

The University's
Summer Institute
of Linguistics
is helping
missionaries to

Search for the Tiger



In a seminar, missionary candidates concentrate on a report dealing with poor eyesight of natives.

THERE HAD BEEN a holiday celebration, and one fellow stood too close to firecrackers exploding on a frame of bamboo. Now, two weeks later, the nasty gash in his leg kept refusing to heal. Like most of the Cuicatec Indians in the tiny Mexican village, he didn't think to treat the wound. Instead, he went home to bed and waited for it to grow better.

Someone remembered that Jim Wilson, an American, lived nearby. A group of Indians went to him and asked him to help the sick man. Wilson didn't hesitate. He took what few medicines he had in his hut and set to work.

"I treated him daily for three weeks," said Wilson. "Then one morning I was swabbing the cut with peroxide and my cloth caught hold of something. I pulled on it, and out came a three-inch hunk of bamboo.

"Immediately afterwards I returned to see how he was getting along. He wasn't

there. He'd taken a four-hour walk to see if his leg was any good any more!"

Wilson had, in effect, proven himself a new kind of medicine man to the primitive Cuicatecs. Scientist and missionary, he was there to help them help themselves.

"We have two faces," said Wilson. "As scientists, we're S. I. L. As missionaries, we're Wycliffe Translators."

He was speaking for himself and the more than 3,000 other persons who have studied at S. I. L.—the Summer Institute of Linguistics—and gone on to various parts of the globe to live with and give aid to primitive peoples. Most of the 3,000, like Wilson, have been at their work for years, but regularly return to the Institute for further training. They run into fresh problems every year, and they come back to learn methods for solving them.

The Institute has welcomed missionaries to the University of Oklahoma since 1942, with the exception of two war years when

it held forth at Muskogee. Located in Woodrow Wilson Center, it has an enrollment of 250 this summer. O. U.'s Institute is not unique; it was merely one of the first to be set up. Four similar branch schools exist at the University of North Dakota, in Australia, Canada and England.

Turner Blount, registrar and administrative assistant of the Institute, sat in his office last month and explained things:

"The Institute here on campus is part of the University curriculum in the summer. Our courses are linguistic in nature, primarily designed to prepare people to analyze unwritten languages that may be found anywhere in the world."

At Blount's elbow was a bureau, the top of which was covered with exotic, multi-colored feathers, a double-pronged spear, some arrows. As he paused, from across the hall came the voice of a student working with phonemics: "S-s-s-so, s-s-s-suh . . ."

"The students get the tools to work with

here," Blount continued. "They don't study languages as such, you understand, but the hearing and recording and structure of the languages."

The Institute has people—instructors and students—working with about 150 different language groups. Some persons attend to do pure anthropological research, but most are missionary candidates who expect to journey to uncivilized areas where the languages haven't been analyzed and where the natives must be worked with in their own tongues.

When a student arrives at the Institute, he finds himself in large, plain dormitories which have been converted into classrooms and labs for the summer's work. He may be assigned a sleeping room only steps away from most of his classes. He meets other students, representatives of dozens of different denominations. And perhaps not all will be missionary candidates; this year four priests were enrolled. Nor will all be American; there will be students from England, Canada, Liberia, Finland.

Beginners study phonetics and phonemics (speech sounds), morphology (grammar) and syntax (sentence structure), and field techniques and problems. They are introduced to primitive languages—perhaps first to those of certain North American Indian tribes—and learn to write them down as they sound, then develop primers so that the people who speak the words may learn to read and write them as well.

After getting down a language, it's only natural for the missionary to want to translate the New Testament into it. The Institute works in cooperation with the Wycliffe Bible Translators, Incorporated, in this capacity. (The Wycliffe School of Linguistics, actually a branch of the Institute, was established in 1949 in Melbourne, Australia.)

So the courses are designed for those who are preparing to do some specific linguistic task. As Jim Wilson said, when a missionary pulls a language together and writes it into a primer, he is S. I. L. and a scientist; when he puts God's Word into the language, he is a missionary and Wycliffe.

BLOUNT LEANED BACK in his chair and told how the Institute came into being. Dr. Kenneth L. Pike, a professor at the University of Michigan, started it in 1934 with two students in Sulphur Springs, Arkansas. Pike developed the courses and planned the entire setup. He's still director and gives much time to the Institute.

"Then 15 years ago we were invited to move here by an instructor in O. U.'s Department of Modern Languages," said

Blount. "She'd heard that we had a small school in Arkansas, and because of the desire to better equip herself in her field—and us, also—she spent a summer with us. Her enthusiasm for the courses was very strong, to put it mildly. As a result, we were asked to come to Oklahoma's campus."

Blount himself is from Los Angeles, California. Stocky, muscular and with great blond, bushy eyebrows, he looks like a football coach. He loves his work. Springing out of his chair, he walked down the hall and paused at an open doorway. In a small room sat 12 students listening to a trim, gray woman instructor.

"The older women in this particular tribe," the instructor was saying, "do close work in the sun and consequently have bad eyesight. We've wondered about getting glasses for them. Some of the women asked us to try to borrow magnifying glasses for them to use, but any glasses which you have to hold make reading more difficult, I think."

