bears their own trademark. In this instance they should have let well enough alone, for they suggested “expeditiously.”

It was the best of words for us. In addition to the idea of “quickly,” which was all the Chinese had in mind, it had connotations of efficacy and efficient action far beyond anything we had sought to gain in the word “promptly.” It was strong, and as the club they offered us for use, “expeditiously” was heavier than we could have hoped for. The weight of the phrase “expeditiously to exercise their right to return” has pressed strongly ever since on a world

opinion that still knows English better than it knows Chinese and which has never noticed, if it ever heard, that *chin-su* only means "utmost speed" with no overtones of efficacy and efficient action.

The proposal to have a third power in each capital, Washington and Peking, designated to exercise certain subsidiary functions in the implementation of the agreed announcement, was originally a Chinese suggestion. They probably—though this cannot be proven—expected to derive benefits not listed as the function of the third power. By specifying that India be the third power charged with implementing certain matters in Washington they may have hoped to involve the Indian Embassy in Washington in irritating *démarches* with the United States Department of State on controversial matters, thereby creating ill will between the two governments. They also may have hoped that by the designation of the Indian government as in some way representing the interest of the government of the Peoples Republic of China in Washington it would give that government the semblance of being responsible for all Chinese in the United States, in this way making it appear to the Chinese authorities on Formosa that an additional bit of *de facto* recognition had been gained for the Peoples Republic of China.

The United States side accepted the suggestion about the third power arrangement both because it was to our interest to appear reasonable when it could be done without giving in on principle, and because it was also felt that it would be a real advantage to have the United Kingdom's representative in Peking recognized as having the right, under certain circumstances, to make representations to the government of the Peoples Republic of China on behalf of American civilians in China.

Concealed within the agreement to incorporate the third power arrangement within the agreed announcement were two different points of view about just how the two third powers were to be brought into the picture.

The United States position was that the government of the area wherein the third power would function should give permission or authorize the representative of that power to act. Thus the government of the United States would authorize the Indian Embassy in Washington under certain conditions to give aid to, or make representations on behalf of, certain Chinese civilians in the United States. In turn, the government of the Peoples Republic of China would give permission to the office of the United Kingdom Chargé in Peking to act similarly on behalf of American civilians in China.

The Chinese position was that the government of the persons involved should ask the third power to undertake those functions on behalf of its nationals. Thus the government of the Peoples Republic of China would ask the government of India to instruct the Indian Embassy in Washington to look after Chinese civilians in the United States; similarly, the government of the United States would ask the government of the United Kingdom to instruct the office of the United Kingdom Chargé in Peking to look after civilians in China.

The basic conflict in these two positions was never clearly brought to the conference table. Both sides preferred to let sleeping dogs lie and glossed over the real issue, hoping to gain later advantage. And in this equivocal state of affairs we arrived at the problem of wording the substantive sentence in the text of the agreed announcement.

The wording originally proposed by the American side read in English "shall be authorized," and the suggested Chinese language version was closely equivalent—something like "shall receive authority." By whom that authority was granted, or from whom received, was a sleeping dog carefully left undisturbed.

The English text proposed by the Chinese side read "shall be entrusted" but omitted the prepositional phrase necessary to qualify the meaning of the verb "entrust." The use of prepositions in English is a particularly tricky matter for Chinese, who prefer to ignore them even when they are most proficient in the language. In the Chinese text the term they proposed was *wei-t'o* (mandated).

The fundamental confrontation of the two terms "authorized" and "mandated" had brought the essential conflict of viewpoints to the conference table, albeit disguised as a textual matter. If the third power were "authorized," that authorization would logically be given by the government of the country in which the function was to be exercised. If the third power, however, were "mandated," a case could be made that the mandating should be done by the government having proprietary interest in the persons concerned.

Throughout the argument about the text, the English word "mandated" was never used by the Chinese English-language interpreter. The omission had some justification. The Chinese compound *wei-t'o* has a much larger semantic content than its newly assigned modern meaning of "mandate." The first syllable means to designate a representative and appears in many combinations that have reference to members of representative bodies or membership on official commissions. The second syllable is essentially

an honorific, politely signifying beseech. It appears in such phrases as "I place myself in your hands" or "I abandon myself to your grace."

The Chinese side was easily induced to drop the English word "entrusted." As tactfully as possible it was pointed out that without the preposition "with" the sentence was ungrammatical and incomplete and would require the addition of another qualifying clause in a text already trimmed and forged to near completion.

Apparently on the assumption that I did not know the mandate significance of *wei-t'o*, the Chinese took the line that a sense of politeness alone was the reason for its use in the text. "Authorized" was harsh and overbearing, lacking in courtesy. After all, we were asking others to do something for us. The real meaning of *wei-t'o* was merely "to invite politely."

The Chinese language is rich in polite variants and words meaning "to invite." I offered Ambassador Wang a number of these, including one so flowery and ornate a part of the grand ceremony of an imperial past, that he laughed out loud and said I was too old-fashioned. By then they were sure I did not know the new mandate meaning of *wei-t'o*.

Eventually we agreed to leave *wei-t'o* in the Chinese text. But it had been so carefully defined as "invite" that the Chinese by their own logic were constrained to accept it as such in the English text which then read "shall be invited."

It was a neutral and unpretentious word but by its meaning the United States government invited the Indian Embassy in Washington to undertake certain functions on behalf of Chinese in the United States who wished to return to mainland China. The fact of this invitation was

widely publicized as part of the third power arrangement.

