

HOW WILL EUROPE TALK?

By W. BRETTSCHEIDER

In the article in our last issue entitled "The Capital" we discussed some of the problems which Japan and East Asia are facing in the endeavor to find a common linguistic instrument for the "Grossraum" of East Asia. In the following article we present an analysis of the same question with regard to Europe. Although the war is not yet over either in East Asia or in Europe, we consider it the task of such a magazine as ours to deal in times of war with the questions that will arise in the peace to come.

The tendency toward the formation of "Grossraums" will, we believe, have its repercussions on all fields of life, including that of language. Just as in future the planning of water resources or transportation will be done on the scale of the "Grossraum," so the rise of a "Grossraum" language will become inevitable. But just as people will continue to fetch their drinking water from near-by wells and not from the water system of the "Grossraum," so they will continue to employ their native tongues for daily use as well as for their songs, letters, and cultural expression. The enforcement of one language on people with another mother tongue, as it has been attempted in Europe in former times, would be a political mistake, for it would cause needless bitterness. It would be an even greater cultural mistake, for the wealth of European culture grows from the fact that the nations of Europe have been able to express their own ideas in their own languages, which are the best suited to their national genius.

An institution especially devoted to the study of language problems is the "German Academy" at Munich. It has organized many language institutes throughout the world. Our author is in charge of the one at Shanghai. As a student in England and in the Baltic States and as a teacher in China, he has gathered much experience in the studying and teaching of languages.—K.M.

THE TOWER OF BABEL

Since time immemorial human imagination has been fascinated by the splitting up of mankind into various language groups. In old myths and legends we constantly meet with the dim notion that there must once have been a time when there was only one language, and that this splitting up was a punishment inflicted by supernatural powers upon mankind for its sinfulness. Accordingly, human intelligence has often enough set itself the task of overcoming this inconvenient obstacle. In the same measure in which in recent times the exchange of people, goods, and ideas has been increasing over the whole globe, the demand for a medium of understanding common to all has become stronger.

Obviously this goal can be pursued in two very different ways. One can try either to construct artificially a new international language or to make one or several of the great existing national languages an international medium. The first possibility has, relatively speaking, been most successfully exhausted by Esperanto; and even if this attempt must today be regarded as a failure, it is nevertheless of interest because of its underlying significance.

ESPERANTO

Esperanto was invented by L. Zamenhof, a Jewish doctor of Warsaw. It was boosted by the international press, encouraged by the League of Nations, and, until less than ten years ago, welcomed by many as the language of

the future. It had its greatest success in Germany, where many people had, after 1918, lost confidence even in their own language. Is it not indeed a curious fact that in 1928 some 30,000 people studied Esperanto in Germany as against about 15,000 in all the rest of the world? Esperanto, incidentally, has had many predecessors and successors, in all some 150 different systems within the last hundred years.

The reasons why Esperanto did not fulfill the many hopes placed in it would form the subject of a lengthy study. We shall only name two, which touch upon the root of the matter, as they throw light on our present theme.

First of all Dr. Zamenhof fundamentally misunderstood not only the nature of the growth of a language, which simultaneously represents a historical and national process, but also the language situation of our time. For could anyone seriously believe that the great nations whose languages dominated the Western world, that England, France, or Germany, would give up their languages in favor of Esperanto?

Secondly, the language characteristics of the new invention betrayed the fact that it was limited to a purely Western way of thinking: for Esperanto is composed solely of Indo-European ingredients, that is, ingredients limited almost entirely to Europe and the Americas. Hence it conceives of the "world" in a way that has now been proved outmoded, as, among other things, it entirely overlooks the existence and importance of the great Asiatic nations and their languages.

The third and most severe drawback to Esperanto (and similar artificial languages) is that it has no living nation or culture behind it. It may have justification as an international code book which simplifies reservations of hotel rooms or the order of a ton of steel. But it will never be able to express any worth-while thought, for nobody is going to think in it. The learning of any one of the great languages, including the dead ones, such

as classical Greek, opens the door to a new culture. A person who has studied English is thus enabled not only to read the stock quotations in New York or to go shopping in Cape Town but also to delve into the world of Shakespeare, an advantage that the students of Esperanto will never have.

"WORLD-WIDE" LANGUAGES

The second possibility, namely, that of enlarging spontaneously developed national languages into world-wide means of communication, has been attempted by the great powers of the earth in all periods of history. But it has never been realized without definite limitations. For all so-called "world-wide" empires in history were in reality *not* world-wide, since until now the word "world" has always been used to mean areas of varying size, but always only a part of the world.

