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- G. FELIX-GEORGE: In this week's 'University Report' a study of the practical side of family life in Ghana, and from Malawi, a justification for the teaching of English in African universities to degree level and beyond.
- In last week's programme we were hearing about the usefulness of Swahili as a lingua franca in East Africa. In countries that were once British colonies the English language has sometimes to do a similar job. But there's a world of difference between using English to make yourself understood when you go and live in another region or when you're doing business with someone from elsewhere, and developing it so that it becomes part of your own culture.
- Here's a member of staff of one Department of English:
- DR. F. MTALI: We don't want to turn out Englishmen. We don't want to do the job of the British Council, telling people about England. We don't want to teach English as something that is just pleasant in itself.
- G. FELIX-GEORGE: Three negatives. But there are plenty of positives to follow. The voice was that of Dr. Felix Mtali, a lecturer at Chancellor College, University of Malawi. And I don't need to tell you that he's in the Department of English. He's been talking in Blantyre to Douglas Lamb and telling him how he sees the functions of an English department in an African university.
- DR. F. MTALI: I think the best of these functions was summed up to our outgoing Professor of English, Professor Ron Harris, who is now going over to the University of London, when he said "the conditions for the existence of an English department in an African university is the fostering of creativity and that is all". Really when you come to think of it, we don't want to turn out Englishmen. We don't want to do the job of the British Council, telling people about England. We don't want to teach English as something that is just pleasant in itself. We want to create the conditions for, again I'm going to repeat myself, creativity:

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DR. F. MTALI: that is, students who do English must come out with something that they can't get from the social sciences, from the sciences; apart from the language itself which is again a very useful tool. But the condition for the department is really creativity.

G. FELIX-GEORGE: Learning to be creative is a tall order when you remember the saying that artists (and writers) are born and not made. Learning to be creative in a second language sounds even more difficult. But there are many 'born-writers' in Africa who have been enormously successful writing in English. Already they've established what's almost a tradition.

DR. F. MTALI: Three years ago, for example, we took a hard look at our syllabus and decided that it didn't have enough African content. Of course, when you do this, you have to say at the same time "What kind of African content are we going to put in? What are the classics that you have to include?" Because you just don't take anything because it's African or Malawian, you take something because it is good. And we feel that on the continent now there is a lot that is good, that should be taught at university. So that the syllabus begins from year one to year four, (we have a four year degree course) with a lot of African literature packed into it, side by side with other classics of course. I mean, one doesn't emphasise one's own without taking the best that has been done elsewhere.

DOUGLAS LAMB: What kinds of study or creative work, active work, have you emphasised?

DR. F. MTALI: On the practical level we try to teach our students film-making and film appreciation, drama, practical drama as well, and even better still, we have a writers' group which has produced some very interesting things, some of which have been aired on the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation. And from the writers' group we hope perhaps a great Malawian novel is going to come out or a great Malawian poem. Let me add that talent in Malawi hasn't dried up, in fact, if anything, it is budding.

G. FELIX-GEORGE: Every time the programme deals with literature the question of translation comes up. It isn't always the problem of translating from one language to another; sometimes it's translating from one culture to another.

- DR. F. MTALI: In translation everything loses a little. You can't have a perfect poem, for example, coming through, or a perfect novel coming through, as perfect as it was in the original languages. Still, I think the art of translation has gone a long way. One can now read almost any masterpiece in English, if English is the language you understand. Something suffers in translation, but if the translation is good you are able to say, ah, there's a poet writing, or, there's a real novelist writing.
- DOUGLAS LAMB: Are most of these translations done by Westerners rather than by Africans themselves? Can someone on this side of the continent translate from, say, a Nigerian novel, written in the local language?
- DR. F. MTALI: Perhaps in that example the Nigerian, a Nigerian person, would be the best because not only is Nigeria far away, but the language there will be very different. Still, the nuances of the African atmosphere, if you like to put it that way, the image really, the proverbs, all the other devices that make an African work African, will be more easily rendered and understood, I think, by an African than by a man who is of an entirely different culture. For example, when I read 'Arrow of God' by Chinua Achebe, or even 'Things Fall Apart', where the man packs the thing, not only with proverbs, but with images that speak of the area of what the people actually do. I am able to see that in our Malawian context this is how we would put it and it works well this way.
- DOUGLAS LAMB: Of course the English Department is still a department of the University and the courses offered are for the award of degrees at the end of four years. Now, if this emphasis on creative work is encouraged, how do you evaluate the progress and achievement of students. They still have to take examination papers at the end of years and the final year. Do you think that this is the most important measure?
- MR. F. MTALI: No, this indeed is not the most important measure. I mean we deal with the significance, the emotional tie-up of facts and so on, and this is something you don't store up, this is something you get with practice and so on - appreciation - so our exams tend to be different. But exams are there, exams in the classroom courses, even in the practical sort of drama and film and things; exams in the use of English which is an important component of the course.

