The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

JAMES C. BOSTAIN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Bostain]

Q: Today is February 10, 1998. This is an interview with James C. Bostain. This is being done on behalf of The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

BOSTAIN: Cincinnati, Ohio, 1921. My father was a heating and ventilating engineer. My mother was a housewife. We lived alright through the 1920s and through the 1930s, we went downhill, of course.

Q: You were not completely alone in that. We're talking about the Depression.

BOSTAIN: Yes. My father and mother finally divorced in 1937. By that time, we had moved on to Louisville, Kentucky.

Q: You were about 16 then.

BOSTAIN: Yes, about that. I went to high school down there and then went into the military. I joined the Army Air corps, which is different from the Army Air Force.
Q: When did you join it?

BOSTAIN: In 1943.

Q: Let's go back just a touch. Could you tell me a bit about what you were doing as a young lad in Cincinnati, a bit about school and life then?

BOSTAIN: My memories about that period are very vague. By the time I got to Louisville, I was making model airplanes. I was a rather solitary type. I did some reading.

Q: Do you recall any books that really stick in your mind?

BOSTAIN: No, I don't think I read any particularly... I did a lot of reading. I learned to

read "Little Orphan Annie," a comic strip, when I was four, but I was not a very literary type. I went to high school and became an English major for want of anything else.

Q: High school was in Louisville, Kentucky?

BOSTAIN: Yes. Louisville Male High School.

Q: What were your classes like? Were they demanding?

BOSTAIN: I made good grades all the way through. I don't remember struggling very much. Some of the classes were very useful and some were a waste of time, of course. I studied French, for example, for two years and then I couldn't speak French. We only studied the French writing system. I went to college later on and studied French for a year and couldn't speak French and was shy about it, so I studied French literature. To this day, I can't speak French. I took three years of French. We call it "taking French" in this country. We don't learn it; we take it. I can read French today, but I can't speak it very well. I speak a little bit, but not much.

Q: You joined the Air Corps in 1943. This was right out of high school?

BOSTAIN: I worked two or three years before that. I knew a war was coming and I didn't see any point... I wasn't very ambitious anyway. I was a car hop and then a cashier in a drive-in laundry for two or three years. When the war came along, I signed up for the Air Force to escape the infantry because I had read too many books about World War I. I got washed out in the collection center down in Nashville for a lack of enthusiasm. They had so many aviation [candidates] at that point and a lot of them were dropping out. Aviation training was terrible. It was nine months of OCS plus learning to fly a damned airplane. They tried their best to crack you up. If you were going to crack up, they would rather have you crack up in training than being in charge of 10 men. So, I didn't show the proper enthusiasm for all that and they washed me out.

Q: To "wash out" means you didn't qualify as a pilot.

BOSTAIN: I didn't qualify as an aviation cadet. I ended up in radio mechanics and signaling and finally ended up in Dover Air Force Base in Delaware drawing cartoons. There was nothing to do that was of any value. I figured any German or Japanese was going to chuck me into a ditch in World War II before the allies won the war. But it got me the GI Bill. It got me an education and that got me a career.

Q: Where did you go to school?

BOSTAIN: I went to Oberlin College in Ohio.

Q: This is a pretty fancy school: liberal arts, strong social sense, etc.
BOSTAIN: It had the first woman graduate in the country, a waystation of the Underground Railway during the Civil War, very liberal. I enjoyed myself enormously.

Q: You say you were taking English?

BOSTAIN: I was an English major, but toward the end, I began to realize that I had read all the English literature I had wanted to read. They had the first course in linguistics there. I took that the last semester before I graduated. When I graduated, I was Phi Beta Kappa. There were only two of us who were Phi Beta Kappa that year and the other one was a lady who transferred in the last semester. So, as far as I can tell, I was the valedictorian of that class. It didn't dawn on me for years.

Q: What was the linguistic approach in the late 1940s?

BOSTAIN: The linguistic approach is language appropriate behavior. You cannot study it as if it were dog Latin or some branch of logic. It is part of human behavior, a confused model, irreconcilable, and incompatible as our behavior is. That has been my aim ever since. I came in in the pre-Chomsky rules. He taught a few days. Noam Chomsky came along in the late 1950s when I was already down at the Foreign Service Institute. He is, I think, a rabbi. He pronounces things as if they were words coming from the Mount. He never has the least bit of hesitation. I think he made one very valuable contribution to linguistics in introducing the notion of transformers. The transformers is where you take a sentence and take what I call the dictionary units stable but change the structure unit. You haven't changed anything in the sentence from active to passive. So, "The dog bit the man" becomes "The man was bitten by the dog." "Man," "dog," and "bite" stay the same. "Bite" changes its form, but it doesn't change the relationship. That is transform. He also went into what he called "degenerative" grammar, trying to find something in your brain that would generate all these sentences. He said they were going to generate this brain, machine, mechanic, whatever it is, but it would apply to all and only sentences of English. That disqualifies him as a linguist right there. "All" and "only" do not fit in language. It is open-ended. Language is always open-ended. You can't have "all" in the English language. It's not there.

Q: When you were taking linguistics, were you beginning to wonder about what you were going to do with your life?

BOSTAIN: No, I was fascinated with linguistics. I went to Yale in the English Department, which was all I was qualified to do. I took one course in the Linguistics Department. I made a good enough impression on Vernon Glock, who was the head of the department then, but he didn't have a scholarship to offer me after the end of the first year. I got to him too late. So, I waited a year and went back and finished the master's degree in linguistics. Then I decided that I wanted to be an actor anyway. That was my last academic experience.

Q: Looking at Yale and their approach to linguistics, did they have a specialty?

BOSTAIN: Yes, they were pre-Chomsky. Chomsky and Long were right at the end of the decade I graduated. He revolutionized all the things, but I don't think he [] qualifies as a

linguist.

Q: Who was going into linguistics at the time you were there at Yale?

BOSTAIN: A small list of us. There were maybe 10-15 students in the department. 15-20 years ago, the department was subsumed under social studies. It's now arrived at Yale and become a separate department. They still only have half a dozen students. The [emphasis] was traditional grammar, which came out of the 18th century. If chemistry were in the same shape that the situation of grammar is in today, you would see a similar debate about [that].
Q: In linguistics, were they looking towards producing a particular field or profession?

BOSTAIN: Yes, language users. They were going to use professional linguists to teach foreign languages. During World War II, there was a program called the Army Language Program. The United States found itself in a war against the Japanese and the Germans and no one could speak Japanese or German. So, there was high speed pressure to produce German speakers and Japanese speakers, or at least people who could comprehend German and Japanese and ask questions. So, they set up a school and [hired] the linguists to do it. One of them was Henry Lee Smith, Jr., called Haksey Smith. He was a dynamic, driving person. I think he was responsible for the establishment of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). The School of Language Studies was the heart of FSI when it began. They had been teaching politics, history, etc., but the language school was something new and fundamental and they hired linguists to come and teach languages. They didn't have any competent language speakers. I worked with languages like German again. I knew some German from college. I worked with Vietnamese. I knew none of that. I worked with Japanese and Burmese. If you want to teach a language, you can't use me as a model for Vietnamese. You imitate my Vietnamese and you'll be lost.

Q: Going back to this time, by 1951, I went to the Army Language School and took a year of Russian there. There was a very well defined procedure for learning languages. I took Italian back in the late 1970s and it really hadn't changed much. You are talking about coming out of Yale when?

BOSTAIN: 1954. I came to FSI in 1955.

Q: Had the way that languages were being taught at universities and other places changed much?

BOSTAIN: No. There was still the need to talk about French. I knew an awful lot about French. I can't speak French. I know that if a phrase begins "Il faut que [It is necessary that]," the next verb has to be subjunctive. I can't even tell you the rule in French. I know a lot about French, but I never learned French. That is what we had. We had a lot of intellectual knowledge about languages, but no competence in them. So, the idea of coming to a place where they use language instruction to teach people to speak languages, to put it in their behavior, not in their minds, to give them what I call a kinesthetic control of the language instead of a theoretical control, was very exciting.

This is what Haksey Smith had started. So, we divided the labor between the native speakers of the language and the linguists. If you want to speak a language, what you do is imitate a native speaker's behavior. He can't tell you anything about it. He knows no more about his language than most English speakers know about English. He can give you some kind of rule that he picked up from somewhere, but he can't tell you about his language. Linguists are trained to talk about phonetics, about grammatical patterns, and they can make text with the aid of the informant as an informant.

Q: Informant being the native speaker?

BOSTAIN: Yes, the native speaker. We try to record as best we can his speech and to organize it in such a way that you can pass it on to students systematically. This was very exciting.

Q: You had taken some time off for acting?

BOSTAIN: That didn't last very long. Acting is not a profession in this country. It's a grab bag. I went to New York and spent a year down there. Unfortunately, it was the February 27, 2002year of Marlon Brando's great success, so scratch the hypothesis that [I was] a great actor.

Q: He sort of mumbled.