It is not until today that the whole world in the real sense of the words has been linked up, either peacefully or by war. All those languages in history that have had more than a national validity have always only dominated part of the world. Latin was supreme in the Mediterranean area and later in Christian Europe, French in western Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and so on. Even English, which until today has had the greatest claim to be ranked as an international language, has to bow to these geographical limitations, as it carries no weight in South America, Russia, and large parts of Europe.

Furthermore, the role of a so-called international language is also limited by its field of application, for there has always been a certain division of labor among the ruling languages. In the last century, for example, French ruled the field of diplomacy and luxury, German that of literature and science, English that of communications and commerce, and Italian that of music.

Finally we must rid ourselves of the illusion that the international importance or non-importance of a language

is an irrevocable and eternal fact. Actually it is subject to changes in history. When in 1783 Antoine Rivarol wrote his famous *Discours sur l'universalité de la langue française*, he believed that he could fix the ruling power of French for all time: "Le temps semble être venue de dire le monde français comme autrefois le monde romain!" Yet the pinnacle of French power had already been passed, and today, a century and a half later, the use of the French language is receding everywhere. It was followed by English, and today we are again facing a new situation. With East Asia emancipating itself linguistically from the west, we must ask the question: which will be the chief language in Europe?

THE ESSAY ON THE ELEPHANT

We are reminded of the anecdote about the Englishman, the Frenchman, and the German writing an essay on the elephant. The Englishman gave an objective description of the elephant and its economic importance. The Frenchman analyzed the love life of the elephant, drawing clever parallels to human psychology. The German, however, began an attempt at an introduction into the history of the elephant in its relationship to the universe, in seventeen volumes.

This little story reveals the root of the traditional objections brought forward against the German mentality and thus also against the German language as its means of expression. One has become accustomed to emphasizing the liquid clarity of French and the uncomplicated intelligibility of English as compared to the obscurity, the heavy rhythm, and the redundancy of German. Apparently these observations are not quite unfounded, for the unfinished condition of the German people and the lack of unity in its political as well as spiritual forms have for centuries also been expressed in the language, while the French language was constantly under the centralizing and cleansing influence of the Académie Française. Here, too, the consolidation

of Germany into a unit will have its revolutionary effects.

IS GERMAN TOO DIFFICULT?

An examination of the varying degrees of difficulty in learning the great languages is impossible, because it could only be made from the viewpoint of one other language. It stands to reason that the Dane or Netherlander, whose languages are related to German, find that language little more than a special dialect which they can learn with ease. On the other hand, German offers great difficulties to the Spaniard, to whom French, because it is related to his language, seems simple. Any number of such examples could be given. Nevertheless, certain indications for judging the difficulty of a language can be gathered from the reactions of people who have no linguistic connections whatever with it. We are thinking of the Chinese or Japanese, for example, who study German, French, or English, and of the experiences which they have had.

First of all there is the stumbling block of the German script. The peculiar variation of Latin script and Latin print which is called "Gothic" has undoubtedly hindered the spread of the German language. However, about a year ago the exclusive use of Latin letters in handwriting and print was stipulated in Germany. This measure will give German books much wider scope and will allow language students to heave a sigh of relief.

One characteristic of the German language which is greatly appreciated by the foreign student is its spelling, with every letter pronounced as it is written. It is true, there is still no complete solution of the problem of true phonetic spelling. But this is a difficulty which German shares with all modern Western languages and which has its origin in historical developments. Moreover, compared to French or to the often fantastic divergence between sound and spelling in English, this difficulty seems but slight in German. The German custom

of spelling all nouns with capital initial letters helps the student to identify them. Experience shows that a student learning German can usually after a few months write a dictation with satisfactory spelling. This is certainly not the case with English or French, languages which offer far more possibility of choosing the wrong spelling to reproduce a given sound.

GRAMMAR— *THE STUMBLING BLOCK*

What we have said about spelling by no means applies to grammar, and this is a field which seems to be strewn with obstacles of all kinds. The principle of the Indo-Germanic languages of expressing changes of meaning by inflecting the endings of word-roots has faded in most of the living languages of Europe. In German, however, it is still very active. Hence what makes the student groan are the endings, the changes of the roots by declining and conjugating, and the necessity of making the adjective agree with the noun, in all its inflections, according to the three genders.