A few days later at the next meeting when the Chinese howled in protest and said the government of the United States should have invited the government of the United Kingdom Chargé in Peking, we politely agreed that if they wanted us to invite the government of the United Kingdom we would do that, too. We had thought that was what they were to do, but if they did not wish to extend an invitation, in the interests of politeness, and to aid the implementation of the agreed announcement, we were willing to invite any and everybody. Nobody, however was mandated.

The restrictive meaning of "mandated" never stood a chance. None of the correspondents who read the bulletin on the press board of the Palais des Nations could read *wei-t'o* in Chinese, but all understood the English word "invite," and so invite it was to the world at large who read the world press. Mandated never got off the ground, and after a few days even the Chinese gave up the argument.

From now on the word "invite" has a special place in my memory. But one thing more I also surely know: never again will the Chinese accept any word I proffer them across the table. At least they will give it a very long second look. Maybe, too, they now realize that I did know the modern, limited meaning of "mandate" for the word *wei-t'o*, which they had tried so glibly to explain away.

# XIII

Words, even the best possible, selected with the greatest care, are not enough. The echo must not only ring true with meaning but correspond to speech in rate of utterance, tone, and inflection.

Very often at a conference, after the prepared statements have been fired off with great rapidity and the desks cleared by both sides, a speaker will carefully get down to business and state, in short clear sentences, something of prime importance. He will be thinking out loud, slowly and with great care. He will also be stressing, by intent, each word or phrase with all the deliberation possible to give it emphasis and weight.

His interpreter has just finished following his principal at full speed over the long course of a steeplechase speech. He has had the feeling of always being far behind with the mud thrown in his face, about to take a spill at the next obstacle as he stumbled, with unwilling hesitations and slowdowns, through the long sentences. Now he has a few short sentences, easily rendered, in which to reaffirm himself. The temptation is very great to spit out the words swiftly and crisply—because they are easy and he is sure of them—and let the other side hear that which originally has been spoken slowly, interpreted at the rate and the brusqueness of an ultimatum: one *bête noire* which must never appear at the conference table.

However, those across the table, for whose ears the words are spoken, do not understand what is said in English with purposeful slowness in order that each word may make its own deep impression on the consciousness. They merely hear sounds that by the rate and inflection of their utterance, purport to be something of special importance. It remains for the interpreter to give those sounds meaning and in so doing to preserve all of their original gravity—even ponderousness, if such were intended. His tone and rate of utterance should echo exactly the tone and rate of utterance of his principal.

Troyanovsky, interpreter for Molotov and Khrushchev, is the perfect exponent of hi-fi interpretation. His English is fluent, but correct, American: he went to United States schools in Maryland while his father was ambassador in Washington. When by himself, he is a smiling, pleasant-seeming chap. When he is interpreting, however, he becomes a chameleon, responding to the master's stimulation. At a dinner party, or in the lounge of the Palais des Nations when his principal is jovial in cynical calculated camaraderie, Troyanovsky's pleasant face also smiles, and he is not only polite but boyishly appealing.

But at the conference table it is another story. During one session of the conference on Indochina in the summer of 1954, the Cambodian delegate rather suddenly introduced the charge that communist guerrillas from Vietnam had attacked a Cambodian bus carrying civilians and had killed a number of the passengers, including some women and children, and wounded many more. The source cited was a telegram which the chief of the Cambodian delegation read to the conference.

Molotov asked and gained the floor and began to speak. His slow drawl, slurring intonation, and curling lips

blasphemed and accused, pouring total disbelief on all those who had spoken: the chief of the Cambodian delegation, Bidault for France, and Dinh from South Vietnam. Bidault's sensitive face went white with spots of red as though flicked by a lash, the Cambodian, in a strange telepathic reaction, began to wave a piece of paper, and delegates all around the table began to shift in their seats as though blown upon with insult—*yet no one had understood a word of what had been spoken.*

Molotov ended and gestured briefly to his echo to follow. The voice, the scorn, the mocking disbelief linking one long insult to the next belonged to Molotov, but the words were English.

“We have heard much talk about a reputed telegram that no one has seen. No one knows whether it really exists or not—sent from no one to no one . . .” and on and on with every possible slur and nasty insinuation.

Bidault started signalling the chair for recognition. In fumbling haste the Cambodians passed the telegram to Eden, and an uproar began to grow around the big table as Molotov's slurring voice went on in Troyanovsky's English. At the end, with the words “This conference has more important business to transact than wasting its time with imaginary telegrams,” it was Molotov's sneer that curled mockingly on Troyanovsky's young lips. It was hi-fi interpreting at its best—in the service of the worst.

Identification with his principal, as complete as is humanly possible, is the interpreter's secret of such fidelity. One of the primary rules of interpretation is that the interpreter must not permit his own ideas, feelings, prejudices or convictions to intrude upon performance of his task.

There was an interpreter in Panmunjom who had every

qualification but detachment. He and his family had suffered much at the hands of the communists and he hated them all with a burning intensity. He would much rather fight with them than talk with them, and he resented the talking. Yet those who met at the conference table had been charged with implementing an armistice. There was business to be done and limited agreements at which to arrive, so fighting was ruled out. But he could make the simplest statement of fact or opinion sound like a challenge to mortal combat. The stilted and trite phrase "I wish to make a statement," with which a speaker secures the floor in an unchaired meeting, cut like challenge to combat when he spoke it. Although there was much wrangling and at times some ugly arguing, many of the sessions nevertheless were devoted to trying to secure agreement on basically noncontroversial and matter-of-fact subjects, such as where the prisoners were to be exchanged, where the joint headquarters was to be located, etc. There were, however, appreciably fewer agreements reached and less business accomplished at the meeting where he interpreted, and in spite of his superior qualifications, his usefulness was sharply limited.

