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Colonialism and Language

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COHERENCE, LOGICAL

Logicians generally employ *coherence* and **CONSISTENCY** as synonyms naming the absence of contradictions in a group of **SENTENCES**, propositions, or beliefs, where a contradiction is the conjunction of a proposition and its negation. In metaphysical terms, logical incoherence or contradiction is the impossible instantiation of a property and some other, incompatible property, as in "the circle was square." Epistemically, a contradiction is an irrational belief in both a proposition and its denial.

Logical consistency is not a *necessary* feature of what people say, write, or think. Nor is the absence of contradictions a sufficient condition on discourse coherence (see COHERENCE, DISCOURSE), as a collection of logically consistent yet unrelated sentences does not constitute a coherent discourse. In many contexts, however, logical consistency is a regulative norm for speakers and interpreters. According to classical logic, a set of propositions is either coherent or contradictory and trivial (in the sense that it entails all propositions or *explodes*). In classical logic, the *ex falso quodlibet* argument was held to establish that

given a single contradiction, every arbitrarily chosen proposition follows validly. Yet it is now often denied that this is a good principle of reasoning, and some philosophers contend that there are paraconsistent yet nonexplosive systems. That some proposition and its negation are part of the same belief set does not imply that all other propositions belong to that set, and different levels of logical coherence can be delineated in semantic representations of inconsistent sets (Jennings and Schotch 1984).

Some philosophers have gone so far as to contend that there are *true contradictions*, such as the conclusions yielded by liar and sorites paradoxes. The latter *dialetheist* stance is contested by many logicians, however, who have sought to establish that all paradoxical arguments are invalid or unsound. For example, in an updating of the medieval *cassatio* account of logical paradoxes, Laurence Goldstein (2000) argues that while liar sentences are meaningful, they lack content in the sense of failing to specify truth conditions and, therefore, are neither true nor false.

Logical coherence or consistency is not equivalent to logical validity, which is often defined as a basic constraint on the relations between the premises and conclusions of an argument: *Valid* arguments are those in which truth is preserved, in the sense that whenever all of the premises of the argument are true, its conclusion is necessarily true. (In classical logic, validity requires the preservation of falsehood as well; necessarily, if the conclusion is false, at least one of the premises is false.) Attempts to provide a conceptual analysis of the notion of logical consequence include syntactical, model-theoretic, and proof-theoretic approaches.

– Paisley Livingston

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COLONIALISM AND LANGUAGE

One of the complications of writing on the centrality of language to imperialism and colonialism is that even if the account were limited to the policies and practices of the European nation-states in the last 500 years, it would still leave out major historical events and processes. For example, it would not cover the effects of Roman imperial linguistic strategy, one of which, at a deep historical level, was the appearance of a number of the modern European vernacular languages that were, in turn, to become vehicles of imperial and colonial rule. Nor would it include the linguistic impact of earlier empires, for example, the Aztecs in Mexico or the Incas in Peru. And it would not address non-European modern imperialism and colonialism, for example,

the consequences of the imposition of Japanese language and culture on its Asian neighbors in the late nineteenth and early to middle twentieth centuries.

Given the complexity of this larger history or set of histories, it would be impossible to provide any sort of sensible rendition of it or them in a short entry. It is proposed, therefore, to trace the development of one major form of linguistic colonialism in order to demonstrate the general ideology that lay behind the practice, and to show how, even in this single example, it worked differently in distinct locations and points in history. Though this sacrifices historical specificity in one sense, it is intended that the example chosen – the uses of English in the British imperial and colonial project – will demonstrate the particularity and variability of the process. Antonio De Nebrija made an important point when he asserted in his *Gramática Castellana*, published in the fateful year 1492, that "siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio" (language was always the companion of empire) (de Nebrija [1492] 2006, 13), but it is necessary to pay attention to the ways in which this relationship was constituted within different forms of colonialism.