Further down the hallway in another room some students were listening to indecipherable words playing out of tape recorder. "We've some hard nuts to crack with certain languages," said Blount, "so we bring tapes from the field and work with them here under supervision."

Another room was filled with brightly colored dolls, pottery and other curios. A sign on the wall read, "I may look busy, but I'm only confused." Blount looked at it, then pointed to another which read, "Why be difficult? With a little more effort you can be impossible."

"They're all sweating here," he said. "It's a grind, an around-the-clock program. It means real discipline."

To prove it, he led the way to a main lecture session. More than 100 students sat in a large room, their eyes aimed at a blackboard at the front. At the board stood Harold Hess, instructing them in morphology.

"Is it an infix?" Hess asked the crowd as he pointed to some strange word on the board.

"No! Yes! No! No!" shouted the students.

"Who says it is?" asked Hess. Two or three hands shot up into the air.

"Who says it isn't?" Many hands came up.

"Now what about number 15? Is it transitive?"

At the back of the room several men and women sat at a table, listening to Hess and taking notes. "They're instructors, too," explained Blount. "When the lecture is over, they'll split the students into groups of 10 or 12 and give them personalized help

on what has gone before. There are make-up and catch-on sessions for those who get behind or aren't comprehending, and individual tutoring for those who need it.

"Is it oo-ah, or is it oo versus ah?" came Hess' voice. "Are they parallel? No, they're separate ideas, aren't they?"

Later that day, after the intense sessions had abated somewhat, Jim Wilson relaxed and told the story of his Cuicatec Indian friends in Mexico. Personable and friendly, Wilson is the sort of man Americans would immediately take to. But primitives are different.

"They naturally suspect foreigners," he said. "We've a long way to go with them. When they bring their children to us full of worms or themselves suffering with dysentery, we give them medicine. It helps to teach them we're not there to hurt them. Then they're very, very appreciative. We think this is basic Indian culture, to be appreciative. They aren't animals. Natives know how to say 'thank you,' too."

"I came from Aurora, Illinois. My wife and I have been in Mexico since 1952. Like it? Oh, sure. We don't work in the jungle. We're in the mountains, the heart of the coffee country where it never gets too hot, 250 miles southeast of Mexico City. All our Indians have something to do with coffee. They aren't poor, not by their own standards, though they might be by ours."

"Most are still illiterate. Each Indian group around us has its own language which has never been reduced to written form. We're still trying to learn the languages. We're back at the Institute now working on problems connected with them. You see, we have to take a language apart, put it back together again, and translate the New Testament into it."

My wife and I have three boys, six, four and two. The two youngest were born in Mexico. They haven't picked up the Indian language, but instead made friends with the children in the village's two Spanish families. Now my boys speak Spanish very well."

BEGINNERS AT THE INSTITUTE probably are best illustrated by Des and Grace Derbyshire. This English couple lived in London for a few years and then moved to British Guiana in South America when he took work there as a certified public accountant. Des is slim, dark and has grown a mustache. Grace is small, blonde, pretty. They are quiet people and determined to give over their lives to the welfare of others.

After they'd been in British Guiana a couple years, some missionaries invited the Derbyshires to spend two weeks watching them work with a jungle tribe. Deeply im-

pressed, Des and Grace decided to do the same sort of work for the Plymouth Brethren. He left his job and they returned to England where they took basic courses at the Institute's British branch. Then for four months last spring they lived in a jungle camp in Southern Mexico, maintained by the Institute so that candidates may get a contact with Indians and isolation.

Last month they came to Norman and took up advanced work at the Institute. Study of the Kiowa and Comanche Indian languages has introduced them to problems similar to those which they'll be facing in the future, probably in Brazil.

"We're anxious to get into the real work," said Des.

"Oh, yes," agreed Grace, "it'll be so nice to get settled!"

Less than two years ago three missionaries were killed by natives in Ecuador, South America. The tribe hadn't been contacted by white men for about 75 years, and the last white men they had known molested them.

Carolyn Orr, a young woman from Fort Worth, Texas, was working—and still works—as a missionary in the same jungle where her friends were killed. After finishing college, she and another woman had taken summer courses at the Institute, then gone to Peru for the Gideon Baptists. A year later found them in Ecuador, and they've lived there four years.

Carolyn's Indian friends aren't of the same tribe which slew the three, but are a different language group. However, Carolyn is close enough to watch the progress being made today with the dangerous tribe.

"An aviation group drops gifts each week in an effort to bring about friendly relations with them," she said. "The Indians have appeared real friendly lately. At first, when gifts were dropped, they wouldn't even come out of their huts, much less take the gifts. Now they exchange things with the white fliers. They put smoked meat, combs, pet animals and other items into the air baskets.

"I'm with the Quichua tribe, but I'll be home now for a whole year going to school. I miss the Indians. I miss them more than I miss my American friends when I'm in South America. The Indians are so friendly. They take care of us. They do our carpenter work for us, and when they go hunting they bring meat back to us, or fish, or bananas and papaya (potato substitutes) from their gardens."

