

ETHNOLOGY

New Written Language Makes Debut in America

Biggest U. S. Indian Tribe, With 95% of Adults Illiterate, Will Have Books in Scientifically Devised Writing

By EMILY C. DAVIS

THE DEBUT of a new written language in America!

You can chalk this up now as one of the unusual achievements of science in 1940, even if 1940 is still young.

It means that one of America's illiterate minorities—the biggest Indian tribe in the United States—will at last see its own language in print. For 45,000 Navajos in the Southwest, that is a tremendously far-reaching event, and there may even be repercussions in the education of white children.

The new written language will give the huge Navajo tribe a new grip on problems of living, the Office of Indian Affairs hopes. And life is serious aplenty for this group 45,000 strong, with their dependence on sheep and goat raising, and their depressingly over-grazed range land. If ever Americans needed everyday modern applied science to pull them out of a tough spot, it would seem to be the Navajos. But—

Heretofore, field service doctors, teachers, and conservationists have been hard put to explain to attentive, but bewildered, Navajos simple facts about modern farming, germs, nutrition, and perils of soil erosion. Navajo interpreters would stand helpless, as some English term proved untranslatable. Science was too often baffled. So were the Navajos. Indians thought the white man talked queer.

Ethnologists Called In

A simple way of writing Navajo. This is the sovereign remedy which the Indian Office believes is indicated to go to the root of the problem. Called on to produce this remedy, John P. Harrington, Smithsonian Institution language specialist, and Oliver La Farge, New York ethnologist, have evolved a way of writing Navajo in ordinary alphabet letters with one or two extra signs.

Linguists before had tried to write Navajo talk. But the result was always a longish set of queer phonetic symbols too complicated for Indian use.

Why is Navajo such a language problem? I asked Willard W. Beatty, director of education in the Indian service, and got this answer:

Navajo is one of the most difficult Indian languages. Speaking it involves use of voice muscles not needed in English at all. Navajo is a singing language, a three tonal language. As in Chinese, a word spoken in different tones may have different meanings. To show this in writing, the new Navajo alphabet has signs for tongue going up and tongue going down.

The Navajo language has no word so abstract as "the eye," and no conditional tense. The Indian doesn't say, "I may go." It has to be present, past, or future, or you tackle the idea in some more round-about way. In this Indian speech, sentences are reversed even more oddly

—to our way of thinking—than in German sentence structure.

If you ask a Navajo about an absent Indian, he doesn't reply straight-off, "He's hunting bears." The Indian says: "They who walk around the mountain are being sought." No word for bears. Passive tense verb. But that's right to Navajo ears.

With the simple alphabet ready for use, the Office of Indian Affairs has now called in pictorial education specialists to introduce Navajos to their old speech in its visible guise. Result is something new in pictorial education: Posters which any one can understand without words, but labeled also with a message, written above—and first—in Navajo, and below translated into English worded in Navajo fashion.

An Exciting Project

To Rudolf Modley of Pictorial Statistics, New York, who worked on this poster idea, there is something exciting about introducing a large group of people of all ages to the old, old invention of writing. There must have always been excitement and awe around the adventure of writing for the first time, whether a people discovered writing for themselves or had its wonders brought to them. On a flying visit to Washington, Mr. Modley talked about this. He thinks

Nahodji god'go nada ya'a'd'e



Only the one who hoes has good corn

NEW WRITTEN LANGUAGE

Navajo speech at last put into written form. Posters like this in gay colors will soon introduce adult Navajos to their new experience—reading. The United States' biggest tribe, adult Navajos are now 95% illiterate.



ART FOR INDIAN BOOKS

For young Indians, first lessons in reading Navajo will be made pleasant by primer pictures like this. The primer is naturally all about a Navajo girl and the corn and horses and sheep. Primer artist is Koke Denetsosie, a Navajo

Navajos will be excited when they get first glimpses of their ancient speech in its new form.

If Navajo Indians have no words for our modern scientific terms, then, reasoned Mr. Modley, the first words that Navajos are given to read should be in familiar Navajo forms of expression.

"We have designed one poster showing a farmer's foot and his hoe, as he works in a cornfield," said Mr. Modley. "Beside a young stalk of corn grows a Russian thistle. Tentatively, we labeled this picture, 'Kill the weeds.' Then we asked Navajo Indians to give us their caption. They said: 'Only the one who hoes has good corn.' That's the Navajo way of expressing the idea."

And that is the way the caption will read, in Navajo and English, when the posters are tacked up in schoolhouses and trading posts out in Navajo country in Arizona and New Mexico.

"On another poster," he continued, "we show in a series of pictures how the Navajo woman washes her hair at the day school, washes the baby, sews a dress, grinds her corn. We thought of calling this series, 'The woman at the day school.' But Navajos gave us a better slogan. They said it means: 'The day school helps the woman in many things.'"

Enlist Children's Aid

Navajo youngsters are counted on to help introduce elders to reading the ancient language. Almost 95% of adult Navajos are illiterate. And only about one in ten speaks English. This complicates their already tangled economic and social troubles. Moving from place to place to seek better grazing for their sheep and goats, the Navajos are often in such isolated areas that, minus roads

and busses, they cannot send their children to the schools.

It is estimated that over 4,000 of the boys and girls have no schooling, although more than half of the younger Navajos, of elementary school age, are now believed to be in school.

These small scholars and older ones who can read English will read the English legend on the posters and help match Navajo words above to the English below—a first lesson in reading for adults, with an important idea in farming, home economics, or hygiene tied around it.