An account of English (later British) colonialism in Ireland might start by noting that "when the English first invaded Ireland in 1169, they took their language with them and imposed it on the native population." But such a narrative would involve an anachronistic oversimplification both in terms of the national identity of the invaders and the languages that they spoke. It is open to question, for example, whether the leaders of the invasion thought of themselves as English at all (barely a century after the Norman Conquest, they were more likely to have considered themselves Norman or Anglo-Norman), and the languages of their mercenary soldiery included Flemish, Welsh, Anglo-Norman, and, of course, what passed for "English." Indeed, the first colonial legislation on language in Ireland, *The Statute of Kilkenny* (1366), was notable for two reasons. First, it was directed against the colonists, rather than the colonized, and had the aim of preventing the colonizers from adopting the native Gaelic language and culture. The indigenous Irish were not included in the scope of the law since they could speak their own language if they wanted; the point was to stop the colonizers from *going native* (a process of cultural assimilation that had been occurring since the first invasion). Second, despite proclaiming that English should be the language of the colonists, the statutes were in fact written in Norman-French – one of the languages of law in England at the time. The point here is that although the general outline of the history of linguistic colonialism in any given case can be traced relatively easily, the debates and practices pertaining to specific historical conjunctures are often difficult and complex to understand.

In the sixteenth century, some 400 years after the first invasion of Ireland, the centralizing English state determined upon a policy of linguistic colonialism as part of its attempt to bring the whole island under crown rule. The legislation that marked the implementation of the strategy, Henry VIII's *Act for the English Order, Habit and Language* (1537), revealed the belief that underpinned it. The law ordered that all of the king's subjects conform to English culture, especially language, on the basis that

> there is again nothing which doth more contain and keep many of [the king's] subjects of [Ireland], in a certain savage and wild kind and manner of living, than the diversity that is betwixt them in tongue, language, order and habit, which by the eye deceives the multitude, and persuades unto them, that they should be as it were of sundry sorts, or rather of sundry countries. (*Statutes* 1786, 28 H 8. c.xv.)

The corollary to this belief that cultural – specifically linguistic – difference created division and prevented political and religious unity was the idea that a common language would forge common political allegiance and **IDENTITY**. The logical consequence, therefore, was that linguistic difference had to be extirpated and Ireland Anglicized. Edmund Spenser, poet and colonial servant, noted in 1596 that "it hath ever been the use of the Conqueror, to despise the language of the conquered and to force him by all means to learn his" (Spenser [1596] 1633, 47). He argued for the eradication of Gaelic on the supposition that "the speech being *Irish*, the heart must needs be *Irish*: for out of the abundance of the heart the tongue speaks" (ibid., 48).

Yet if it was the aim of linguistic colonialism in Ireland to Anglicize the country in order to bring it completely under political control, then it was a goal that was not achieved until the late nineteenth century (by which point Irish linguistic nationalism, the binary opposite of the colonial policy, had already started to inspire the revolutionary movement that overthrew British rule). It has been calculated that in the 1830s, for example, half the native Irish population spoke Irish, and half of that group spoke *only* Irish. Some 80 years later, just prior to Irish independence, less than 14 percent of the population spoke any Irish, and no more than 2 percent were Irish monoglots. How was this linguistic shift brought about? In this specific case there were a number of factors: the incorporation of the country by military force into the imperial political and economic order and the consequent introduction of the socially centralizing processes of industrialism and urbanization; the massive emigration that followed upon the widespread poverty among the rural population; the imposition of an educational system that rejected the native language in favor of English; the spread of the bureaucratic state into everyday life; the choice of English as the language of religion by the Irish Catholic Church; and the death of large numbers of Irish speakers in the Great Famine.

Although a number of these causes were particular to Ireland, others repeated in a pattern that occurred across the British Empire – though with differences. Indeed, if there is a key to understanding how and why linguistic colonialism of the modern European type operated, it lies in this variable combination of economic, cultural, educational, and religious factors and their effects upon the lived experience of colonial subjects. The nature, practices, and functions of colonial language policy changed throughout time, were altered to suit the differing purposes of the colonizers, and were adapted when the colonized responded in various ways. The sole aim was, to coin an oxymoron, the ruthlessly pragmatic use of language to achieve, consolidate, and prolong colonial rule.