Sometimes the temptation to intrude does not stem from inner compulsion but from something proffered in the course of the meeting as bait or enticement. The offering of such bait by a speaker involves bypassing or ignoring his own interpreter and speaking directly to the interpreter of the other side. It may come about most naturally. In the frustration which comes from realizing that his carefully chosen words, with all their calculated nuance, are not directly reaching his opposite, the negotiator begins to point his remarks at the one person across the table who understands—his opposite's interpreter.

Some time after the military armistice commission in Korea had begun its work, one of the interpreters brought by the Chinese to the staff level meetings was a Chinese WAC, a very demure miss who spoke her English with a singularly pure and gentle accent. At times she allowed herself, or could not restrain, the ghost of a smile. One of the United Nations negotiators seemed to feel that finally this was one sympathetic person who could really understand all the persuasion and logic he had been pouring into deaf ears. While his opposite sat by in half-irritated amusement, he would direct long and cozily confidential appeals to her to "explain to Colonel Hsu just what I mean."

The real joke in this little comedy was that Colonel Hsu, Michigan State Ph.D., understood, and probably spoke, English better than his little gentle-voiced interpreter.

In one of the more informal meetings between Ambassador Johnson and Ambassador Wang in the late summer of 1955 the latter made a long appeal, full of nuances and implied promises rather than explicit undertakings, and then, as it was being interpreted, sat watching me intently. He obviously sensed that the stiff, somewhat pompous rendering given by his interpreter to his own informal but suggestive remarks had failed in appeal and had missed the mark. From the expression on my face, he also probably sensed that I had understood at what he was hinting without saying it, for he turned to me directly and spoke appealingly as one Chinese to another: "Colonel Ekvall, you certainly understand what I really mean, don't you?"

The temptation was to speak, or at least to nod, thus by implication becoming, for the moment, a negotiator,

but the correct thing was to look noncommittal and not acknowledge any special understanding in which my principal had no part. I didn't speak; I didn't nod; but I wonder whether I kept a fugitive smile from my face?

At a formal meeting, much later in the course of the negotiations, Ambassador Wang really broke all the rules and tossed a baited hook in my direction. He had been discussing the matter of cultural exchange and human contacts, and he had been enjoying himself talking about freedom of information, bamboo curtains, and such things as related to the ban preventing American newsmen from accepting an invitation to visit China and report to the American people on what they saw. He taunted us with being afraid of facts and the truth. There was little that could effectively be said in rebuttal. In fact, there was nothing; we took refuge in silence. Then, into this silence, he suddenly tossed a statement that sizzled like a firecracker.

"Now here is Colonel Ekvall who has done so much research and written so much on the subject of the minorities and their culture. He should come to China to finish his study and complete the writing of his book. We would welcome him. We would welcome him and all other scientists in cultural exchange."

My ears were red and I looked straight ahead at the pad in front of me on the table. Then, turning from Ambassador Johnson toward me with frank amusement in his voice, he goaded me once more. "Colonel Ekvall, welcome."

He had broken all the rules, turning an echo into a being having a personality and a future. I became not only exhibit A of Chinese cultural tolerance, dragged in by the fact of my knowledge of the Tibetan language and

culture, but an unwitting accomplice, and he grinned in enjoyment of the fact.

I could only stare at the pad in front of me while his glibly polite jest was transposed into stiff English: stare, and wait for Ambassador Johnson to give me something official to interpret.

## XIV

Several more basic rules emerge from the experience of interpreting: the interpreter must never add, even in the interest of clarification, anything of his own to what is being said; and conversely, he must never subtract, for neither subtraction nor its half brother omission is permissible.

✓The temptation to add, if not a sentence, just a phrase or even a word, can be very strong. The interpreter often feels as though he were the only one with hearing ears, listening to a dialogue of the deaf where just one more word—the right one, of course—would clear up all misunderstanding; he may even deceive himself into believing that such addition is the best and highest form of interpretation. In his inmost being he knows what his principal means: it is simply a matter of clarification. Yet clarification may, in fact, be something not desired.

And here I remember a staff meeting in Panmunjom in which I was most unhappy from beginning to end. What I was given to interpret seemed to be, as I worked through it stubborn sentence by sentence and refractory

phrase by phrase, the most amazing jumble of contradictions ever uttered. I thought I knew what was intended. Again and again I was tempted to insert one or two explanatory phrases which would make everything clear. But against all reason I held true to the words of my principal and at the end wiped my sweating palms.

The other side responded with the request that the interpretation be repeated. This implied that I was at fault, and I had to swallow the humiliation while at the same time feeling, with a mounting, helpless sort of fury, that it wasn't altogether my fault. But no matter whose fault, I was the one pilloried and shamed. Then they asked that the statement be repeated. It was no clearer than before, and I once more sweated through its interpretation, after which those on the other side of the table shook their heads in bewilderment. A long question-and-answer session followed until everyone seemed tired out. At last, in a state of mutual bafflement, we adjourned and I could take my shame outside.

Yet as we rode back to camp at Munsani, my principal remarked, "Ekvall, you did a good job today."

"But sir, they didn't understand. Nobody understood and we ended more confused than when we started." I was smarting with the hurt of a job bungled and yet still sensed bitterly, but silently, that it wasn't altogether my fault.

"That's it exactly. If they had understood I would have known that you were misinterpreting. They weren't supposed to understand. I was purposely fuzzing it up. Good work."