Schools Will Teach Navajo

Young Indians will also be taught to read and write Navajo language at day school. Primer books now being evolved follow the same psychological approach as the posters. Black and white pictures in one primer unfold the adventures of a Navajo girl with the sheep. The words of the story appear in Navajo language and Navajo form of expression.

Two young Indians of this tribe are the artists of both posters and primers. Their names are a fair introduction to Navajo: Tishnahjinnie, whose name means Black Rock or Black Mountain, is the poster artist. Denetsosie is the primer artist. Both draw sheep with the greatest of facility, and with expert foreshortening. Getting them to draw anything else is the problem. Sheep are their favorites, and they do beautiful, somewhat oriental looking sketches, that remind you of the Indian's Asiatic past.

A third Navajo with a Spanish name, Willetto Antonio, in the print shop of Phoenix Indian School, handles printing for the new Navajo language and himself is becoming a successful translator in the new language.

There is some sort of moral, Mr. Mod-

ley thinks, in the fact that Tishnahjinnie attended old-fashioned boarding schools which the Indian service used to provide for its young wards. From these schools, which Indians never liked, Tishnahjinnie repeatedly ran away, and once was brought back handcuffed 300 miles. Today, in his early twenties, he contentedly draws primer pictures for a system of education which he thinks the younger generation may enjoy.

Shown to Educators

At a preview of the new written language and its application to education, which the Indian service staged for the Progressive Education Association in Chicago, February 21 to 24, educators were shown Navajo posters and primers, and the theory of education involved was demonstrated.

Without planned education in their language, it seemed likely that Navajos would go on living in a different world from modern America. The trouble is, they don't think like us.

"The Navajo," explained Mr. Modley,

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Wellesley, Mass.

"gets little of the white man's culture mentally. He accepts much that he can see or touch or taste. He drinks coffee, uses sugar. Gave up his deerskin coat for modern materials. His famous silver-smithing is an industry evolved within a century. There is so little left of the material culture of the Navajo of 1600 A.D. that no one can fairly say the Navajo is reactionary, can't take new ways.

"But—the Navajo Indian still doesn't think the white man's thoughts, and that is because language is such a barrier. His language simply can't cope with straight-away translations from English. After all, don't forget our modern talk of health, nutrition, and conservation is full of terms we ourselves coined within recent decades.

"So, it's no wonder a Navajo sheep owner is bewildered when he tries to understand that he should reduce his stock by so many sheep-units. One horse is as hard on grazing as five sheep. He could get rid of a few horses rather than reduce sheep. But try to translate the idea from English into Navajo! Passing through four or five interpreters, relayed to the Indian—the idea may seem a dangerous and not entirely sensible threat to his economic life."

It's a hard row to hoe, being an isolated minority, unable to get sense out of newspapers, radio, or the talk of white men. Indians are broadcasting radio programs in Navajo now, from Window Rock, on the Navajo reservation in Arizona. With reading and writing Navajo made easy, these Indians will be detouring—if you want to look at it that way—on the road to become modern Americans. But they will be on the road.

Science News Letter, March 9, 1940

Ninety per cent of Finland's dentists are women.

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PSYCHOLOGY

Ruined Evening Brings Anger Toward Far-Away People

Session of Difficult Tests Substituted for Pleasant Time at Movies Makes Men Sore at Innocent

This article is one of a series on the psychology of war and propaganda prepared by the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues especially for release through Science Service.

THE frustration of being forced suddenly to abandon plans for a pleasant evening caused a group of young men to exhibit increased hostility toward the people of a far-away nation which had nothing at all to do with their disappointment. Unknown people were made the scapegoat for a personal annoyance.

This was revealed when two psychologists learned that a group of young men at a camp was to be given a series of tests which would be boring to them and which were so difficult that everyone was bound to fail miserably. The time taken to give the tests forced the men to miss what they considered the most interesting event of the week, Bank Night at the local theater. The men, it was anticipated, would be frustrated and made angry by this situation.

Before the men knew the nature of the tests and the fact that they would miss Bank Night, their attitude toward the people of a far-away nation was measured by means of rating-scales.

After they had taken the tests and realized that they could not enjoy the evening at the theater, they were once again asked to rate this nation. It was found that their attitudes after the frustrating tests were reliably more hostile toward the nation than before.

Similar groups who were not frustrated by the tests and who rated the same nation twice revealed no such change. Thus it was shown that the hostility aroused by the unpleasant experience in the camp had caused the first group of men to turn some of their hostility against far-away foreigners who could not possibly have been to blame for the situation.

The psychologists who turned the test evening into an experiment were Drs. Neal E. Miller, of Yale University, and Richard Bugelski, of the University of Toledo. They see in the results an expression of the tendency to blame some-

one else for an individual's own misfortunes known to psychologists as the scapegoat device.

This tendency may be used to arouse hatred toward innocent foreigners.

"In ordinary social living," Dr. Miller points out, "men and women suffer frustrations especially when they are unemployed or are compelled to accept a reduction in pay. Their anger can spread to scapegoats in the same way that the anger of the men in the camp spread to the people of a foreign country. It is one of the functions of propaganda to induce people to use as scapegoats innocent foreigners who, though not necessarily responsible for the frustration, are made to serve as targets for aggression."

Science News Letter, March 9, 1940

Germany is buying up old phonograph records at the rate of 3,000,000 a year, as a source of much-needed shellac.

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