In this regard, it should also be remembered that the discourse deployed around the languages of colonialism also formed part of the colonial project. For example, Edwin Guest noted in 1838 that English "is rapidly becoming the great medium of civilisation, the language and law to the Hindoo, of commerce to the African,

of religion to the scattered islands of the Pacific"; its range, he observed, "is greater than ever was that of the Greek, the Latin, or the Arabic; and the circle widens daily" (1838, 703). And in 1850, T. Watts argued in the *Transactions of the Philological Society* that "it will be a splendid and novel experiment in modern society, if a language becomes so predominant over all others as to reduce them in comparison to the proportion of provincial dialects." He had one language in mind, of course: "[A]t present the prospects of the English language are the most splendid the world has ever seen. It is spreading in each of the quarters of the globe by fashion, by emigration, and by conquest" (Watts 1850, 214).

The imperial vision that both Guest and Watts articulated in the mid-nineteenth century was already one that held English to be a global language transmitted by means of economic and military conquest; by the emigration of English speakers as both proponents and victims of British power; by cultural influence (not least through education and the fashionability that economic success brings with it); and by the imposition of the "civilizing" influence of religion. But it is important to note that both in the nineteenth century and today, the phrase *global language* is significant in its reference to the use of English in contexts across the world, but also highly misleading in its suggestion that it is the same form of the language used throughout the world. English, as the vehicle of imperialism and colonialism (primarily British, more recently American), was and is used in enormously wide-ranging situations, but it isn't a world language, either in the sense of a single form reproduced globally or in the sense that it is used by even a majority of human beings. Given the diversity of human experience, the complexity of our history, and the nature of human language, it is highly implausible that a particular language – English, Chinese, Arabic, or any other – will become a true global language. Indeed, as has been seen in the history of colonialism and postcolonialism, what in fact happens when it is imposed in different places across the world is that the language itself changes and develops. This process of the emergence of variant forms, sometimes recognized as new languages in their own right, is often described as the price that imperial languages have to pay for their historical role.

If the functions of language in imperialism and colonialism are historically, spatially, and contextually variable, then the responses made by those who were subjected to these languages also differ accordingly in the colonial and postcolonial periods. To take the example of English again, it is possible to point to the distinct roles of the language in India both before and after national independence. Although English was clearly used under colonialism to produce domination and to exercise power, it is nonetheless the case, as B. J. Kachru has shown, that it was used as a language of Indian nationalism in the independence struggle and now functions in complicated ways as a vehicle of control, authority and administrative cohesion – not least in the way in which it can operate as a *neutral* medium in particular contexts. This is not, however, to say that English is not still perceived by some as a language of oppression in India, as it is in other postcolonial locations. In the debate about the proper medium for African literature, for example, the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o identified English as a significant cause of colonial alienation and thus argued for his native Gĩkũyũ as the language best suited to express his African experience. On the other hand, Chinua Achebe, another major writer, rejected this position and opted instead to use English, but a new form of English, linked to its national *home* but altered to conform to African realities.

The range of views on this and related issues and the vehemence with which they are expressed testifies to the ongoing complexity and significance of the debates surrounding the legacy of linguistic colonialism, many of which are treated as questions of language policy (see LANGUAGE POLICY).

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COLOR CLASSISIFICATION

Color terms label categories of the hue, saturation, and brightness of light reflected from surfaces. Because colors vary from one another continuously and independently on these three dimensions, there is no apparent intrinsic structure to the color space that would prevent speakers of different languages from cutting up the continuum in different ways. In the absence of empirical studies, psychologists and anthropologists expected color classification to be an example of extreme cultural relativism and that the spectrum would be segmented into categories by different languages in arbitrarily different ways (e.g., Brown 1965, 315–16).

B. Berlin and P. Kay (1969) refuted this relativist assumption. They asked native speakers of 20 different languages to identify the best examples (*foci*) and the boundaries of basic color terms on a Munsell color chart (a grid of 320 color chips with 40 hues and 8 levels of brightness, plus a 10-chip gray scale). Although informants varied enormously in their placement of boundaries of color categories, they agreed considerably more on the choices of the foci of the categories. Berlin and Kay found that there were only 11 basic color categories in their sample of languages, with foci in black, white, red, yellow, green, blue, brown, gray, pink, orange, and purple. More surprisingly, they found that the color