Even obscurity has its uses, and in such cases the interpreter should not attempt to shed further light. But, of course, not all obscurity is intentional or even useful.

The temptation to subtract may be equally strong. At times there are so many tiresome repetitions, such a great number of pyramided synonyms, that the interpreter feels it certainly will do no harm, maybe even help, if a few words are left out. How strong this temptation may be can well be appreciated by anyone who has sat through after-dinner speeches or other similar long-winded discourse and wished, in a rage that had to remain unspoken, that there were some way to amputate the wildly sprouting verbiage. The interpreter has that power. And he can use it, if he yields to temptation, without fear of detection. An editor, using the blue pencil, knows there is a record of each deletion or change. He must be ready, if necessary, to defend each cut. But there is no record for the interpreter: he can cut and never be discovered, never be called to account. Yet it is a power he must never use.

Omission is inadvertent subtraction. It occurs with varying frequency, depending on pressure, speed of the speaker's utterance, and other unfavorable factors which are an inseparable part of ad lib discourse. Most omissions do not cause too much damage, for they are usually limited to the dropping of a word or a clause, but the danger of really serious damage is always present. Against this danger the interpreter develops, as a defense mechanism, the faculty of checking off somewhere in his mind the count of the essential thoughts or phrases his principal has used against the count of what he has interpreted. When he has dropped something important, this subconscious tabulator flashes a warning signal, telling him he has omitted something, though not exactly what, and thereby allows him to check with the speaker or with the stenographic record in order to pick it up. The keeping of such a subconscious tabulation is a very important part

of high-speed, catch-as-catch-can interpretation of hurly-burly, ab lib discussion, for unless there is someone else on his own side of the table who knows the other language, there is no further way of checking whether all that has been said has been echoed with equal fidelity.

An even greater temptation than that of subtraction is the urge to try and compress the worthless many into the precious few—especially when Chinese, which is made for the coining of epigrams of matchless brevity, is the language being used. But compression is only barely permissible if the interpreter is sufficiently on guard against the fault of omission.

The greatest master of compression I have ever heard is Andronakov, who was with the French delegation in the Asian and Indochina conferences in Geneva in 1955. He does a three-language—French, English, and Russian—two-way interpretation with a speed and brilliancy I have never heard equalled. His interpretation, of a peculiar staccato quality, invariably has fewer syllables than the original and is actually a form of “cable-ese.”

The art of compression has some of the intoxicating effect of creative effort. It is heady stuff. But I have never dared use this art when serious matters were being discussed.

However, in one session in Panmunjom, which was open to the press, and in itself really more a bit of theater than a conference, I let myself go. It was the meeting in which the members of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission were being introduced, with appropriate remarks, to the Joint Secretariat. My principal, the man of many words, had a wonderful time multiplying words without knowledge. But for once there was nothing substantive at stake and I had a field day compressing those

words. Not needing to be exceptionally faithful I took a long overdue revenge, cutting fifty syllables to twenty, then ten, and once into a short epigram of four syllables. My principal was somewhat startled: never had his chance to say something more come to him so quickly, but that was something to which he could have no possible objection. The duet of organ fugue and drumbeat assembly went on until the newsmen began to chuckle in amusement. Could this be the Chinese language of the famous police court story?

A Chinese plaintiff was being questioned, through the court interpreter, about a stolen cat. "What sort of a cat was it?" the judge asked. The prisoner talked at high speed in Chinese for five minutes and then the interpreter announced, "Your honor, he says it was black."

Compression is great fun, but dangerous stuff when brought to the conference table. An epigram is not, however, forbidden. Addition and subtraction are.

## XV

As yet, no system for the effective monitoring of interpretation with built-in arrangements for interrupting the meeting in case of significant error and setting the record straight, has been devised for international conferences. There is no provision for correction corresponding to the nerve-racking function which was mine behind the sandbags in Myitkyina. It is quite possible any such arrange-

ment would prove too unwieldy, but linguists serving on the United Nations staff and in the language division of the State Department are gravely concerned over the lack of such a device.

At the present time, whenever a mistake is made it gets into the bloodstream of the discussion, infecting issues until at long last argument, explanation, and the piecemeal unscrambling of cross-purposes get it isolated and finally neutralized. Such a process takes time; frequently the initial damage is never entirely repaired.

The danger of a serious misinterpretation, the confusion and damage which can result, and the need of an effective monitoring arrangement with corrective powers are well illustrated by the course of events in the final session of the Asian conference convened in Geneva in the summer of 1954. From the point of view of the United Nations delegations, that final farewell session had two objectives. The first was to introduce into the record a statement which would put the blame for the failure of the conference to effect any solution of the Korean problem squarely on the intransigence of the Chinese, North Koreans, and Russians. The second was to reaffirm the unity and solidarity of the United Nations delegations with the South Korean delegation as unmistakably as the United Nations forces had demonstrated that unity by fighting beside the South Korean forces against the communist aggressors from the north.

The language situation at that final session requires some explanation. Five languages were in use: English, French, Russian, Chinese, and Korean. The language of the day was French, which meant that a consecutive interpretation in French was made by the interpreters on the conference floor and simultaneous interpretation from

that French version was made from the booths in English, Russian, Chinese, and Korean. If, of course, the speaker on the floor spoke in French, it would be interpreted simultaneously from the booths directly.

I, however, knew that the Chinese language interpreter in the booth did not know French and so had to pick up the English simultaneous interpretation as a base from which he would make his Chinese rendering. That put the Chinese simultaneous interpretation a phrase or two behind the others. Another irregularity in the setup was that Chou En-lai, the Chinese delegate, was using his own interpreter who sat beside him and put into English whatever Chou said, and from that the simultaneous interpretation would be made.