Carolyn was holding a colored, woven bag on her lap, and she opened it. She took out an Indian child's rattle, and next a toy consisting of a frog skin stuffed with the produce of a cotton tree. Of a whistle made of animal bone she said, "They can play

tunes on these, but I've never been able to do it." Then came a necklace of tiger claws, and one of tiger fangs.

"This is their 'beautyrest mattress,'" she said, displaying a piece of rubbery tree bark.

The Quichuas are short in stature. They use as weapons dart blowguns 8 to 12 feet long, and they are skilled at killing animals with these. Some of the men dye their hair red and wear short skirts, put feathers into their ears, through their noses, and are generally more flashy than the women—"like birds."

They aren't promiscuous, but have high moral standards. Still, many of them like to drink and they make their own liquor. This is done, said Carolyn, by chewing up a certain seed and spitting it back into a pot until the whole mess is masticated. Then it's covered with banana leaves and allowed to ferment. When it's ready to drink, it's like "white lightning."

"They never come around our house when they're drunk," she said. "Their own

liquor makes them silly, but the white man's liquor makes them mean."

Naturally the natives are superstitious. They believe that the reeds from which they weave their baskets have men spirits; therefore, the men of the tribe must weave the baskets. However, the woven baskets have women spirits, so the women have to carry them.

Too, they believe that tigers are of two different kinds: one kind has a regular animal spirit, the other a man-spirit. When the natives hear a tiger call, they can tell, they say, whether its spirit is human or animal. Shooting a tiger is usually done from a boat on the river. They go out at night and whistle the animal to the water's edge, then kill him.

Those Indians who most strongly believe in tigers having two distinct spirits build their huts highest—sometimes as high as ten feet off the ground. They don't want

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Jim Wilson and Carolyn Orr: their friends celebrated and slept all night on the front porch.

Washington D. C. Club Chooses Officers At Annual Meeting

The Cloud Room of Washington National Airport saw the annual spring banquet and business meeting May 10 of members of the Washington, D. C., Alumni Club. Showing of an O. U. film and election of officers for 1957-58 followed an address by Wendell B. Barnes, administrator of Small Business Administration.

N. Burkey Musselman, '51ba, '54ma, is the club's new, 13th president. Musselman, vice president last year, is on the staff of McGraw-Hill Publications.

Miss Frances K. Hunt, '29ba, moved from treasurer to become vice president. Norman Alexander, Jr., '52bus, '56Law, an attorney with the Bureau of Internal Revenue, now is treasurer, while Lieut. Col. Frank O. Hamilton, '37ba, '39Law, is secretary. Hamilton, an officer in the Army Judge Advocate General's office, temporarily is on duty with the Department of Justice.

Newly elected to the club's board of directors were William L. Cooper, '49journ,

immediate past president; William R. High, '31ba, a former president; Air Force Major Robert J. Reid, '48bus, and Truman Richardson, '47journ, '51ma.

Remaining on the board are Don A. Eaton, '47-'49, and Joe S. Wallace, '41ba, '43Law, both past presidents; Army Lieut. Col. Ray S. Whitson, '34eng, and Miss Jean Johnson, '49ba.

A resolution was passed honoring Paul A. Walker, '12Law, who founded the Washington chapter and was first president in 1944. Walker was given honorary life membership on the board. He recently returned to Norman after serving for many years with the government in Washington.

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man-spirit tigers coming into the bedroom after dark.

Carolyn's own hut sits just a few feet off the ground. It has a thatched roof and palm-bark walls. She used to sleep under a mosquito net but found it unnecessary. The mosquitoes and vampire bats have never bothered her, though they attack the natives.

How successful has her work been?

"Well, the adults say, 'We can't learn to

read.' We try to encourage them as well as the children. We were especially interested in teaching the tribal chief. He'll be 57 this year, and that's real old for Indians. We started him on a primer of his own tongue. After a while he became so interested in learning that he left it and got into Spanish. Now he's decided he wants to learn English. He was the witchdoctor and knows all the herbs, some of which are good, some only psychologically good.

"Our work may sound exciting, but it gets to seem so ordinary. You don't think of it as being outstanding. It's satisfying. The natives are cleaner now, not drunk or worried or following witchcraft."

A recurring incident stays in Carolyn's memory. Some nights soldiers or groups of strangers pass through the hot, quiet jungle where her village sits. Every time this happens someone living in the village will come and sleep on Carolyn's porch. It may be one man, or it may be a grandmother and a half-dozen small children. But someone will be there, a protecting shield voluntarily placed between the white missionary and forces which may be hostile.

Along about 1780 the great poet William Blake penned these now-immortal lines: "Tyger! Tyger! burning bright in the forests of the night, what immortal hand or eye dare frame thy fearful symmetry?"

Many have believed Blake meant the tiger in his jungle to symbolize the soul shining out of the chaos of a physical world.

Searching for that particular tiger are Carolyn Orr, Jim Wilson, the Derbyshires and all their fellow-workers who have passed through the Institute. In years to come they will whistle it to the river, knowing for certain that it is possessed of a man-spirit. When it comes, they will not shoot to kill. Rather, they will extend a hand.

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