BOSTAIN: Right. I figured "I'm not what they're looking for here." After a year, I bumped into Professor Bach when I went back to Yale to visit a friend. He suggested I pick up linguistic studies again and sent me to the Foreign Service Institute.

Q: When you joined the Foreign Service Institute in 1955, how did you see it as an institution?

BOSTAIN: I knew nothing about it except the School of Language Studies. I didn't know what else they were doing there. We were very busy with classes. I signed up right away for Dutch. I didn't know Dutch, but I knew some linguistics so I could keep ahead of the students and help the instructor out. I could walk into any classroom and help with the pronunciation because I know pronunciation. I came into a Greek class one day. The instructor was having a hard time getting the students to say a certain sound. I told him, "The sound occurs in English." He said, "No, it doesn't." I said, "If they know how to do it in English, then they can do it in Greek."

Q: Is part of the linguist's training... Do you need a good ear?

BOSTAIN: Yes, of course. You need to know how sounds are produced in the mouth. You need to know lip sounds, tongue tip sounds, back of the throat sounds, etc. You need to know all that and then you find out that the human mouth is universal. Anybody who says, "top" will have to have the plate of his [mouth] about a half inch back from the tip of his tongue, push it away and put a little puff of breath after you say it in English: "top."

Put an "s" in front of it and the puff of breath disappears: "stop." There is no puff of breath after "st," but there is a puff of breath after "t." You can record these things. The Chinese have "t" with a puff of breath and "t" without a puff of breath. They have "top" and "top." If you know these things, the mouth is universal. It is anatomically standard.

Q: What was the emphasis of the Foreign Service Institute in 1955 on the language side?

BOSTAIN: They had to teach all the Foreign Service officers to speak as many foreign languages as possible. We had maybe 30 languages on the menu. We didn't have 30 linguists in all those languages. Each linguist had maybe three or four languages. They would hop around and try to keep ahead of the students in every case. You could always use the anatomical stuff. That works. You [learn] pronunciation right away. You an always say, "Well, this is the way they say it and if it doesn't make sense to the linguist, that's too bad." The reason why we say "An ugly woman," and the French say, "Une [an] femme [woman] laide [ugly]" is that they put their adjectives after the noun. That is the way they do. Don't fight it; just learn it.

Q: I remember the model at the Army Language School in 1951 was "Don't fight the language." That was drilled into us day after day.

BOSTAIN: It's the same sort of teaching that they had there that we did at the Foreign Service Institute. I made some tapes of the moderating points. The same technique is, you have a speaker there, the students try to imitate his linguistic behavior, and you have some coach. If you're going to learn how to hit a golfball, there is no point in reading books about leverage and all that sort of stuff. Get a bucket of balls, go out to the tee, and have an instructor there to help you. That was what we had. The balls were the languages, the performer was the speaker and the instructor. "Native" was a dirty word. He didn't instruct though. If he instructed, he got thrown out of the class. He tried to instruct by giving the folklore from his language. He had the coach there who could talk about leverage and also talk about the swing. Many people do a lot of things that they have no understanding of. You couldn't ask Babe Ruth how he hit a home run. He would say, "Well, I saw a ball coming and I put a little extra in my swing." Or you go to Nijinski and say, "How do you make these magnificent leaps?" He says, "Well, I jump up in the air. When I'm there, I pause." That is how he does it. And it works. So, the guy can speak French beautifully and he doesn't have any idea how he speaks it. But the students want to learn it. They can't just imitate him perfectly. In the first place, they're locked into English. Everything they want to say in French confronts their English habits. They will not say, "top" in French. It won't be the contact of the tongue blade as the tongue hits against the bottom of the upper teeth. It is a different sound altogether. It's not different to us, to our ear. It's so close to us that there is no contest between them in English. So, we say they're the same sound. Of course, it isn't. It's different. I used to say to students, "One of the general words for 'go' is 'geet.' How do you feel about this sentence: Close the geet?" They said, "That's funny English." I said, "Yes." "Wie gehts" is from the German. Gehts is not the way they say it. They say, "Geets." This is what you have to know to be a linguist. So, our job was to help the students learn the phonetic patterns and the basic grammatical patterns of the languages they were learning.

Q: Did you find that there was a type of person who was more responsive to language training than others?

BOSTAIN: Oh, yes. Some people come in and have such strong notions about writing, for example. Writing is not language. It's an adjunct to language. If they come in full of experience about writing, they will fight you all the way down the line. You say, "The Spanish word for nada is pronounced "natha." They say, "It's a 'd.'" I said, "Who cares what it says? That's how they say it." Spanish has five vowel sounds. But American English has one little unstressed vowel: "uh," called a "schwa." The word for house in Spanish is "casa." "Sa" is unstressed. The American replaces "sa" with "uh." That is different than the Spanish "casa." They can't hear. You have to convince them that it is "a." When you do, they start putting stress on the second syllable. So, you have to teach them to say "a" as an unstressed syllable and this is completely alien to English speakers.

Q: Did you find any problem with somebody who had a strong regional accent? Did that make any difference?

BOSTAIN: Occasionally, but not often. Most of them realized they were not speaking that language anymore. We did have one guy from Georgia who kept saying, "Fine" with a Georgia accent. Most of them would realize they were not speaking their own language. As soon as you get into a foreign language, it doesn't matter. You give up your patterns as soon as it is pointed out that they're wrong.

Q: What was your impression when you first arrived of the type of person who was coming to learn a language?

BOSTAIN: They were all Foreign Service officers. I didn't know anything about the Foreign Service or Foreign Service officers. They were intelligent, mostly willing, and cooperative. They were glad to get the help. I had no problems with any of them that I remember. I can't remember anybody who really resisted our teaching.

Q: People used to writing would fight you about that. When you're an adult, you kind of like to know why. It might not be "Why do they say that," but you want to know what is being talked about. You want to know some of the background, whereas a child will just mimic. It's very hard to make an adult act like a child.

BOSTAIN: Yes. I had a rule for this in German class. That is, the word in German for "why" is "warum." The word for "because" is "darum." So, the form for "warum," is "darum! Don't fight it; just learn it." It doesn't make sense. It's German. It's not English. English doesn't make sense either. But you have to do this. If you don't, you're not speaking German. If you don't like it, I'm sorry.

Q: Did you find yourself getting involved in setting up new languages as our interest grew, things like Vietnamese, as our interest moved in different geographic areas?

BOSTAIN: Yes. I had the very first class of Vietnamese at the Foreign Service Institute: one student and his wife. That is all they had. We taught him South Vietnamese because it was in the beginning. The only instructor we could find was the wife of a third secretary at the embassy. We could not hire students because Diem wouldn't let them come over here and teach. They were to come, learn, and go back to help out Vietnam. So, we had to find somebody who was "loose," like the wife of the third secretary. She was a very lovely woman named Mrs. Long. The student was one of these book happy guys. He wanted to learn the rules. His wife was with him on a space available basis. He kept on all year long. She didn't want to do drills. She thought that was boring, artificial. So, she would occasionally just keep chattering along, telling them in Vietnamese about things that happened, about how her husband [was slighted by] the first secretary's husband, and so on, at a party. He came and said, "We're going to do the book." I said, "Vietnamese is not in the book. It's in her. What you want to do is get her behavior into your nervous system. It isn't in the book. The book is a very poor record." He still wanted to go by the book. He was really uptight about it. So, they went on their way for the whole year (September to June). About the middle of June came a knock on my door one day. Here was Ted. Ted said, "Jane is not coming back." I said, "What is the matter, she's not feeling well?" He said, "No. Mrs. Long wouldn't do the book again and Jane said that if she didn't do the book, she was going to go home." I said, "Fine. Let her stay there. She is here on a space available basis. She doesn't have to finish the course. You have to finish the course. You have to come back for the next two weeks and finish the course. Jane can stay home. We've been over this many times. What is in the books is not the language. What is in Mrs. Long is the language." He said, "We've been very patient with her." I said, "I understand. Thank you." He went away. A few minutes later, there came a scratching at the door. Mrs. Long came in and sat down. I said, "Ted told me. Jane is not coming back. We don't have to worry about her anymore. He has to finish the course, but she will not be back." She looked at me with tears in her eyes and said, "I've been so patient with them." Cross-cultural communication or miscommunication. They were each trying to be very nice to the other and were looking for different things.

So, anyway, I did that for about 10 years at the Foreign Service Institute.

Q: Did you have a problem in using native speakers... I'm speaking of things like in Japanese there is a woman's language and a man's language. In Korea, it depends where you are. These differences in languages... You have a mixed group of American men and American women studying Japanese. How do you deal with that?