From this complicated situation the salient fact emerges that the language line of communication between Paul Henri Spaak, then Belgian Prime Minister, and Chou En-lai, Premier of the Peoples Republic of China—the two protagonists of the drama which was about to unfold on the conference floor—was French to English to Chinese and Chinese to English to French. These were, also, the three languages out of the five which I knew, and as a matter of professional interest, aided by my knowledge of the case, by switching my earphones on one ear from language to language and listening with the other ear to the speaker on the floor, I was able to check on the successive and different language versions.

Paul Henri Spaak, with all the authority of his position as a leader of the western world and as a spokesman for collective security and the rule of law as against the rule of force, was speaking for the United Nations position and in defense of the United Nations statement. Nor, as befitted one of the great orators of Europe, was he read-

ing a text but rather was speaking freely, eloquently, and convincingly with the full power of his personality and the force of his ideas. The comprehensiveness and truthfulness of the United Nations proposal made it superfluous to consider any other proposal and so he finished with the statement: "Cette déclaration est contenue dans notre texte." The simultaneous English version that came into my other ear said: "This statement is contained in the text of the armistice agreement." It later was discovered that the interpreter had heard the words "dans notre texte" as "dans l'autre texte" and thinking that "l'autre" was vague and needed explanation, had added his own clarification by inserting the words "of the armistice agreement." I spun the dial for the Chinese version which would be a phrase late and heard it follow the English: "This statement is contained in the text of the armistice agreement."

To the ears of Chou En-lai, Paul Henri Spaak had said that the Chinese proposal was contained in the text of the armistice agreement, when in truth it had nothing to do with the armistice agreement. It was perfectly obvious at what instant he heard that amazing statement—so contrary to fact—for he started as though a bee had stung him and began signalling the chairman, Sir Anthony Eden, for the floor.

It was Chou En-lai's first big international conference. Though smarting under the characterization that he and his cause were being "dragged before the bar of world opinion," he had scored a notable success throughout the course of the conference. Being "dragged before the bar" had actually been a very effective and dramatic entrance, and he had admirably stolen the show from his comrade in arms, Molotov. Up to and at the very last meeting, he

was still consciously carrying the ball, pressing for every advantage and watching for the breaks.

He now thought he had one. He had caught the great and famous spokesman for the West in a clumsy mistake. The great Spaak had said, "text of the armistice agreement," when what was being discussed had no direct connection whatsoever with the text of the armistice agreement. In the full luxury of being both correct and righteously indignant, he took the floor, his rather high-pitched voice shrill with grievance.

"Mr. Chairman and fellow delegates. At this great international conference, the first that I have attended, I am surprised to find there is so little understanding and that I am so greatly misunderstood. The Belgian Foreign Minister, Mr. Spaak, has just said that the proposal of the delegation of the Peoples Republic of China is included in the armistice agreement. This assertion is groundless."

Paul Henri Spaak was watching Chou En-lai with an expression of mildly interested detachment mixed with obvious wonderment as to just what all the fuss was about. Also, perhaps, thinking that the shrill Chinese syllables were a strange answer to the nuanced beauty of what had been so well said in French, yet willing to learn what those unfamiliar syllables meant, he adjusted his earphones with good-natured intent. But when their meaning, passing from Chinese through English into French, finally reached his understanding it was his turn to start angrily and with hand and voice begin asking for the floor.

Sir Anthony had begun to look puzzled, and all over the conference hall delegates began to stir and sit straighter with expectation, for suddenly Chou En-lai, spokesman for the Communists, and Paul Henri Spaak, spokesman

for the United Nations group of delegations, for no apparent reason, were having a private little dogfight.

Spaak's eyes behind the thick lenses of his glasses were big with a sense of injury, and it was his turn at righteous indignation and oratorical grievance as he rose to address the chair, at the same time shaking his finger warningly at Chou En-lai.

"Monsieur le président, je voudrais demander à M. Chou En-lai de bien écouter ce que je vais dire parce que très certainement il a mal compris ma première intervention. Je n'ai pas dit que sa proposition était comprise dans les conditions d'armistice. *Je n'ai jamais dit cela!*"

The error was snowballing. The addition inserted "in the interest of clarity" was getting out of hand, compounding confusion. The United Nations interpreter started to repeat his error and then hastily corrected himself, thereby revealing that he now knew the mistake he had made. Many people began to sense that something had gone wrong without knowing how or why. But there was no one to ring a bell and put a finger on what was wrong, so it continued to roll.

Spaak and Chou, as fast as a three-language channel of communication would permit, were now far along in their intense private exchange of accusation, denial, and explanation. But a strange perverse personal rapport, compounded of mutual bewilderment and a common eagerness to explain and make matters once and for all clear, had developed between them.

Spaak's initial repudiation of the phrase "text of the armistice agreement," by repetition, suggested more. What was it he had not said? What had he really meant? Everything was suddenly ambiguous and equivocal. Chou sensed his chance and the extent of his new opportunity as he

and the spokesman for the West talked warmly man to man.

“If the declaration put forward by the sixteen United Nations states and the last proposal put forward by the delegation of the Peoples Republic of China, *though having a few certain differences*, come from a common desire, instead of a unilateral declaration by the sixteen, why cannot the nineteen states represented at this Geneva Conference express this common desire in a common agreement?”

