



**FEVERISH?**

## A Tangle Of Tongues

"I cannot talk to my *chaprassi* (personal messenger) in his own language without an interpreter," a high-ranking Indian official complained last week. "When I have to tell him to come and go or fetch tea—we have to speak English, and he is not very good at it." The official was a Southern Indian speaking the Tamil language, while his *chaprassi* was a Northerner speaking Hindi—the modern version of Sanskrit. In a polyglot India with fourteen distinct languages and hundreds of dialects, their dilemma was typical.

Besides forcing a political unity on the subcontinent, the British gave India its first universal means of communication in the English language. But when India's constitution was promulgated in 1950, it provided that Hindi would become the sole official language of the government and the schools within fifteen years.

Last week, with just half that period elapsed, the government acknowledged that it had not reckoned with either the practical or emotional obstacles in the way of this massive reform. The Ministry of Education announced a new policy: All students will be expected to learn three languages, Hindi, English, and one other Indian tongue. The ministry thus hoped to quell the very intense attachment to ancestral languages which has even led to such bloody excesses as the Bombay riots in 1956.

*English Forever:* Furthermore, the ministry admitted that English will probably never be completely abandoned. "It will be ten to fifteen years more before we can convert all schools to Hindi as a medium of instruction," said an educator. "We decided educational standards were more important than patriotic emotion, and that there was no doubt that standards were falling off because of lack of textbooks in Hindi."

To provide textbooks—particularly for the sciences—a staff of 35 is now laboring to create a scientific Hindi vocabulary. Their word coinage must be approved by an intricate system of expert committees, state governments, and an official board on scientific terminology. Although 90,000 Hindi terms have been formulated so far, only one-tenth of them have been approved. The goal is 300,000 terms by 1960.

The student of the future, however, will find that his technical vocabulary is still studded with English. Scholars can find basic Sanskrit roots for such phrases as "British thermal unit"—which becomes *British ushma matrak*. But for words like "calorie" and "hormone," the only solution is a simple transliteration into Hindi script, which still leaves the English words *calorie* and *hormone*.

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**CATCHING  
COLD?**



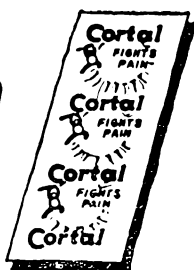
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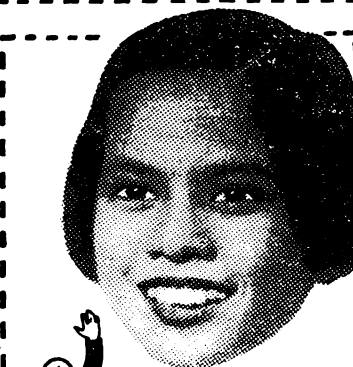
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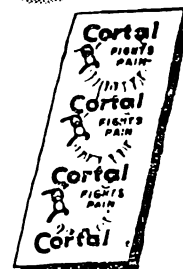
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