APPENDIX I

Human Translateability Test

by
F.H. Ellis
May, 1959

The following sentences were read to eight people,
four of whom were British, and four American:

S^1 The box was in the pen.

S^2 The inkstand was in the pen.

The following responses are to be noted:

"Please repeat the sentence."
"It doesn't make sense."
"An inkstand can't possibly be <u>in</u> a pen."
"You're fooling. Come now."
"What sort of pen do you mean? The thing you
 write with, or a pig-pen?"
"Do you mean "pen", or do you really mean peniten-
 tiary?"
"Pen has several meanings; which do you mean?"

The following full paragraph was then read to the
same people:

$p^m (S^1)$ Little John was looking for his toy box.
            Finally he found it. THE BOX WAS IN THE
            PEN. Little John was very happy.

The spontaneous responses noted after the paragraph
was read were 100% of the nature, "Oh, you mean play-
pen. Why didn't you say so at the beginning. Were
you pulling my leg?" In other words, these eight
people were all in agreement that the sentences, S^1
and S^2, when read, were non-sense-carrying. However,
when $p^m (S^1)$ was read, incorporating S^1 within its
full context, S^1 made more sense. One person suggest-
ed, however, that aside from the fictitious ring of
S^1 semantically, it carries another fictitious impli-
cation, in that if Little John was old enough to have
a toy box, he would be too old to need a play-pen!
(And this came from a person who knows children well.)
Unless, of course, Little John had a baby brother or
sister, who at the time had need of a play-pen.

As a result of further discussion with the eight
people who were submitted to the translateability
test, it became clear that "pen", used in S^1 to
mean "play-pen", would never be used by itself un-
less its context of children had already been estab-
lished by a previous sentence(s), or paragraph. It
was further suggested that even with the full read-
ing of p^m (S^1), it is not clear that "pen" necessarily
means "play-pen"; it could conceivably mean "pig-pen"
if little John, say, lived on a farm. Therefore, it
becomes even clearer that for any fair testing of
such a paragraph, if such a paragraph is to be used
for testing human translateability, a <u>fair</u> para-
graph must be selected, and it was agreed that
$p^m(S^1)$ is <u>not</u> a fair test.

In the case of S^2, the same objections apply, even
more strongly. For a full discussion of this sent-
ence, see the main paper.

F. H. Ellis
Cambridge Language Research Unit
Columbia University