It was a smoothly worded enticement that yet made the minimal concession to stubborn fact in the phrase “though having a few certain differences.” But the ad lib exchange had been at high speed, and in the heated hurly-burly, Chou En-lai’s interpreter omitted the key phrase “though having a few certain differences” from the interpretation and with that omission it passed into French. What Spaak finally heard in French was a sweeping plea for agreement based on a common desire for settlement. It possibly sounded even like a belated Chinese acceptance of the point of view he had defended so eloquently. He may have felt that at last he had persuaded Chou to be reasonable. In the heated exchanges of misunderstanding he had passed beyond the point of cold, hard thinking and, eager to show that he too was reasonable, his impulses spoke.

“En ce que me concern et pour éviter tout doute, je suis prêt à affirmer—affirmation ou vote—que j’accepte la proposition de délégué de la république chinoise.”

“La république chinoise,” even in French, is not the official designation of the Peoples Republic of China; but for once Chou En-lai passed up the quibble, accepted Paul Henri Spaak’s statement as a new agreement on the

part of the United Nations group of delegations, and smoothly called for a reconsideration.

A parliamentary riot broke out on the floor. It seemed that Paul Henri Spaak, the great spokesman for the West, had suddenly broken away from the agreement and unity so carefully arrived at before the final meeting and had gone over to the enemy. Prime Minister Casey of Australia, Vice President Garcia of the Philippines, and heads of other delegations were all asking for the floor. General Bedell Smith, chief of the United States delegation, was trying to do two things at the same time: get the floor, and by actual physical restraint hold the delegation of South Korea in place, for that delegation, suddenly convinced of treachery, had started to walk out. Sir Anthony Eden, caught up in the confusion of the developments, obviously didn't know whether Spaak had given ground or had wrung an unexpected concession from the Chinese. Nor could he be sure to whom of many claimants he should grant the floor, and thus he, too, seemed to give ground in uncertainty.

For three-quarters of an hour the allied delegations of the United Nations floundered in the confusion of misunderstanding, and spoke, largely at cross-purposes, in bewilderment and even anger, while the Communists exploited with zest the opportunities which came to them in the turmoil. Spaak himself, equally bewildered by the reproaches of his friends and the blandishments of his enemies, felt, with an obvious sense of injury, that on the basis of *what he had heard*, he was justified in being reasonable.

Eventually, a sort of unity, more of feeling than of ideas and position, was restored among the delegations of

the nations who had contributed to the effort in Korea, and the original resolution was adhered to as an act of faith. But it had lost the clean, hard impact intended. On the other hand, the Communist delegations had gained a last minute advantage and went out of the meeting with a propaganda issue that was played to the hilt in their press. In the free world press that issue never gained much credence, for that press had come to discount as false most of what the Communists put out, but there was some uncertainty apparent and some questions raised as to just how united the United Nations were over the content and phrasing of their "last word" at the Asian conference of 1954.

Two basic rules of interpretation had been broken. One interpreter, in the interest of clarification—he thought—had added a phrase; another interpreter, under the stress of fast ad lib interpretation, had unwittingly left out a phrase. The double violation resulted in a chorus of recrimination and much misunderstanding, threatening, for a short time, the unity of the West.

## XVI

Officially, the conference interpreter is a one-way channel, transposing what his principal says into the other language. Unofficially, he should also function in reverse, doing a certain amount of *sotto voce* comment on what the speaker for the other side has said for the ear of his principal. This function arises from the interpreter's

identification with his principal. What he knows or learns must equally be made available to that more important alter ego.

The strictly semantic aspects of this function have to do with the correcting of words, filling in of omissions, and commenting on over-all nuance and tone. Every interpreter knows the sickening sensation that comes when he realizes that he has used the wrong word. The fault may stem from many causes but most frequently from mental fatigue. In the United Nations the interpreters change off at hour intervals and two hours of interpreting is considered a day's work. An interpreter at a conference table is there for the duration of the meeting and after two hours the quality of his performance begins to deteriorate. When he realizes that he has used the wrong word, the safest way out is immediate correction with the phrase "I made a mistake, the correction is —."

Often, however, an interpreter is unaware of having used a wrong word. But his opposite across the table knows, or should know, that a mistake has been made, for at that time the opposite one has all the advantages. He is listening, relaxed; he is a spectator with a ringside seat; he is proofreading, not composing; and the language being spoken is native to him. Yet he cannot openly and officially correct the interpretation. The nearest approach he can make to open correction is to suggest to his principal that he ask for a repeat. Thus his best recourse is whispered comment to his principal or a scribbled note indicating the mistake. He does this both because his principal should know the real meaning of the mistaken interpretation and as a matter of self-protection.

When the matter of the designation of a third power was being discussed in the Geneva talks, the Chinese

English-language interpreter used the English word "ascertain" for the Chinese word meaning "to designate" or "to fix for certain." This usage in the sentence "Each of the two parties will ascertain a third power . . ." could have made for endless confusion if I had not headed it off with the correction "Wang did not say 'ascertain' but rather 'designate for certain,'" whispered to Ambassador Johnson to make clear the meaning, keep the record straight, and forestall a *non sequitur* argument. After a few exchanges the implied correction became apparent and the word "ascertain" disappeared.

But sometimes an error will seem to be somewhat incidental and the interpreter will decide to let it pass. He does so at his own risk, for it may return to haunt him. Ambassador Wang once said, "This situation results from coercion." His interpreter said in English, "This situation is unnatural." That morning many things needing correction were being said and I had whispered to my principal a number of times. Such whispering, when too frequent, can become irritating, and I decided not to whisper the latest correction. It was only one sentence in many and later when making up the final record of the meeting the correction could be entered. But perversely, the word "unnatural" caught Ambassador Johnson's attention, and seizing on it, he rang the changes in refutation.