BOSTAIN: We had a Vietnamese woman as a teacher of this guy, as did most of our classes at that time. We explained to them, "Look, she is speaking Vietnamese as a woman would speak Vietnamese. It's not that much different from the male. We can give you specific instances where you would make changes. If you get the basic patterns from her, the changes are simply vocabulary changes." In Burmese, men have one word for "I" and women have another word for "I." We had a man instructor who was teaching women. There was a problem. We had to explain to them, "He is a man. If you imitate him, you speak like a man. We can tell you where to make changes. We haven't got women instructors because of budgetary problems." So, wherever there was that kind of

difference, we tried never to get rural bucolic types to teach people to go to Paris. There are social differences no matter where you go. We tried to be enough aware of them and make the students enough aware of them so they would overcome the problems that involved.

Q: Did you have problems dealing with your instructors? I would think they all were coming from different countries. They were doing their work. They were under a lot of stress, too.

BOSTAIN: Oh, yes, sure. We had some who had been teachers of their language. They were no good at all. They would give you all the folklore of French or Vietnamese. We had one Vietnamese instructor who actually thought that Vietnamese was not a very good language. He would try to speak French. You would speak to him in Vietnamese and he would answer in French. His parents were French officials in Vietnam. He thought French was better than English. In fact, he and another guy told me that Vietnamese had no grammar at all because it had no endings. Of course, grammar is simply the way you organize sentences. Every language has an organization pattern. But he said it had no grammar. He was drafted to supplement working in a French class one day by a colleague of mine. The colleague came in. Here was Mr. B. up at the blackboard explaining some grammar in French. The colleague said, "Thank you, Mr. B., I'll take over the class." That was the last substitution he ever had to do in French. He was not supposed to instruct. He was a language model and that's all he was. He was there as a living specimen of what you want to study. He was not a teacher. He doesn't know anything about language. I've been writing a paper lately about Chomsky on the invention of his [theory] about a language instinct.

Q: Yes, a little black box.

BOSTAIN: Yes. I call it a cop-out. He can't explain why my three-year-old can speak English in sentences. I have another explanation, which we won't bother with. I said it was a cop-out to a friend of mine. He said, "There are a lot of psychologists, linguists, and philosophers who are very kind and think he's very impressive." I said, "Those people do not have a background in 20th century linguistics. They are linguistics laymen. They are no more knowledgeable than the plowman is about languages. They still have the same 18th century folklore." If you are Vietnamese and you start teaching theory, you are teaching 19th century theory at best.

Q: Did you have a problem with your informants who were often coming from countries from which they had to flee, mainly because of communism? When they left, their speech patterns and so on were frozen in time. During your reign, I took a year of Serbo-Croatian. We had particularly one very strong-minded Serb.

BOSTAIN: Was he at FSI?

Q: Yes. He was Popovich. We had Popovic and Jankovic. They were sort of frozen in time. They had very strong feelings. Is this a problem?

BOSTAIN: It is a problem to the extent that they're teaching something that is not necessarily universal Serbo-Croatian. It's like a high school teaching a special dialect of English called "Correct English," which is useful nowhere except in writing papers. They think that is the only kind of English that exists. A student who can't write that kind of English is figured unable to write English. So, yes, everywhere you go, I'm sure, if you had a Catholic, he would want to put Catholicism into it. A Buddhist is going to want to put Buddhism into it. You have to be aware of that and allow for it. That is all you can do, unless you can get enough instructors, but we couldn't. We were limited. We couldn't get any kind of instructor. He had to be, first of all, intelligent. He had to be somewhat civilized - no country types. We wanted to have city types because our people were going to go to cities. So, you get them and you get all the things that come along with them, all their baggage. They bring Catholicism, communism, anti-communism, whatever. You simply have to live with it. Since a linguist only comes into class maybe an hour a day and the instructor is there all day long, the instructor has five hours to proselytize. If the linguist can come in and he catches on that this guy is trying to sell communism or anti-communism, whatever, he can maybe take him aside or take the students aside and tell them to be on guard. But they are people.

Q: How about developing dialogues and books? This must have taken quite a bit of your time, didn't it?
BOSTAIN: Yes. I had an idea, which never really materialized. Haksey Smith and George Treager worked out what they call the 10 items (communication, association, and so on). When they criss-cross, you get the sexes and education. You can write a dialogue on what the differences of sexual education is in that country by sexes: men are taught this and so on. I figure you take the 100 boxes there and you can make a lot of dialogue. I wanted to do that, but I never got around to it. By that time, I was lecturing too much.

Q: This is where you really sort of combined your linguistics and your desire to be an actor, isn't it?

BOSTAIN: Yes.

Q: How did this develop?

BOSTAIN: Haksey Smith was there. He was giving lectures on cross-cultural communication. In 1956, he was finishing his 10th year there and wanted to leave and go to academic life in Buffalo. So, he picked me out because I had been an actor and said, "You have to give these lectures." I sat in on his lectures for the last three months he was there. I took extensive notes and I began gradually replacing his with mine. I probably kept about two jokes from his lectures. I always wanted to make points by jokes. People remember jokes.

I have here an outline of the lecture I used to give. The basic line was for people who were going overseas, mostly for the first time. I had to convince them that when they got over there, they were no longer in America and that being a good American wouldn't help

you. It actually might condemn you. So, the main line was "The world is 95% un-American. You can't straighten them out. You can't wipe them out. Better know how to read them, how to read their signals, assuming their signals do not mean exactly what our signals mean." For us, a palm forward with your palm up and brining your fingers together means "come here." In lots of countries, it is exactly the opposite. Palm down, fingers down. In Italy, this means "farewell." So, an American talks to an Italian, walks away, the Italian gives him the palm up, fingers up, and says "Ciao." The American thinks he wants something and goes back and says, "What?" The Italian says, "Nothing. I was just saying 'Goodbye.'" The American walks away and the Italian says "Ciao."

We assume our signals are universal. Of course, they're not. For us, the index finger is called the "first finger." For the Germans, the thumb is the first finger. So, the Germans count "one" with the thumb, "two" with index finger, and "three" with the middle finger. So, a thumb, an index finger, and a middle finger is "three" for the Germans. You go to a German beer hall and you order two beers with these two fingers and they bring you three beers. Your thumb isn't up, but they figure you got that shot off in the war. They read the signal as "three" with or without the thumb. You need to learn to do this or you will not operate successfully in the system. So, it is not a question of right or wrong. It's a question of reading signals efficiently. You have to give up the idea that our signals are universal and our beliefs are universal. Democracy, religion, Christianity, these are local. Nobody wants to believe that democracy is a local notion. It is my job to shake them up a little bit.

Q: How did you work it? Would it be in a large class?

BOSTAIN: Yes. There were all kinds of classes. I have given 250 lectures a year when I was in mid-stream there. There might be 750 people maximum at [Maxwell] Air Force Base, all captains and lieutenants in officers school. There might be 10 people in a small class. There might be a bunch of wives at the wives' course at FSI. I resolved to give lectures outside the government and take leave, which later became impossible. They said that I couldn’t go out and give lectures. They shut down everybody. So, I couldn't have gone out after [I retired]. I couldn’t go out at a certain time and talk about English. It had nothing to do with my work at all. But you couldn’t go out and talk about bowling and get paid for it if you are a government employee. So, that was bad. But I was able to get paid for it. They allowed me free reign. They gave me carte blanche. I made my own schedule. I went and talked to a college group one time, a group of enlisted men another time, officers another time, any kind of audience. I usually got a standing ovation about once a week. It was very nice.

Q: As an organization, did you find over time (You started in 1955 and you left in 1981.) that you were having to almost see the same people, different faces, different names, all the time, or was there more of a growing sophistication about the world or not?

BOSTAIN: There was a great turnover of people, of course, Some came in and were better than those who had left. Some came in who were worse than those who left. I spent not much of my time, a small part of my time, at the Foreign Service Institute physically.

I was always traveling somewhere. So, I might spend three days a week there and that's all, and then the next week I'd be off the whole week. I had classes at FSI and here in Washington. Then I would go to my office, go off to a lecture over in Anacostia (Washington, DC) or someplace like that, and then come back to the office. So, I was in and out. I really felt rather detached. I thought that what I was doing was worthwhile. My boss, Jim Frith, was the dean of the School of Language Studies. He and I were the outreach group. He gave me carte blanche to [go] anywhere I wanted [without] having to take leave. I could go with any government agency. So, I was a free floater. I didn't really feel an inner part of the Foreign Service Institute. I knew all the people there. I liked them all. But I was floating in and out. So, I was detached.

Q: For these lectures, were these pretty much aimed at trying to prove the same thing, that it was a different world out there and our rules weren't their rules?

BOSTAIN: Yes, cultural anthropology. I had never had an anthropology class in my life. What I did was extrapolate linguistics. No linguistic pattern is universal. No cultural pattern is universal. I simply used that as a springboard. Then I would bring linguistic instances to drive the point home. Sometimes I talked only about language. How does this help my language without the cross-cultural thing? My main job was to be entertaining and make people laugh and remember. I was quite successful at that.

Q: Did you have much chance to travel abroad?

