

## *The Golden Turtle*

Every year around the same time the animals and wizards of every country meet on a small island between the continents to hold a big conference and to discuss important matters. One dull morning the snake, representing a little African country, said, „I have to bring up something“, and it looked around the crowd complacently. „Well?“ yawned the Egyptian crocodile and prepared itself to give one or two useful comments and then sleep through the rest of the session. „The problem that we ought to discuss today“, the snake continued, „is the fact that we don't understand one another. Only the most educated members of our people are able to manage more than two languages, and these are never the same ones.“

The animals had evaded this problem many times since it was uncomfortable to ponder questions they had no answer to and started to respond nervously as they were being forced to face it again. „So what?“ said the Irish goblin and turned its golden pot over to sit on it (there was nothing in it except an old button because the world economy was in a crisis). „So far we have always got along well, haven't we?“ - „That's not true“, a sheep from the Scottish highlands protested who had come because Nessie had a cold. „We are unable to pass on important news. The koalas in one part of the rain forest have no idea that there is a fire in another part. The fish of the sea are dying of water poisoning because nobody tells them that an oil pollution is approaching. And here, at our conference, we have to draw lots every year to decide what language is to be used at the meeting. Is this what you call getting along well?“ It bleated loudly to make its point, lay down and started to chew cud.

There was silence for some time, while in the heads of a few extremely lazy animals there were thoughts of killing this inexperienced sheep. Suddenly the Arabic lion resolutely said, „We should take my language!“ It lifted its paw and ostentatiously looked at its claws. „Because I am the strongest, fastest and most dangerous creature among us here. And it is a Law of Nature that the strongest succeeds. Then our problem will be solved. Everyone learns my language and all understand one another.“ - „Oh no“, replied the lizard, of whom nobody knew for a certainty where it came from, „my language will be spoken. I am the creature with the most ancient family tree, going back to the dinosaurs, and with so much tradition I ought to know what is best.“

Approving comments came from the audience, and the lizard looked at the lion contemptuously. „Why not *my* language?“ came a shrill voice to top the noise, and when a rhino stepped aside a rabbit appeared. „I am very fertile, and the language of my country will be likewise.“ A hyena laughed and was hit on its mouth by a zebra's hoof. „I am also very fertile. Let's take my language“, a mouse said cautiously. „And mine!“ cried a wombat in unison with an antelope. „And mine ...“ growled a leopard.

It soon turned out that every animal and every country wanted to make its language the one that everybody was to learn and nobody was willing to give in to the others, not even an inch.

Now a small turtle that did not represent any country but just lived on the island heard the fight and started to crawl towards the group that had gathered, slowly, of course, as it is the habit of turtles. Having arrived, it looked for the highest rock in the vicinity and climbed it. „SILENCE!“ A loud bellowing made the animals tremble, and suddenly they all stared at a small spot on a big rock, as if drawn by a string.

The turtle smiled contentedly and congratulated itself to the volume of its voice. „I believe“, it said in a loud voice, „I have an answer to your problem.“ And again the hyena laughed but was able to protect its injured mouth in time before it was hit again.

„Why not create a new language?“ the turtle went on from its rock. „Why not create a language that is easy to learn and easy to speak, for all the creatures in the world? A language that does not discriminate against any country and does not favor any?“ It looked at the animals below who stared at it speechlessly, hoping they would accept its suggestion. Slowly the lion began growlingly, „And how are we supposed to create this language?“ The turtle moved its foot triumphantly, because on its long crawl to the meeting place it had been able to think about this question thoroughly. „I’ll explain it to you“, it started, and it talked on for many hours, and the more it talked and explained the language the more the animals liked the idea.

„Great!“ said the crocodile. „Wonderful!“ commented the lion. „We ought to give the turtle a reward,“ decided the Irish goblin. „Of course,“ the others agreed. „But how?“ – „Let me do this,“ an energetic voice from among the crowd said, and the Hollywood fairy whizzed up to the rock where the turtle was, lifted its magic wand, spoke some magic words, and a shower of gold came down on the body of the inventor of the language until it was covered with gold from head to foot.

„We now recognize you as our greatest help and you may participate in any of our meetings,“ it said, and the crowd below applauded. „Don’t mention it,“ the fairy said, bowed low and whizzed back to its place. The turtle, though, on its rock, smiled its brightest smile and thought that, all in all, it had reason to be satisfied with its achievement.

A true story, told by Katharina von Radziewsky, June 2003  
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