Ambassador Wang may well have felt resentful—he looked at least amazed—at being taken to task for what he had never said, but probably put it down to American trickery, while Ambassador Johnson had a wonderful time with a straw man not of his making. But it was difficult to interpret and my opposite, the Chinese interpreter, began to look browbeaten.

The picking up of omissions and dropped phrases is of much greater importance than any correction of individual words. Use of the wrong word may distort meaning and produce its own mischievous results but the idea or issue is somewhere around and not altogether forgotten. But if a phrase or clause is dropped out and not picked up and brought back by the other interpreter, it is lost with complete finality, and that loss may lead to serious consequences in the future course of the negotiations. Thus an interpreter may take a chance on leaving a word or two uncorrected; but he dare not let a phrase or sentence be lost, thereby having no meaning for his principal, and so must whisper or scribble to good purpose. And if his principal makes an issue of, or refers to, that idea just rescued from oblivion, the interpreter who let it drop has the unhappy feeling of having been measured by his foes, though his own people are unaware of any discrepancy.

Comment on the nuance and tone of what has been said may focus on a word that may not be exactly wrong but has other interesting associations and connotations. Such explanation gives a sort of two-point fix on meaning. But nuance or tone is more generally concerned with the whole—short or long as it may be—of discourse.

The Chinese interpreters who had experience in Panmunjom acquired habits of reliance on the use of harsh terms, bristling phraseology, and ponderous three- and four-syllable words. On the other hand, in the Geneva talks Ambassador Wang was urbane and smooth but markedly informal, even colloquial at times. The English interpretation of what he said was almost invariably more uncompromising and angular than the original Chinese utterance. In the interpretation, his mere state-

ments became challenges to battle. But once in a while, though somewhat rarely, Ambassador Wang's easy phrases, with carefully calculated intent, turned bitter and biting, sharp with unspoken insult. His Chinese interpreter, however, knew only one tone, and his habitually stiff and formal phrasing was less aggressive and lacked the bite of the original. This, too, was something of critical importance and brought to the attention of the United States negotiator.

In addition to the semantic aspects of functioning in reverse, the interpreter should give early warning to his principal of the introduction by the other side of new subject matter or any unexpected giving of assent or stating of refusal. The punch line, a sudden unexpected "yes," or the blunt blow of a "no," and even the introduction of a new subject, may appear in the first sentence of a long statement. But that statement, though uttered, means nothing until interpreted, and that interpretation will not begin until all the other words have been said. The interpreter can save for his principal precious time in which to start thinking of answers, argument, refutation or change in tactics, by telling him, in whispers or in a scribbled note, the gist of that punch line.

The greatest advantage, of course, is when the negotiator knows the other language. That, however, is an advantage that so far only the Chinese have had, for many of their negotiators know enough English to understand what is said on first utterance.

None of ours have known Chinese. So the Chinese have precious time in which to dream up answers, and our negotiators must wait for the official interpretation or get what they may from whispered briefs made by their own interpreters, functioning in reverse.

Lastly, the interpreter (by reason of his knowledge of language and because he has no official responsibility for recording or analyzing the course of the argument while the other side is speaking) has a special and unique opportunity to eavesdrop and note developments in the camp of the enemy. Prepared statements are changed; last minute additions are scribbled; sentences are spoken and before they are interpreted are countermanded; and hastily whispered consultations take place from which a significant phrase or word may leak to attentive ears on the other side of the table. All such developments offer the opportunity to the interpreter of the opposite side to match stray pieces into a pattern and pass that pattern to his principal as something of information and value.

The interpreter himself hears everything twice. He is strung to a nervous tension which makes him finely sensitive to nuance and atmosphere, and, savoring the full flavor of the whole, he gathers impressions, half-formed judgments, and even full-blown conclusions which are hard to substantiate yet have a certain validity of their own.

There is one final hazard. If ever—and it does sometimes happen—his principal queries him for those impressions and conclusions, for that instant he is no longer an interpreter but finds himself, momentarily, on the dizzy, dangerous heights where advisors think deep thoughts and are found wanting. It is safer, even if more nerve-racking, to be an echo.

# XVII

There are certain refinements of the function of interpretation which come fleetingly and at rare intervals. The interpreter who has been juggling desperately with so-called equivalents at unexpected moments finds himself caught and carried in the deep currents of the common thought-stream of humanity where the confusion of tongues no longer exists. A down-to-earth contemporary Americanism may be matched by a phrase more than two thousand years old from a disciple of Confucius, or the words of a Mongolian Living Buddha, spoken in Tibetan, may be mirrored by a line from the English poets. Humor, too, holds its place in the common heritage, and in flashes of illumination even a pun may survive.

I came to know Mac, a Marine intelligence officer, in Peking. We met at a polyglot cocktail party. In the course of cocktail persiflage, a Mongolian princess (then currently wife of the French consul general) and I had perversely chosen to insulate ourselves from the talk that swirled around us in English, French, and Chinese, all of which she spoke fluently, and had shifted into Tibetan for toasts and countertoasts. After a bit, Mac, who was standing by in a somewhat double sense, could restrain his curiosity no longer.

“What are you speaking?” And when told, was properly impressed.

A little later he and I discovered that we shared lik-

ings in the English poets and retired into a corner, for the space of a drink, to toss back and forth stray bits culled from Chaucer to Kipling before we went our separate ways.