Far from wishing to explain away these grammatical problems, we must still point out that the usual teaching methods are partly to blame for making the study so difficult. The learning of rules and their exceptions which we have taken over from the study of Greek and Latin is more likely further to complicate the maze of grammar than to disentangle it. A language is grasped by practice and habit, which together create a certain instinctive sureness in the use of grammatical forms. Practice and habit, however, must be directed at the organic root of a language, and that, in German, is the sentence. If the student starts from the most simple sentences and progresses gradually to more involved ones, he absorbs the laws of structure of the language through the exercise of using such sentences. It is from these laws that word-forms and their endings proceed. Then only should he note and fix in

his memory the grammatical peculiarities as he meets with them, peculiarities already familiar to him by constant, if uncomprehending use.

As the Germans themselves in their learning of foreign languages are not afraid of difficulties and are anxious to start their studies at the root and with a complete understanding of its grammar and construction, they have too often assumed the same attitude in the foreigner who wishes to study German. Hence the grammars produced by Germans for foreign use suffer from being too abstract. Furthermore, they do not approach the study of German from the point of view of the nationality of each student. The grammar to be used by English students should be radically different from that used by Frenchmen or Russians, not to mention Japanese or Chinese. We are quite confident that this will be done in the near future. The experiences of a great number of young Germans as exchange students and exchange teachers in many parts of the world, as well as the experiences of German soldiers on guard on the French Coast or fighting in Russia side by side with Italians and Spanish units, will contribute to considerable changes and streamlining in the methods of teaching German. Whatever difficulties the spelling still offers will also, we believe, be eliminated by a spelling reform.

PRECISION AND FLEXIBILITY

However, even presuming a teaching method suited to it the German grammar remains difficult enough. The obvious question, then, is, what is the real purpose achieved by the manifold inflection of the words? The answer is: an extraordinary precision in expressing the relationship between the various words. The verb gives exact information regarding active or passive state, reality or assumption, as well as the time at which an act takes place, took place, or will take place. The noun appears clearly in the singular or plural, as a subject or an object. The adjective shows by its ending to which part

of the sentence it belongs. The same precision is to be seen in the construction of a sentence, whose parts express every shade of dependence and meaning by variation in the use of conjunctions and in the position of the words.

The sentence, too, as the natural unit of the language, is immensely flexible in its form. It permits, first, practically any desired order of words; next, the finest nuances in the ranking of the words; and finally, an effortless underlining of its points of emphasis by the simple expedient of varying the order of its parts.

Thus we have imperceptibly passed from the principle of exactness, which gives the German language its prominent position in the sciences, to that of flexibility, which has enabled it to become the means of expression for a poetic literature of universal standing. This flexibility is founded on the peculiar phenomenon that individual words may be combined to new words with new meanings almost at the writer's choice. There are countless examples of this. While the Frenchman has to say "*chemin de fer*," the German forms the smooth expression "*Eisenbahn*"; or where the Englishman combines "citizen of the Empire," the German may use the short and simple word "*Reichsbuerger*." This phenomenon renders the language simple and liquid, a fact appreciated especially by Chinese, for example, who are forced to combine several characters in order to express even the most elementary things.

Much could be written about the advantages and disadvantages of a language. However, we limit ourselves to these few remarks, for actually the simplicity of a language is not a condition for its international acceptance, nor is its difficulty an obstacle. The positions held by Latin and French are convincing examples, and even the English language is found to be a very complicated structure once one really wishes to master it. If simplicity were the deciding factor, we would today count Afrikaans, for example,

among the international languages. The deciding factor seems to us to be something quite different: only then can a language be universally accepted if it is a vessel for universal ideas. However, before we approach this central point of our examination, it might be interesting to look at the actual extent to which German is spoken in the world of today.

HOW MANY EUROPEANS SPEAK GERMAN TODAY?

The respective positions of German, English, and French as mother tongues in Europe and the whole world can be seen in the following table:

TABLE I
Use of Mother Tongues, 1937, (in millions)

| In Europe | In the World (incl. Europe) |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| German 87 | 100 |
| English 50 | 200 |
| French 39 | 45 |

The German language is thus far ahead in Europe, where it is the mother tongue of approximately as many people as are English and French together. Extending the picture to the whole world, the situation is different. Here English, because of the USA and the British overseas possessions, far outranks German and French.