BOSTAIN: Not much. I have been in 49 of the 50 states. I never got to Idaho. I always wanted somebody in Idaho to want me to lecture, but they never called me. I went to Vietnam for two weeks in 1968. I went to Brussels a couple of times. I went to Canada several times, but only Ottawa or Toronto or someplace like that. I went to France one time. But it was mostly in the United States.

Q: Where were you picking up gestures, ways for non-Americans to deal with situations that you could use as illustration?

BOSTAIN: I could talk to the instructors at FSI. I talked to the Orientals and picked up something from them. For example, I would first assign the German. German noun structures have a very peculiar pattern. They all have endings. English has lost all that thanks to the Norman Conquest. But in German, you have "Gehr oder mein" - R, E, no ending. You have to know that. "Gehn guten mein" - N, N, no ending. So, I went home one weekend and figured out the whole thing and reduced it to a little box of 16 patterns of the endings you had to have in these various sequences. I came in the next Monday morning and talked to Mrs. Christof, a very lovely woman. I said, "Mrs. Christof, why don't you look this over? I am not sure it's right, but if it is, I think we've got a real wonderful teaching tool here. We can teach these students these endings without getting all confused." She said, "Mr. Bostain, why are you always begging compliments?" I said, "I beg your pardon?" She said, "Why are you always begging compliments?" We parted. Then I began talking to Germans. A German will never compliment himself. He always deprecates himself. "That's a lovely house." "We live here." So, if they ever start

complimenting themselves, they are begging you to respond to [the custom]. So, if you ever go to Germany and say, "I am a great guy," they say, "You can't be." It's that kind of thing that is hidden. I talked to one guy who was an Italian linguist and had spent a lot of time in Italy. He talked about "la mana morta," the hand on the knee, the dead hand. I made a whole routine out of that. It was very effective with high school students going overseas to Europe during the summertime. What you did was, if you walked by on the street and a guy was standing there and he said, "Buongiorno, Senorita," she said, "Buongiorno, Senor," they would be friends. As soon as she said, "Buongiorno, Senor," she said, "Yes." If you respond friendly, you agree. You are supposed to avert your eyes and walk on. She was trying to be friendly. She got mad when he had her hand on her knee. The policeman comes and says, "Senorita, you invited him to do that." She wanted to see the policeman put him in jail. But to no avail, because the judge was Italian. It was that kind of humorous incident that drives the point home.

Q: When you were in Vietnam, what were your impressions about how things were?

BOSTAIN: Of course, there was misunderstandings on both sides, obviously. I was sent over there because they wanted to make a tape about how to use an interpreter. I had been giving a lecture on using an interpreter, although I had never used an interpreter. I used linguistic principles. He talked for five minutes and got it translated to what he could remember and nobody could understand. It distorts the message. So, give him short bits, pass them through, give him a little time, and that way the message gets through as best as possible. That is a very simple linguistic problem.

So, in Vietnam, I went to a village on the coast there somewhere. Someone was stealing cement off of an American boat. The police chief was trying to interrogate people through an interpreter. He overloaded the interpreter. He would speak for five minutes and then the interpreter would ask him a two minute question. (end of tape)
They found later on that the Americans on the ship were selling the cement, so it was the Americans who were criminals, not the Vietnamese. But there was no way in the world that I could find that out from these interpreters. They wanted to make a film on using interpreters. I said, "Okay, fine, but I have one handicap. I've never used an interpreter." They said, "Why don't you get some experience?" I said, "Fine. I understand they use interpreters extensively in Acapulco." They said, "Maybe they do, but you're going to Vietnam." This was AID money. So, I was in Vietnam. I spent two weeks walking around there watching them use interpreters. It was just dreadful. They made the same kind of mistakes that everybody makes. They just keep talking. A good interpreter can understand everything and then translate it perfectly. So, I would say, "Slow it down to bite sized pieces and send it through one at a time. That way, you can keep control." Any professional interpreter will tell you that this is insulting because they can. Simultaneous interpreters can. They're running a minute behind what they've heard. It's nerve-wracking. You're trying to hear something and repeat the same thing a minute later. They have to take these guys out and dry them out every three minutes. A lot of them take notes. You've got to take notes to give a 30 minute translation. The average interpreter is hopeless. That was going to be the point. Then they never made the movie. They ran out of money or something. The project disappeared. But I got a trip to Vietnam and saw

what was going on over there. It was after the Tet Offensive that I went down to the embassy and talked to a fellow. I had very little overseas experience. I didn't have to go overseas. It was at FSI.

Q: Of course, here you can draw on the international community, too.

BOSTAIN: At FSI you can draw on the international community. There is someone from everywhere there. If I want to talk about Italian, I go and talk to an Italian. He will not tell me anthropologically about his language, but I listen anthropologically and can figure out what he is talking about. Like the German lady paying compliments. I figured, "Okay, that's the way they do. They won't compliment themselves. They'll deprecate themselves every time they can." That kind of learning I could do at FSI, so I didn't have to go around the world. I gave a talk in Albuquerque one time. There were Navajos in the audience. I spent the evening talking with them. We sat around the bar in the evening drinking beer. I said, "I think I'll go back to bed." "Oh, you can't go." I realized you do not leave a Navajo group. The whole group leaves. They don't go off individually. The Navajo are group people. They do things in groups. So, you can't say to them, "Excuse me, I'm going to go now." You stay. I stayed until we all got up and left. This is not like Americans. You get up and walk out. It was that kind of insight that I was always looking for. I found enough of them to fill up a lecture. I told them "I'm not going to get everything about the world. I don't know everything about the world." But if you keep watching, these things are there to be seen, but you won't see them unless you look for them.

Q: Were you almost alone in this particular lecture series or were there many others? Has this ever become a study?

BOSTAIN: No, I think I was unique. I had a combination of linguistic background, cultural anthropology extension of that, and acting technique. A lot of people know these things, but they can't act. I used to be terrified that sometime an anthropologist would rise up out of the audience and say "You're a fraud" because they were [handy] at anthropology. One time, a guy came to me and said, "I wish every anthropologist would make it as interesting as you can." I said, "I'm not an anthropologist. I haven't had any anthropology in my life." He said, "I'm a Ph.D. in anthropology. You're wonderful." I said, "Okay, I won't worry about that." I always compare myself to Stephen Crane, who wrote "The Red Badge of Courage." He [wrote] the most accurate record of combat of the Civil War and he was too young to have [fought]. He wasn't even born until 15 years after the war ended. Somehow he picked it up and somehow I picked it up.

Q: Did you ever find that cultural anthropology writing (Margaret Meade and that sort of thing) was at all useful for what you were doing?

BOSTAIN: Not terribly. Occasionally I would pick up clues. I could talk about Ruth Benedict's book, "The Sword and the Chrysanthemum-"

Q: About Japan.

BOSTAIN: That is what they taught us in school. That was not really right down to the bone. Margaret Meade, a lot of people figured she was confused entirely about the Samoans experience, the story of their sex life. But you get clues - [sex and] the Trobriand islanders. The only way a woman gets pregnant is you go down in the pool. They had sex. They were [able to] get out of the house, too. So, they were essentially free. They never got pregnant except for when they went down to the pool. The proof was that there was an albino woman in the [crowd]. Of course, nobody would have anything to do with that loathsome person, but she got pregnant, so she must have gone down to the pool. You get this kind of folklore. Most of the Bible stories to me are just folklore. It's a way for people to explain things when they have insufficient knowledge.

Q: I had it all figured out about how married women had babies. It was the ring on their finger. Married women had babies and had a ring on their finger. I thought this had something to do with it. I wasn't quite sure how it worked.

BOSTAIN: There are all these myths and fables. I tried not to poke holes into our fables. That would antagonize the audience and they wouldn't believe anything else I said.

Q: Did the book "The Ugly American," which came out in the late 1950s, have an impact at the FSI?

BOSTAIN: Yes, this was brought up occasionally, but I simply said that, "Well, there are clutzes everywhere. There are dumb people in every society. If you go overseas being dumb, you're going to do dumb things." It phased out of sight by about 1960.

Q: I was wondering whether it gave in a sort of perverse way more impetus from Congress and all to try to give more money to the FSI and more emphasis.

BOSTAIN: I have no idea, but I hope it did. Any time the Congress gets alarmed about how we're not understanding people, not dealing properly with them, they're going to give us more money for training. So, if that helped, good. I have no idea whether it did or not.

Q: Did you find dealing with the military and with business groups the same reception you were getting from students of the FSI to your lecture?

BOSTAIN: The military... Basically, the only branch that I really talked to at any great length was the Air Force. They live overseas. The Navy lives on ships. They have no use for... The only time they go off the ship is to go into town and have a rip roaring time. The Army... I went to Fort Bragg one time. The escort officer there had been a captain in the Army. He went out of the Army and went into public television in Seattle. He came back into the Army because he wanted to get into psychological warfare or to do this sort of thing. Unfortunately, when I arrived, he was practically in tears. I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "Well, a four star general came down from Washington today and toured the place. He gave a talk afterwards and said he liked this, he liked that, he liked

all the way trees turned into men and men popped out of the ground and that sort of stuff, the artillery and that sort of thing. As far as psychological warfare is concerned, the business of the United States Army is to kill people." He said [he wanted to retire from the Army] as soon as possible. They're not interested in cohabitation or cooperation with anybody. They aren't. That is their business: to kill people. So, they had no use for me. But the Air Force did. I did a lot of work for the Air Force. I went to Maxwell Air Force Base for over 20 years. I was the oldest living lecturer when I got through there. I had something like 100 classes. They finally cut me off because they had to reduce their program. That was alright. I didn't mind that.

