

# Now He Has a Choice

By REGINALD SOOLOOK

I am an Eskimo who has a problem. My problem is not so much that I can speak, or for that matter, understand (well enough to live comfortably without having to consult anybody how I should say it or what the other is saying) my local dialect; but I can't write it down on paper so others could understand.

I can communicate rather well with my parents. They reared me from the day I was born. They spoke to me in Eskimo; told me what I should or shouldn't say or do in Eskimo. And I replied in Eskimo.

That was effectual communication and quite effective!

They made one great but forgivable mistake. They didn't teach me how to write in Eskimo. Great—because it's just great. Forgivable because they themselves didn't know how to write in Eskimo. I am thankful they didn't. I hate to think of the transition I would have to make. I have enough problems with the present way of writing, and even speaking and understanding it.

This does not mean I would have liked to write in Eskimo.

But what did my parents do? They started to speak whatever English they knew and told me that I have to go to school.

"Go to school for what?" I asked.

"So you can learn to write in English," they answered.

But I didn't know English. What good would it do me if I didn't know how to speak in English. Speaking in Eskimo, they insisted I go to school. So I went to school.

I was an Eskimo, speaking Eskimo, living in Eskimo sod house, eating Eskimo food and at times, using Eskimo clothing and going to government-run school which in turn were English speaking Caucasian teachers who taught English to the Eskimo-speaking Eskimos.

So I was taught a foreign language and how to write in that language—English. But they failed to get across to me that if I was to succeed in this English-oriented country that I was to learn to speak and write in English. Maybe that was to come later but none did.

Later, I found out that I have to master some technical and scientific words to master a trade or profession. This was perhaps (if not THE) the greatest jump from the everyday monologue in a small native village to that of a language which has over 450,000 words and different usages to each one of them.

Collocated communication—that's a soul-searching job for me.

Now that I know a little of what it is all about, I found that I have a choice—a choice of what I am now and what I can do or be if I can sacrifice some of my time to attain this goal—better and worthwhile education. Do away with the tradition of need to that of tradition of competition on a basis that more can be done if the individual wishes to exceed beyond the perimeter of his living (bare subsistence and existence).