German as a foreign language is found mainly in Europe, as is only to be expected from the leading position of the Reich in Europe in size, geographical position, and cultural activity. However, the position of German in the western and northern parts of the Continent is essentially different from that in the east and southeast. We might define it in such a way that in western Europe the German language forms an important but not vital part of cultural life, while in the younger states of the east it is part of their very existence.

SURVEYING THE CONTINENT

A survey of the Continent, without any claim to completeness, should throw

some sidelights on the conditions mentioned above. The Scandinavian countries, according to their situation and population, are more or less equally near to the German and English spheres. But we find in Swedish statistics that, among the 771 dissertations published at the Universities of Lund and Upsala from 1922 to 1931, 391 were written in Swedish, 92 in English, 41 in French, and 247 in German—figures from which important conclusions can be drawn. Denmark has been connected with German culture through close cultural exchange since the days of Klopstock and Schiller.

The Englishman is justly known to command only one language, his own. But when he does take up the study of foreign languages and cultures, he shows a marked preference for France. In France, however, German and English are taught to about an equal extent.

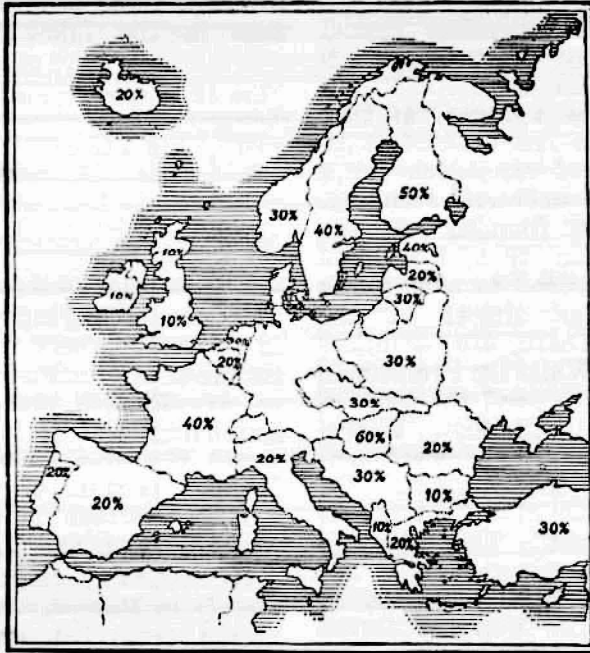
In Eastern Europe we must distinguish three zones, the Baltic, the Russian, and the Balkan. As a result of history as well as economic and political connections, German has always been the leading foreign language in the Baltic zone, where it dominates science and is the means of communication among Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians. Roaming through the Baltic countries for months at a time, the author got along with German without any difficulty.

In Russia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the leading social classes looked unequivocally toward

France. But the Communist Revolution brought about a change in favor of German, for reasons of a purely propagandistic nature. A large part of Marxist literature was in German, and German was the common international language of eastern Europe. Hence the Comintern used German to a large extent for its propaganda and sent masses of German language material from Moscow even to Afghanistan and Japan.

In southeastern Europe, even outside the frontiers of the former Hapsburg monarchy, we find the greatest strongholds of the German language.

The languages of this region are Serbo-Croatian, Bulgarian, Russian, Rumanian, Czech, Hungarian, Turkish, Greek, Slovakian, Slovenian, and Albanian, many of which are intermingled with others. The necessity for a main connecting language is evident. Taking the history of Bulgaria, for instance, one can read as from a graph the changing influence of



Approximate Share of German in the Teaching of Foreign Languages in European Countries (1937)

the various great languages. Upon the domination of Byzantine Greek followed Russian, then French, until in the nineteenth century German became the bearer of culture. The formation of the nations of southeastern Europe is most intimately linked with the teaching of Herder and the German Romantics, so that German is an inseparable element in the life of the nations. To this must be added the radiating force of Vienna, which has always outshone Paris in this region. To give one example: the Croatian national hero

Banus Jelatchitch wrote his song "Croatia's Rejoicing," on the occasion of the liberation of his country, in German. As a medium of communication in commerce and trade, as a means of expressing profound scientific and artistic ideas, German already fulfills the requirements of an international language in southeastern Europe.

played among people for whom it was not their mother tongue. The following tables show the use of four European languages at eleven international zoological congresses from 1889 to 1930:

TABLE II
Use of Languages at International Zoological Congresses

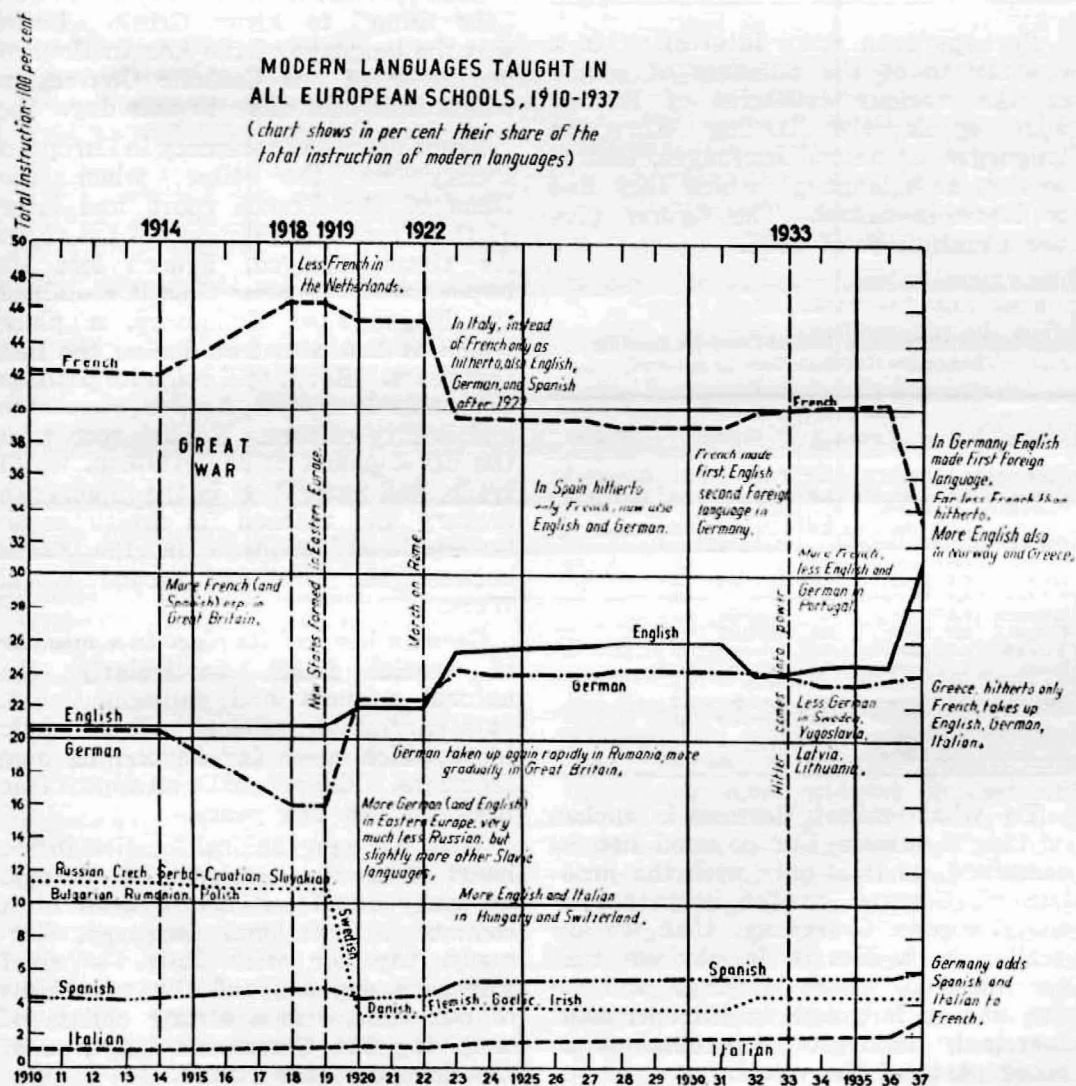
| Lectures given in: | Paris | Moscow | Leyden | Cambridge | Berlin | Bern | Boston | Graz | Monaco | Budapest | Padua |
|--------------------|-------|--------|--------|-----------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|----------|-------|
| | 1889 | 1892 | 1895 | 1898 | 1901 | 1904 | 1907 | 1910 | 1923 | 1927 | 1930 |
| German | — | — | 14 | 9 | 92 | 53 | 14 | 72 | 19 | 161 | 72 |
| English | — | — | 10 | 27 | 9 | 7 | 115 | 23 | 25 | 45 | 20 |
| French | 41 | 61 | 26 | 15 | 11 | 37 | 12 | 10 | 60 | 41 | 22 |
| Italian | — | — | 1 | — | — | 4 | — | 1 | 5 | 6 | 113 |
| | 41 | 61 | 51 | 51 | 112 | 101 | 141 | 106 | 109 | 253 | 227 |