The only problem we really had with businesspeople was IBM one time. I went to Boston to give a lecture to IBM. They only talked about jargon. What can you say about jargon? It's private in-group talk, professionals needed. There is no reason why [we need to] say "intravenous injection." We say "IV." So, they have all this shorthand stuff, which is unintelligible to outsiders. That's jargon. Every profession has jargon. Once you've said that and given four or five examples, what else can you say about jargon? So, I went there. They had an awards ceremony where I spoke. I said, "I can say I've sat here for an hour and a half while you've had these awards. I didn't understand a goddamned thing anybody said. It's all jargon to me. You don't do this to your customers. You're selling things. When you go out, talk to customers as if they didn't know anything about IBM. Don't use technical terms. You'll just confuse them." I talked about how you can use your voice, tones of voice. I was talking about all the signals you can use, your body. The guy who was in charge of things said that I hadn't given the lecture they wanted and they weren't even going to pay the lecture [fee]. They did eventually, but he was going to object to it. In fact, the guy said he thought I was drunk. I wasn't drunk. I didn't know about IBM. At that point, IBM couldn't even wear blue shirts. They wore uniforms. J. Edgar Hoover was sending his full double-breasted suits into the Mob - marked targets. That is the only time I had trouble with business.

Most businesspeople said, "Yes, that's good. We need to understand this. We need to know that what you write down is not the whole message. It's only a fragment of the message." That is why they have Ronald Reagan selling things on television. He can sell them. You don't get [Bennie Fernan]. You get Ronald Reagan. He can talk. He's charming and he wins you. It's not what he says; it's the way he says it that counts. That is the big thing. That is a problem with writing. Everybody thinks writing is language and language is easy to please. If you have a sentence like "My God, Baby, I love you," it can be said two entirely different ways that show up exactly the same in writing. You can only report. Writing is only for information. You report the difference: "My God, Baby, I love you," he growled; "My God, Baby, I love you," he sighed. You can report the voice, but you can't write it. You can't write these things because writing was invented to record information. That is all. That is all you can do with it. And we're heading to a world of computers, which are exclusively writing. We're going to lose track of language before long.

Q: You left the FSI in 1981.

BOSTAIN: The last six months I was there, they changed my job. I had been doing mostly lecturing. They got a new dean of the School of Language Studies. He wanted to revise all the language courses. He had studied Russian and when he went to Russia, he found that he was good at conversation, but he couldn't do business in Russia. So, he wanted to make the courses business oriented, Foreign Service oriented. I had no interest in any of this. He said I had to stop lecturing. I had committed myself until June. He said, "Well, you can do those, but don't do any more." I said, "Well, that's the one thing I can do in this world. I have no use on this committee." I attended a few and I couldn't do anything. So, I decided I would retire. At soon as my 60th birthday, pow, out I went.

Then I went back. I had already started teaching public speaking courses at the Department. That went on until 1995. Then he died in January 1995. He dropped dead on the tennis court. I would say he had outlived me by generations because he took care of himself.

Q: Who was this?

BOSTAIN: Ray Chambers was his name. He was a very nice guy. He and I worked out marvelously, like Laurel and Hardy. He was small and tiny and I'm big and sloppy. He was very [brusque] and I'm fuzzy. It worked out very nicely between the two of us. But he dropped dead and that was the end of the speech training program. They were well-received. He got a commendation. I didn't get it because I retired, but he got his. I would have gotten mine if I had been there. So, they were very nice and that was a very nice source of income. But it's been gone since then. I retired in January 1995.

I always felt kind of detached from FSI. There were in-group discussions and in-group politics. [I never knew that at all]. At a certain time, I realized that I would never get promoted beyond a GS-13. If you're a 14, you have to command people. I said, "I don't want to command people. I'm a craftsman. I'm not a boss. I'm not an administrator." So, I kept on my GS-13. I picked up outside income just to compensate for the lack of promotions. I would have stayed that way forever. I did a special job. It was unique. In fact, when David Firth wrote my efficiency report, it said, "Mr. Bostain does something he has no position for in the structure of the State Department." But it was worthwhile. The only way you can evaluate it is if you [have contact with] the end users. Every time I got a letter of thank you or a praising letter, I would attach it to my weekly schedule. I had a schedule each week. I attached it to my weekly schedule and called it a "puff." At the end of the year, he simply assembled the puff in my efficiency report. That was my efficiency report. It's all praise. "Greatest lecturer ever. Never heard anything better."

Q: To the best of your knowledge, has anything been put into the Foreign Service Institute to substitute for this cultural awareness?

BOSTAIN: There may be, but I have no knowledge of it. Even so, it's probably done more academically than I did it. I did it by acting technique and comic technique. I am not sure anybody else has been doing that since then. I'm pretty sure nobody has.

Q: Absolutely. Well, let me stop at this point. This was excellent.

Speech: "Read Your Neighbor"

[Note: This text was not edited by Mr. Bostain]

BOSTAIN: That I have trouble, as any American has, trying to make sense of or sense out of the rest of the world comes from the fundamental fact that the world is 95% un-American. That's a sad state of affairs but there they are, all those foreigners out there. A lot of them can't even speak English. That's how bad things are. The world is literally overrun with foreigners. The question is, what are we going to do about it?

Up to World War II, the answer was simple enough. We ignored them. Up until World War II, the rest of the world consisted of Western Europe. That's where history took place. Did you ever see the history of Latin America? When does it start? 1500. There was nobody there before that - just the Indians, no people. History took place in Western Europe. That's where civilization took place if you believe that television series. That's a worldwide view of civilization, that television series, all the way from Athens over to Madrid over to London. But outside of Western Europe, no history, no civilization, just colonies and natives. The trouble is that, since World War II, the colonies have turned out to be nations, the nations turned out to be real people, and we're stuck with them from now on. We're stuck with them professionally. We can't ignore the foreigners anymore. If we can't ignore them, then I think there are only three courses we can follow.

One course is to get out there and straighten them out. This is not very promising. A lot of people still try that. Missionary zeal dies very hard, which is precisely why it's not very promising. Missionary zeal dies very hard and those people, I"m sorry to have to remind you, have the unmitigated arrogance to have a missionary zeal towards us. You can't straighten them out because they're so busy trying to straighten us out. They think we're wrong! Oh, well, they're developing. So, there's hope for them. At first, of course, they were "primitive," but that's an insult. So, then they became "undeveloped." Undeveloped is a euphemism that means primitive. A euphemism is a nice word that you use in place of a dirty word. What happens to euphemisms in all languages is, it gets soiled by association with the dirty word you substitute for. The first thing you know, the euphemism substitute dirty word goes out of business. The fundamental dirty words go to a kind of subterranean wave, but the substitute dirty word gets soiled by association and tends to disappear. Consider what's happening right now in English, for example, to the word "intercourse." Muscles tense up, breathing gets tough, silence falls over the room. You can't get that kind of effect by saying "kitchen sink." This word "intercourse" used to be a respectable word. It used to mean any kind of relationship, any kind of interrelationship between two individuals, or even two populations. If you had two nations, for example, that did a very busy trade with each other, it used to be possible to say they had a "very lively intercourse." But that doesn't get said much anymore, at least not in "The Washington Post." That's a family newspaper and it's delivered by small boys. Intercourse has now slid over to the sex category. It's become a dirty word.

We have three categories. For instance, practically all are dirty words: sex, toilet, and religion. There are various other sensitive subjects like death and money, but these don't seem to generate any dirty words. Nobody goes around saying things like "Oh, cash register" or "Oh, funeral."

There is also a declining class of animal terms which, perhaps because of the increasing urbanization of our society, have pretty much "lost their bite." It doesn't do much to call a man a "cur" or a "hound" anymore. You can still get a little mileage out of "pig." You can get a rise out of a female by calling her a "bitch." Then, of course, there's "son of a bitch," which has mother-love built into it. But with those exceptions, the only animal term that has any real swearword value anymore is "ass." This is potent only because it's slid over to sex and toilet. As long as you make it perfectly clear you're talking about an animal, you're not only on safe grounds, you might be on biblical grounds.
When people get into sensitive areas like that, they tend to develop substitute words so they come to the universe a little more indirectly. The trouble is that, in time, the substitute dirty word itself and [takes on meaning] that's the one that interferes. That's exactly what happened to "undeveloped." It became too clearly a substitute for the insult "primitive" and had to go. Sure enough, "undeveloped" was replaced by "underdeveloped." "Underdeveloped" is a euphemism that means "undeveloped," which is a euphemism for "primitive." The whole thing is entirely transitive, of course. "Underdeveloped" has now run its course. Several years ago, the Chief of Protocol in the Department of State announced in the newspapers that we would no longer refer to other nations in the world as "underdeveloped." Henceforth, they were to be known as "developing" or "emerging," coming out from under a rock somewhere. But you have to admit that "developing" is a great advance over "underdeveloped." A nation that's underdeveloped is in a static state of affairs. They're not going anywhere at all. But if you're developing, that's progressive, dynamic. They're on the way; they're on the move. But never fear, they will never catch up. That's also part of the thing. We like to see them come on, provided they remain a little bit behind. We'd be very happy to see any of our friends become the number two nation in the world.