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- G. FELIX-GEORGE: Keeping to traditional standards while experimenting with new and exciting ideas - that's by now a familiar story in 'University Report' - and a very encouraging one. So Douglas Lamb went on to ask Felix Mtali what he considered to be the department's greatest innovation.
- DR. F. MTALI: I think that our introduction of film-making, film appreciation, practical drama, these are things that haven't been there in the traditional sort of English Literature department. of course, we lag a bit behind actually in the name, we still retain 'Department of English'. Other departments have changed their names, they call themselves Departments of Literature, or Language and Literature; Department of Theatre Arts. We are one department and combine all these things into the Department of English - not so much the name but the content of the thing that counts.
- G. FELIX-GEORGE: Now, sewing, cooking and house-keeping have never struck me as subjects anyone could study at university. But, change the name from Domestic Science to Home Science, and learn that the Department was set up with help from the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization, and it straight away sounds more academic.
- Dr. Leila Enberg is the Head of the Department of Home Science at the University of Ghana and she's been telling Christine Oppong about the research they have been conducting there.
- DR. L. ENBERG: In 1966, when the University started its programme, it put first a great deal of emphasis on human development and set up a nursery school on the grounds of the University. About twenty children are brought in from the surrounding villages to work there with some of the staff and to serve as a laboratory for the students in Home Science. They are trying to look at the child in Africa and trying to bring the parents in to learn something about child-rearing practices. Another project is the housing project. A village type house was constructed on the premises in order to incorporate some ideas about space and also materials, low cost materials, that could be used right here in Ghana: wood, cement and so on to build a really low cost appropriate house. This also includes improved storage facilities, disposal of refuse, and a water supply and so on to improve the overall environment for the family.
- MRS. C. OPPONG: And how is Figura being used now?

- DR. L. ENBERG: The house is used as a classroom for two types of classes: for home management and also for our extension classes, because there is a inner courtyard with some simple kinds of cooking arrangements. They also live in the house to learn something about management in reality. They find it very difficult to think in terms of utilising time and resources and make a plan of work so that they can mix successfully as a group and manage whatever resources they have.
- G. FELIX-GEORGE: Looking at the housewife as someone employed on a productive task, Leila Enberg explained that the next step was to look at her workshop - the kitchen. The Department has joined forces with the architects of another university in Ghana, the University of Kumasi.
- DR. L. ENBERG: They have a housing project in Tema and they have collected a lot of information from the women in that community about what they would like in the way of a kitchen. They haven't analysed the area yet and so we are going to study it and go back to some of the homes and try to find out a little bit more about task allocation in meal preparation, and also what kinds of facilities would help the woman carry out her tasks more effectively.
- MRS. C. OPPONG: In what kinds of research have you yourself been involved?
- DR. L. ENBERG: Well I'm interested in family welfare and trying to explain why some families are better off than others; and looking at the family itself to see if there are dimensions within the family that can help explain why some are better able to cope than others; and looking at husbands and wives and the kinds of resources that they have themselves - their education, their source of income, their involvement in the community and whether or not they are really a unit or not, and then trying to see how this relates to the health of the children and their family size and also home improvements that have been carried out.
- MRS. C. OPPONG: Yes. The programme up to now has been very heavy in the natural sciences and in nutrition bio-chemistry. We don't think we should be duplicating work which can be done better by nutritionists or scientists in other fields. We have something unique to contribute and that is to integrate the human problems with the technological problems and to help the students to think more about human development in the family, getting the student to really think about the family and the types of families in Ghana.
- G. FELIX GEORGE: Christine Oppong was talking in Legon to Dr. Leila Enberg of the University of Ghana. And there we come to the end of another 'University Report'.

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