Two days later he telephoned to ask if I could help him. He was in contact with a Mongolian Living Buddha from a place unknown who seemed to have information which might be worth while, but the language problem was acute. He had been using two official interpreters—one Mongolian to Chinese and one Chinese to English—furnished by the local Chinese authorities. But double interpretation, plus what he shrewdly suspected was official suppression and distortion, had up to that time made the contact largely unproductive. A remark, however, which had leaked through about the Living Buddha's having been in Tibet suggested the possibility that he might speak Tibetan. I was to make the test.

The Living Buddha, for reasons best known to himself, may have originally thought it worth while to get in touch with the Americans. But by the time I met him, from the look on his face, he had apparently decided that with two Chinese between himself and American comprehension, all hope was lost. His brocaded robe was all that glittered, for his face was somber and his replies were completely lackluster. He glanced at me, another uncomprehending outlander, without interest.

And then I asked him in Tibetan whether "the Presence of the Phantom Body in his possession of the Five Wisdoms spoke the language of Bodyul," and he came alive. His Tibetan was fluent and, by an odd chance, even the same dialect from northeastern Tibet that I spoke. For a few moments we exchanged the compliments and queries appropriate to such an occasion.

The noncomprehension and consternation on the faces of the short-circuited official interpreters was comical to see, but the one who was obviously in command moved quickly to try and regain control and spoke in Chinese to the Chinese-Mongolian interpreter: "Tell the lama not to tell anything important to the Americans. It would be better if he only spoke through us."

He had spoken on the hasty assumption that neither of the Americans understood his Chinese. It was both appropriate and to the point to disabuse him of the illusion, and I did so in the most polite phrases I could muster.

"The honorable gentlemen have taken utmost pains and been of great help; but we need no longer steal their valuable time for they must be extremely busy with important matters. We could not think of detaining them longer."

After that the saying of farewells and a quick departure was inevitable. Mac and I were alone with the Living Buddha.

"Now, Bob, ask him first where he comes from."

The Living Buddha replied briefly to my question.

Mac, in his impatience, kept right on asking, "What did he say? What did he say?" And then my answer stopped him short.

"In Xanadu did Kublai Khan a stately pleasure dome decree," I intoned gently and watched his face change.

"What the hell —." But words failed, though his mouth remained open. What the Mongolian Living Buddha had answered in Tibetan was; "From Chamdo, you know, where Kublai Khan built a summer palace." Close enough. But until that moment I had never realized that Coleridge had researched his facts before he wrote.

Another time, in Panmunjom, at a session of the preparatory political conference in the fall of 1953, Ambassador Dean, hunching his shoulders over the table, opened the session with a terse, down-to-earth Americanism: "Let's take first things first." He paused to let me interpret. With the flash that comes but rarely in a lifetime, a line of eight syllables from the Great Learning by Confucius came to my lips: *Chih soh hsien hou tse chin tao yeh*. Legget's translation makes it: "To know what is first and what is last will lead near to the Great Learning." But in common usage it is more truly what Ambassador Dean had said than any interpretation I could have framed, for we were sampling the depths of a wisdom distilled from the common experience of humanity wherein the terse phrase of the day and a line from a philosophy over two thousand years old mean truly the same thing.

No people, regardless of how divergent their culture, are without humor. It may be different, frequently so different that it is unrecognizable, but it is there nonetheless, releasing merry laughter mixed with tears or inward smiles so strange they pass unseen. And it at once hides itself and finds expression in the language. It is fleeting, illusive, hard to nail down, and almost impossible to interpret, but once in a great while it leaps from language to language undiminished and even grows larger than life.

It was a couple of days before Thanksgiving in Panmunjom in 1953 when in the course of the formal discussion and without warning, Ambassador Dean suddenly began the story of "a stern and rock-bound coast" and of how Thanksgiving came about, ending with the sentence: "Once a year, when the Great Bear hangs low over the northern sky, the American people set aside one day

in which to thank God for the bounty of the year." After this he went on to propose a recess on Thanksgiving Day. The double meaning of "the Great Bear in the northern sky" brought smiles to every American face in the room, for throughout many sessions the Chinese had been twitted most effectively for being only agents and puppets of a greater master. As I began my interpretation, however, an even more perfect play on words, a pun, born in the humor and language of Chinese culture, took possession of me and passed into words.

In the Chinese language, voice tone plays an important part in the conveyance of the meaning of words; so also does compound word formation. In this case, by a combination of tone and compounding, the Chinese *ta lao-hsiung* became either "great old bear" or "great elder brother." Thus the English pun on the Russian bear was compounded in Chinese by the reference to the elder brother.

The most precious of all Chinese humor is the pun, but when that pun is cross-referenced in a compound word it is doubled back upon itself and perfect: the *double-entendre* has not only survived as a pun, but the pun itself has grown.

Watching the English-speaking Huang Hua, who had remained expressionless during Ambassador Dean's allusion, I began the interpretation: "When *ta lao-hsiung* hangs low in the northern sky. . . ." I saw his face change—as did every Chinese face. I had transformed the English allusion into a perfect Chinese pun.

Even in the midst of the confusion of tongues, a smile still links the members of the human race.

# Epilogue

No prologue ushered in this tale of experience in the transposing of the meaning of meaning from language to language, for the beginning came too quickly and too much by accident. But at this, the end, I feel the need, not to make amends, but to confess. It may seem that in these pages I have unworthily taken unfair revenge on all those who made me talk but say nothing of my own. Maybe I have jeered a little and railed at what they sometimes gave me to interpret. So now, to all of them, my principals, I make confession: I would hate to have to interpret all, or even any, of this which I myself have written.

THE ECHO