I think the greatest shock this country's had in its whole existence is the way the Russians jumped up such a big [advance] in the space program. The shock was so great that we began spending massive amounts of money on education. There's an indicator. What in the world are those guys doing sending more of those things and bigger ones and faster ones and welding things in outer space where there is no oxygen, robots running around the Moon? We're the gadget people, for Heaven's sake. Don't they read the programs? The Germans are like us. They're clean. But the Russians? The Russians are half Oriental. Scratch a Russians teeth and you find tartar.

Just imagine what our failings have been if it has been someone like Tibet sending that junk up there all this time. National suicide would have been the only answer. The Tibetans, don't forget, have a two mile start. But you can't straighten them out. You rush out there to save that poor, benighted savage and you find you have to spend the first year of your tour convincing him he's a poor, benighted savage. See, he thinks he's a civilized guy whose technology hasn't gotten out of control. He's apt to look at us as a little bit less

than perfectly civilized.

The sad fact is that most of the world doesn't share our view of ourselves as the climax of human evolution. In fact, a lot of them think we've slid back down the pole quite a ways, or gone back up the tree, which is a better way to say it. They're apt to look at us from time to time as barbarians with gadgets. [Incredible] knowledge of the gadgets, some of them are incredibly sophisticated. Imagine a bomb that could fall in the middle of a crowded city and kill nobody but communists. You read about "smart weapons?" That's the smartest one of all. While they might want some of these weapons, some of the other gadgets (medicines, labor saving devices, comfort devices, Coca-Cola), they certainly don't want all the barbaric folkways that go along with the gadgets. They don't want the whole packages any more than we want their whole package. "Look, could you manage to send me half a boatload of those cute little Buddha statues?" "Keep your goddam Buddhas and just send the statues, please." That's the way they're apt to feel about us from time to time. "Keep your goddam democracy. Just send the bulldozer, please. We can use a bulldozer, but if we try to put in democracy, everybody in town is going to start acting funny. That's uncomfortable." They're apt to look at us from time to time as underdeveloped in certain respects. Of course, it's true.

No nation can be fully developed in all respects. You can't specialize in everything. So, they look around at some areas of life they give a lot of time and attention to but can't be ignored. Why, no, as far as that's concerned, they're developed and we're not. Haiti has it all over the U.S. in voodoo. The USA is seriously underdeveloped with respect to voodoo. We do the same thing. We look around at the things we specialize in: factories and toilets; industry and sanitation. If they have factories and toilets, they're developing. If not, not. But there are all kinds of things you can specialize in. Sometimes they [plunge] pretty deeply, like spirituality. The United States is underdeveloped with respect to spirituality. You almost never see an American sitting down talking to a tree. I have some news I want to pass on to you so you can worry about it, too. It's being disputed, but there is a guy who claims he's getting signals from plants. He's wiring the plants up to lie detector machines. He says the plants are sending him signals. He had two plants in a greenhouse. Six guys went through one at a time. The number six man, as he went through, snatched one of the plants out of its pot and murdered it. Then he sent the same six guys back and forth into the greenhouse in random order. Every time the murderer went through, they got wild signals from the remaining plant. I think that's disgusting. There is no room in my cosmos for talking plants. Our folklore is that people have souls, animals have inferior spirits, and plants don't. I wish the plants wouldn't talk. I haven’t got time to talk to a vegetable. It's all I can do to talk to my car. Of course, to people who believe that in living things like plants, there are spirits you can commune with, our behavior is something of an abomination. To create a mechanical artifact like a car and then talk to it is practically incestuous.

Speaking of incest, we're underdeveloped in this country with respect to sex. It's not that less sex goes on here than anywhere else. It's just that there's less pleasure per mile of sex around here than in many other parts of the world. Around here, sex is so surrounded with guilt, shame, and taboo. You know, a lot of people in this country think that sex is

obscene. There are like five on the Supreme Court. They seem to have the notion that the only legitimate function of sex is the procreation of the next generation. It's a mystery why God should have made it such a disagreeable, unpleasant business, but all you can do is try to make the least of it. So, it should be done quickly, quietly, furtively, in the dark, without pleasure, and only once per child. Everything else is lasciviousness.

So, here is a little kid looking at the big guy trying to learn about life. What does he see? First program, pow, pow, pow, teeth all over the floor. Second program, blam, blam, blam, bodies all over the floor. But just let a man put a hand under a woman's dress and the whole set will go black. It's hard to watch television without seeing a dozen dead bodies, but you will never see a naked one. The [impression] seems to be that looking at dead bodies will help our young people grow tall, strong, and morally straight, but looking at naked bodies will destroy their characters forever. All I can say is, if anything is going to happen to me, let it be sex, not violence. I said that a couple of months ago and somebody began to applaud. Without really thinking it over ahead of time, I just looked up and said, "Thank you, peace lovers." I think the real trouble with sex in this country is that we got it all mixed up with marriage. That is, any number of people think there is some kind of necessary or natural connection between sex and marriage and go out and sing songs like "Love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage." It's considered very rude to point out that this is the age of the horseless carriage. The American ideal continues to be the old male chauvinist thing: "Young man, try to arrange things so you can have a 50-year love affair with your housekeeper." That usually spoils both the loving and the housekeeping.

In some other societies, these things are organized differently. A man has a woman of his eyes in his house: his wife. The children are together as the legitimate heirs of his property. He has his love affairs outside. But in America, we dumb up those two jobs. American efficiency. It's extremely efficient for lawyers because there is about a 40% divorce rate. The essence of the message we get on this subject is "A man's wife and a man's sexual partner ought to be the same person." An awful lot of people will never get that message either early or often. They don't seem to get it an awful lot in Latin America, for example. I was talking to a Bolivian Air Force officer down in Florida a few years ago. He was complaining about how hard we work here in the United States. He said, "Oh, you work too hard up here. We don't work so hard in Bolivia. We go to fly the airplanes in the mountaintops, down the seacoast, and back up the mountaintop. A change in altitude that's very hard for anybody. After two or three days, the chief says, 'Okay, done enough work. We're going to have a picnic.' So, we go out into the hills and have a picnic. There's food, wine, women." I said, "You mean your wife?" "Oh, no," he said, "You don't take your wife on a picnic." So, I said, "What happens if you come back from a picnic and you find your wife is on a picnic with some guy?" He said, "I kill her."

They don't get the message very much in the Orient either. Orientals have wives and sexual partners. They can usually tell them apart quite easily. If they're Japanese, they may go off to the geisha house to celebrate a little business deal. They use their offices for the same purpose we use ours, to set up appointments to do business elsewhere. They get the business deal all celebrated and someone might say, "Why don't we consummate

this deal. I'll leave here and rush over to the house of prostitution and get ourselves a woman. I think that's a jolly good idea." They get up to go. The Americans in the crowd grab them in the arm and say, "Hey, Hashimotosan, what about your wife?" Hashimotosan is struck dumb by this question. What strikes him dumb is the complete irrelevance of it. What in the world has this got to do with his wife? He's going out with the boys for a while. He thinks about it for a minute and, finally, he might say, "Oh, she don't want to go." The question is, is Hashimotosan immoral? The answer is, he's a bad American. But we had a smallish coup about that. "He's Japanese. He's un-American."