CONGRESSES AND SCHOOLS

The extent to which German is taught in the Europe of tomorrow will largely depend on the outcome of the present struggle; but it is interesting to analyze the role German has hitherto

MODERN LANGUAGES TAUGHT IN ALL EUROPEAN SCHOOLS, 1910-1937

(chart shows in per cent their share of the total instruction of modern languages)



Total instruction - 100 per cent

This table includes, of course, those lecturers who spoke in their mother tongues. As a matter of special interest in our discussion, Table III shows the number of lecturers speaking in languages not their own and which of the four languages they used.

TABLE III
Lectures Held by Speakers Using a Foreign Language

| | 1895 | 1898 | 1901 | 1904 | 1907 | 1910 | 1923 | 1927 | 1930 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| German | 9 | 5 | 34 | 34 | 7 | 31 | 14 | 102 | 41 |
| English | 1 | 9 | 2 | — | 6 | — | 4 | 25 | 7 |
| French | 11 | — | 4 | 21 | 6 | 4 | 16 | 27 | 10 |
| Italian | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2 |
| | 21 | 14 | 40 | 55 | 19 | 35 | 34 | 154 | 60 |

Perhaps even more interesting is a comparison of the numbers of people in the various countries of Europe who speak the leading European languages as second languages, that is to say, as a language which they had to learn in school. The figures give the situation as of 1937.

TABLE IV
Number of People in Various Countries Speaking Languages Not Their Own (in millions)

| | Language Spoken: | | | |
|-------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| | English | French | German | Italian |
| Germany | 3.3 | Spain 1.2 | France 2.1 | Germany 0.5 |
| France | 2.1 | Rumania 1.0 | Rumania 1.0 | Albania 0.4 |
| Czechoslov. | 0.6 | South Slavonia 1.0 | Czechoslov. 0.0 | France 0.3 |
| Netherlands | 0.5 | Czechoslov. 0.8 | Netherlands 0.5 | Poland 0.3 |
| Italy | 0.4 | Germany 0.7 | Hungary 0.5 | |
| Austria | 0.4 | Netherlands 0.5 | Italy 0.4 | |
| Belgium | 0.4 | Italy 0.4 | Belgium 0.4 | |
| Poland | 0.3 | Austria 0.4 | England 0.4 | |
| Sweden | 0.3 | Portugal 0.4 | Poland 0.3 | |
| Spain | 0.3 | England 0.4 | Sweden 0.3 | |
| Turkey | 0.2 | Greece 0.4 | Spain 0.3 | |
| Rumania | 0.2 | Poland 0.3 | Turkey 0.2 | |
| | | Sweden 0.3 | Rumania 0.2 | |
| | | Turkey 0.2 | | |

To what extent German is spoken or taught outside Europe need not be examined, as it is only with the problem of German as the language for the European *Grossraum* that we are dealing here. Yet it is obvious that the question, which language will be the leading language in Europe, must inevitably have its repercussions in other parts of the world.

WHAT MAKES AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE?

A study of the past shows that the rise and fall of languages cannot be explained merely by military victory or defeat. (For example: the Mongols and Manchus who conquered China learned to speak Chinese—not vice versa; and the Germanic tribes which overran the Roman Empire learned Latin.) Rather does it seem that the language which comes closest to expressing the ideas and ideals of a new historic period has the greatest chance of becoming an international language. Greek was the language of the Hellenistic period, and it was considered "the thing" to know Greek. Latin was the language of the Roman Empire and later of the Catholic Church, as which it is still alive to this day.

French rose to supremacy in European society at the time when the ideas of the French court and later of the French Revolution set the style. As times changed, French lost its importance. For some time it remained the language of diplomacy, a place which it has also lost during the last few years. But it still holds its position in such fields as style, fashion, cosmetics, and beauty culture. English rose with the development of materialism, world trade, and navigation in the nineteenth century and reached its zenith as an international language in the years between the first and second World Wars.

German has had its place in a number of special fields, particularly the natural sciences and philosophy, but, as a carrier of political and economic ideas which reach far beyond its own frontiers, it did not make an appearance until the last few years.

With her geographical location in the heart of Europe, bordering to the east on many small nations in need of a common international language, Germany, together with Italy the chief European exponent of the new ideas of our time, has a strong chance of supplying the *Grossraum* language of the Europe of the future.