That's what I mean when I say these people are un-American. I mean they don't have our value systems, our behavior patterns, they're gooks. In fact, we're now in a position to define this term: gook. A gook is a guy with a different set of behavior pattens, a different set of values. What do you suppose we are to him? Gookoo. What do you suppose the likelihood of straightening him out is? Zilch. Never happens. What does happen all the time is that people borrow things selectively. You borrow conventions, customs, artifacts.. Whatever you do borrow, you reshape to your value system. So, we borrowed Zen Buddhism from the Orient. By the time we get through reshaping it to fit our system, no Buddhist would recognize it. The Buddhists might borrow Christianity and by the time they get through reshaping it to fit their system, no Christian would recognize it. In fact, there is a sect in Vietnam near the Cambodian border called Cow Dai. It's kind of an amalgam of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity. They have a number of saints or holy people, all of whom seem to get pretty equal billing. There is Confucius, Buddha, and Jesus, to be sure. Then there is Joan of Arc, a nice little Oriental girl, and Sun Yat-sen, which allows you to date the movement, and Victor Hugo. They have more or less modified Christianity. Of course, we modified Christianity in the 19th century. Any first century Christian who came back today would have his mind blown by a lot of things going on in the buildings with the steeples up on top: bingo, boy scout meetings, things like that. So, the same goes for a Buddhist whose Buddhism we borrowed and modified and say, "Hey, why don't you become a Christian?" He says, "Fine, I'd love to be a Christian. I'm already a Buddhist, an animist, a Confucianist. I'd love to be a Christian, too." You say, "Well, that's not exactly what we had in mind. We thought maybe you would like to give all those other things up." "Oh," he says, "that's not prudent. Nobody knows who has truth by the tail, so why don't we hang onto all of them and hedge our bets a little bit?" We're not going to straighten out the rest of the world. They’re not out there, as you know very well, waiting to become Americans. They're wondering why we don't put on more steam to become better Swedes, Egyptians, Chinese, or whatever.

If you can't straighten out the un-American people, the second possibility is to get out there and wipe them out. But that's not very promising either. I mean, there are so many of them. There are 19 of them to every single one of us. Besides, this is a dangerous process to set in motion. You rush around the world knocking off all the un-American people and then you get to thinking, "Wow, while we're at it, why don't we clean up around home a little bit? We've got a block I'm not so sure about." The first thing you know, it's down to me and thee, get your hand off the knife. If you can't straighten them out and you can't wipe them out, there is only one thing left to do with the un-American people. That's to get out there and coexist, to learn to operate more efficiently with them

without either trying to convert them to Americans or going native ourselves. Did you ever notice that when they become like us, it isn't going native? We go native; they become Americans. You see the great advantage they've got. What we need to do to increase our efficiency in dealing with them is to learn to read the signals they're sending out. This is what I'm talking about all the way through. Communication is just another word for signal transmission. Sensory perception is sent out and received. That's communication. Obviously, all kinds of things go wrong. One of the signals may not get through. It may get lost. A [clean] transmission is sent but doesn't get received. But if it does go through, there are still three things that can happen. Two of them are bad.

One is, the signal may go through and just not mean anything to the guy at the other end. He gets the signal, sure. He just doesn't have any meaning for it. For example, in the Middle East, when you want to signal "no," you don't do the lateral headshake we do. You lift up the chin and give a little click of the tongue. That's the signal for "no" in the Middle East. Well, we're apt to miss that the first few times. So, here is the American over there who says, "Hey, Abdul, do you want to go downtown tonight?" Abdul says, "(Clicking noise)." So, the American raises his voice to make things clear to foreigners and says, "I say, do you want to go downtown tonight?" So, Abdul raises his voice to make things clear to foreigners: "(Clicking noise)." Then they fight. What else can they do?

The second possibility is that the signal goes through and it means pretty much to the other guy what it means to us. Okay, that's the good one.

The real trouble comes with the third possibility, where the signal goes through and it does mean something to the other guy, sure enough. It just means something different to him from what it means to us. Of course, everybody reads a signal according to what it means to him. After World War II, for example, Germany had been all torn up by the war, the crops had been wiped out, and they had some awful winters in the late 1940s. If at that time you had friends or relatives in Germany that you wanted to send a food package to tide them over during the bad winters, you were obliged by U.S. postal regulations to write the word "gift" on the food package. The only difficulty is that "gift" happens to be the German word for "poison" which makes it kind of a bad word to put on the food package. So, here is the American lovingly wrapping up and sending off gift presents. The German unwraps it and throws away gift poison. It's maybe 20 times worse, of course, if they send us a food package marked "gift."

For us, this downward sweep of the hand means "Go away. Go away." But there are a lot of places where something very much like that means "Come here." You know what's going to happen. The American goes to the door and the guy says, "Come in." The American shuts the door and goes away. That's communication: signal sent, perceived, and responded to. You talk to an Italian, you walk away, and he says, "Ciao." It's his way of saying, "Bye-bye." Well, this is "Bye-bye." This is "Come here." So, the American goes back and says, "What?" The guys says, "Nothing. I'm just saying 'Good-bye.'" The American walks away and the Italian says, "Ciao" and we're ready to hit him in the nose.

A lot of people use the term "communication" as if it automatically guaranteed agreement and understanding. They say things like "I hope I can communicate with those people when I run into them." What they mean is, "I hope I can get my signals plugged in. I hope my signals mean exactly to them what they mean to me. I hope there are no other signals in the whole situation." It's just not going to happen. So, the wisest thing to say is, "I wonder what I'm going to communicate to those people when I run into them." You'll be sending out signals and they'll be reading you. You're bound to be sending out signals. Any part of your behavior could be a signal. Any movement can be a signal. Any stillness can be a signal. Even the suppression of signals can itself be a signal. Here is a guy trying to not send out signals. But a signal is sent out. And not just one at a time, but whole bunches of them. You walk into the room and you send out a dozen signals. Your very appearance: your maleness, your femaleness, your age, your state of health, your skin color, your hair, your costume, those are all signals. Try coming in tomorrow morning in a police officer's uniform. It has an effect. Try coming in naked. It has a different effect. Try coming in naked with a police officer's hat on. It has a very special effect. The only problem is what to do with the badge. But you're always sending out bunches of signals. You got to the psychiatrist and say, "Look, Doc, I have this fish fry next week and I [hate] fish fry." He says, "Why don't you love your mother?" [Give] the twitch of your cheek and the twitch in your shoulder, but those are signals, too. To a psychiatrist, they might even be more fascinating than an invitation to a fish fry. If you're just lying there not even moving, not even breathing, it's a big, fat signal: dead.

As that example illustrates, it isn't necessary to be conscious of sending a signal. You can send one without knowing you've done it. There is the old left hand. It doesn't mean much around here. But in the Middle East, that thing takes on a dreadful significance. In the Middle East, that is your toilet hand. The right hand is your eating hand and the left hand is your toilet hand. Everybody knows that you've got to look out for the left hand in the Middle East. A fellow was telling me he went off to Saudi Arabia a few years ago on the Fulbright Program. He took his wife with him and she was left handed. Nobody told them. So, they were invited out to a big banquet the first week they were there. Well, you had your plate in front of you and a big serving platter in the middle. You're supposed to reach out with your eating hand, take things from the serving platter, put them on your plate, and then eat them from there meanwhile keeping your toilet hand tucked decorously in your lap clear under the table where the filthy thing belongs. Here was the American lady reaching out with her toilet hand! They just never even got invited back. Even waving [to] people sometimes catches them in a bad mood and they throw a spear at you. You're signaling "Hello, friend!" What he reads is "Toilet hand to you!" In other words, the guy may very well get your signal, but not get your message.

You don't have to go all the way to Saudi Arabia to have that happen. The best story I've ever heard to illustrate this is about a guy who was driving on a narrow, two lane, secondary road in the hills of Eastern Kentucky. It was all curves. He couldn't make any speed at all. He finally comes around a curve and there is a half-mile straightaway in front of him. He thinks, "Hot dog! I can pick up some speed at last" and he starts to do so. But just as he does, around the curve at the other end of the straightaway comes another car, which immediately gets smack in the middle of the narrow road straddling the line. It

comes rushing at him. There is this crazy woman in the car. She's honking her horn and waving her hand out the window at him. So, he gets as far as he can on the right-hand side of the road, but there is a narrow shoulder and a ditch. He is about to hit the panic button when she swerves back into her lane and shoots past him. As she goes, she leans out of the window of her car and yells, "Pig!" It makes him furious! she threatened his life and then insulted him in the bargain. So, he turned around and yelled at her, "Cow" and almost ran off the road looking backwards like that. But he regains control of the car, drives around the curve, and smashes into a huge pig. That's exactly what she told him. The lady meanwhile went into the ditch to avoid hitting the cow. He got her signal, but he didn't get her message. We're always reading people and they misread us.

There is a story about three young Chinese who had been in the United States for a while. They went back to Peking and were being debriefed by the commissar. Finally, the commissar said, "Was there anything you liked about the United States particularly?" "Oh, yes," said the first young Chinese "I liked the holidays. I thought the holidays were great, especially Easter, my favorite holiday." The commissar said, "Oh, what is Easter?" The young man said, "Easter comes in the middle of the winter and the people bring trees in their houses and they have big meals and pass gifts around." The second one said, "No, Easter comes in the middle of the summertime. The people go out in the parks and have picnics and shoot off fireworks." The third one said, "Easter comes in the springtime. It celebrates the sacrifice their leader made. After the leader had been sacrificed, they put him in a tomb and they rolled a big stone in front of the door of the tomb. At Easter, they come and roll the stone away and the leader comes out. If he sees his shadow..." Just imagine any one of us trying to explain the Arab holidays. It would be the same kind of confusion. But we're always sending out signals. The trouble is that we have so much of our behavior built into our nervous system that we don't know anything about. We've learned how to do a lot of things. We really can't tell you how we do them.

Consider what is involved in getting a forkful of peas in your mouth. When is the last time you stuck the fork in your eye? When is the last time you even missed your mouth? Even if some of the peas should spill off the fork, chances are you won't fall off the chair while you're doing it, although sitting on a straight chair is another little miracle of muscular tension and balance. We have all kinds of unconscious behavior built into our nervous system.

I'm always saying that English teachers in this country don't know anything about English. They know what they like, what they like to call correct, what they don't like to call correct. You think it's some kind of mathematical talk, but it isn't. It's Emily Post stuff. They teach linguistic etiquette. But if you ask them how the language really works, they really can't tell you. Try this with some hotshot English teacher. Say, "Look, here is a simple sentence: 'He went.' The negative form is 'He didn't go.' What is the 'didn't' doing in the negative?" She said, "Well, it's got to be there." You said, "Sure, it's got to be there. What is the rule for its being there?" "It's got to be there." "Sure, but what's the rule?" "It's got to be there!" She is screaming because she doesn't know the rule. Here is the rule. When you negate the verb in an English sentence, you do so by putting the particle 'not' with the short form 'nt' in front of the verb. This 'not' or 'nt' must be preceded

by an auxiliary. So, if you already have an auxiliary in a sentence, you simply stick the 'not' or 'nt' on the existing auxiliary: "He is working." "He isn't working." If there are two or more, you put it on the first one: "He has been working." "He hasn't been working." If there is no auxiliary, as in "He went," you run into the dummy auxiliary "do." For no reason on God's green Earth, except to have something to stick the 'nt' onto. Then because only the first item in the verb string can s how the past signal, you have to take it away from "went" and give it a "do," which makes "went" into "go," "do" into "did," and "He didn't go." You can even turn around and make it into a question: "Didn't he go?" But I doubt seriously that 10% of the English teachers in this country can say how that works. That's how much I know about English. You can go and say "How do you make a sentence negative?" They say "You negate it." "How do you negate it?" "You make it negative. I just told you that."

There is all kinds of behavior built into our nervous system. We have signals. We think everybody uses our signals and then we find out they don't. We think everybody in the world, for example, points with the forefinger. But a lot of people point with their chin. It's very handy if you have a couple of armfuls of something. There is our signal for "one." I should try to elicit this from somebody. I stopped that one time in a seminar when there was a sour faced-looking young man at the other end of the table. So, I thought I would involve him in the fun and games. I said to him, "Would you say to me in English 'It costs one dollar' and show me with your hands how many dollars that is?" He sat there with a stony face and said, "I don't use my hands when I talk." I said, "You mean you don't use them in funny ways." He said, "No, I don't use them at all." I said, "Are you sure about that?" He said, "Certainly." That was so embarrassing.

You can use your hands all you want to. The only rule is, if you're an American, you've got to keep your elbows bent. The minute you get your elbow straightened out, you start looking like an Italian. Italians and a lot of other people have a great many straight elbow gestures, some of which are intensely significant. We don't. The only common straight elbow gesture in our system is pointing with the forefinger as in "Look at the door." That's got to be straight-elbowed. Naturally, when I point with my thumb, it is bent-elbowed. Right hand, left hand, man, woman, or child. We're running out of options. In the first place, it's got to be the forefinger. You can't use the middle finger. That's a dirty gesture. You can't use the thumb because it's not available. You can't use another because that's silly. So, it's got to be the forefinger. The forefinger has to point vertically. You give the palm or the end of the hand to the person you're talking to, not the back of the hand. The back of the hand is effeminate. We call it "effeminate" even though women don't do it. Very interesting. Manly is with two of the backhands. Rush over to the airport and read the signs and you'll find that Hertz is still number one and good old Avis is still number two.

Incidentally, if you run into any Englishman in your travels, do not give them the 'V' for "Victory." That's an extremely obscene gesture for the British. As a matter of fact, Winston Churchill ran into static when he tried to institute the 'V' for "Victory" signal during World War II (always done palm forward). It was referred to by people who didn't care much for Churchill as his "two finger gesture." "Churchill was around here the other

day and gave everybody the two finger gesture so he could look like this dirty gesture." Can you imagine anybody getting uptight about an innocent gesture like that? You have an option with the thumb as a signal for "one." It can be in or out. That's not "two" in our system. It's a sloppy "one." The crazy Chinese think this is eight. That's why their crops fail. This is more than just the hand signal. It is an arm and hand signal because your elbow has to be bent. That's okay for long distance signaling shortstop to outfielder, but inside a room, (inaudible) two o'clock (inaudible) system. The opposite is 10 o'clock. That's the way we do it. But not everybody in the world has had the good sense to adopt this neat, efficient, esthetically satisfactory system. The crazy Germans, for example. You want to know why they lost two major wars in half a century? It's because when they try to say "It costs one mark," they use the thumb. I've seen them sit in a language class and say, "(Inaudible)." This is ridiculous. Look at one, two, three, all over the landscape like that. Three is a bunch, man. Organize them. You go into a German beer hall and say, "Bring me two beers." You know how many you're likely to get, don't you? Three because that thumb counts. And you give a missed signal. They think you want three beers and had your thumb shot off in the war.

I wonder about the other people who operate these other systems. I usually provoke one of three general responses from them. One of them is "Huh?" There is blank incomprehension. The second one is "Ha, ha, ha. Aren't they funny?" The third one is "Aren't they awful?" The finger is usually a "ha, ha" thing. It's a good icebreaker, as a matter of fact. You show them how to count with our fingers. They show you how to count with their fingers. You giggle and break down some walls. You're in a burning building and say, "What floor are we on?" The German gives the signal for "three," you read that as "two" and jump out the window. That could cause some trouble, especially if when he says "three," he really means "four." They don't count the bottom floor. You think the fourth floor is really the second floor. Bad news and broken bones. Otherwise, the finger thing is not much of a problem. But there are bits and pieces around the world that do provoke powerful responses, just reflex hostility.

I want to close by showing you one of these. This is a way of handling space between people. It's based on the fact that we don't touch each other in this society. This is a non-contact society that we live in. You can touch a dear friend or a member of your family, but you cannot touch a stranger. Any continuing contact around here heats up pretty quickly. So, elevators become places of crisis for us all. Everybody gets taller and thinner as the elevator fills up. If you must touch in the elevator (you are permitted to touch provided you don't move, of course, on the outside of the sleeve). It's cloth on cloth, none of this flesh on flesh stuff. On the outside of the sleeve from the wrist up to the shoulder across the back of the shoulder down to the bottom of the shoulder blade, no lower, and down the outside of the other sleeve. That is our impersonal shell. You can touch strangers on the impersonal shell. The other touch in the elevator or anyplace else for that matter is likely to get you a poke in the eye with a sharp stick. You can touch people's hands when you shake hands with them. You're supposed to let go by about the seventh pump at the very latest. Have you ever had anybody pump your hand about the 12th time? Your nervous system heats up on about number 10. If you're a football player, you can actually pat your teammates on the bottom, but it has to be a pat, not a lingering

caress.
In other words, we walk around in this society with a little bubble of space, about an inch, all around our body and we own our bubbles. My body stops here, but I have jurisdiction out to about there. If anybody invades your bubble, makes contact, you're supposed to pull away in an exaggerated fashion and say "Excuse me." So, we go around bubble busting and apologizing. We'll start out the door in a few minutes and be saying "[Excuse me]. I'm sorry. I beg your pardon. Boom, boom, boom." What happens? Sometimes you get in some other societies and they don't have any bubbles. There are very few bubbles in Latin America. So, here is one of us down there going crazy. The streets are narrow, they're full of people, you try to preserve your God-given bubble, and nobody will cooperate. Not only that, but when they do bump you, they don't apologize. Why should they? They don't apologize to each other. Why should they apologize to you? If they knock you down, they'll apologize. Otherwise, they'll push, bump, and don't apologize. How do we read this lack of apology? Hostility. My lord they must hate us down there? I might as well write "Yankee go home" on the back of my shirt right now. Then you get the Middle East and it's even worse. Then you run into contact societies where the one thing they really want is to get hold of each other. I remember an Armenian telling me one time, "Oh, you stand next to a guy and he doesn't touch you and that's an important signal. It means he doesn't like you. If he liked you, he'd certainly want to get hold of you." The American is standing there talking to the Greek and the Greek reaches out and holds the American's hands. Here is an American man whose hands are being held by a Greek. It's just one gathering visceral twitch for the American until he finally screams "Don't break my bubble!" It doesn't make the least bit of sense to the Greek. It's all ungreek to him.

But there they are, this whole world full of funny people out there. I guess the best rule is when in Rome, don't try to be a Roman. That takes about 20 years. But do keep in mind that the Romans are not defective Americans. They're un-American, as 95% of the world is. If you can't straighten them out and if we can't wipe them out, as we can't, and if we're going to go on messing with them, as we are, then I think it is very important for us to learn how to read them a little bit better. Thank you.

End of interview