

One can say, without fear of successful contradiction, that language has had a seminal influence on the development of nation-states in history. Language has within itself the power to bestow upon both individuals and countries the building blocks of ideology and the enhanced self-worth created by a sense of belonging to something outside of oneself – something larger, protective, insulating, and comforting. Language is the principal factor that separates Homo sapiens from all other life forms. It can militate towards alliances of countries or it can produce bitter enemies. It is responsible for these things and so much more. How has language done this? Language is about the communication of thoughts and ideas and feelings. Therefore it can bond or alienate, create belonging or discriminate against and isolate a person. In addition to this, if the nuances of language are not understood, miscommunication is guaranteed. When countries are attempting to communicate but linguistic barriers are undercutting their efforts, the geopolitical consequences have proven to be nearly fatal to the human race (as the Cuban missile crisis, for example, taught us all). In this ‘Tower of Babel’, where the annihilation of intelligent life on earth can be effectuated within an hour, the need for clear and precise communication is critical for the survival of the human species. Language has shown itself to be a malleable servant, able to blend with other processes that have appeared throughout time to aide in uniting or dividing countries. It is language that has had the most impact on the communication process and it is unquestionably the most important tool for unifying a nation-state.

But before this can be demonstrated what should be revealed first is the unification and consolidation of communication by the emplacement and employment of

one standardized language. In more general terms, communication between peoples has led to the creation of unified nation-states when one language exists. One has to look no further than George Orwell's 1984 for the epitome of this. 1984 was clearly predicated on the models of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, given Orwell's lifelong flirtation with International socialism, his personal struggle against fascism and his complete disillusionment with communism prior to his writing this work after the Second World War. In the novel the leadership of Oceania, in order to ever more concretely facilitate their hold on the minds of the 'proles' (Marx's proletariat), are constantly engaged, through the Ministry of Truth, in the reduction/revision/redaction of the one language. The 'Theory of Newspeak', simply put, states that reduction of vocabulary will lead to reduction of thought capability so that eventually, peace will mean war, truth will mean lie and love will mean hate. For example: "the word free still existed, but it could only be used in such statements as the dog is free from lice" (Orwell 246). Because of this control, the average 'prole' could not conceptualize freedom – and therefore would submit to slavery in every domain of his life. Orwell postulated this nightmare of language control based upon what he had observed in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, where Marxist or Nazi terminology and propaganda had apparently deadened the thinking and resistance of the masses to cultic dictatorship.

What does this have to do with the present state of the world? The European Union, a collective whole that is in economic competition with other world powers (the U.S.A., China, Russia, Japan) bears a striking resemblance to the novel. Due to the ever-growing power of the European Union the question that has been raised is: What is to be the dominant language in Europe? The reason this is a concern is because Europe has

many different languages and identity is based in language. Secondly the European Union is, at root, a Franco-German creation. In Europe language is a cultural marker. It is a way for people to identify themselves with a group more so than say religion or political views. However the EU is facing subordination to the United States. The United States wishes the language of the European Union to be English for communication purposes. Adopting one language facilitates trade with the United States (the world's number one economic power) and promotes conformity in the communication process. David Rothkopf, who served as deputy under secretary of commerce for international trade policy in the Clinton Administration and a visiting scholar with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, wrote in 1997:

“It is in the interest of the United States to ensure that the world is moving toward a common language and that it be English; that if the world is moving toward common telecommunications, safety, and quality of standards, they be American, and if common values are being developed they are values with which Americans are comfortable. English is linking the world” (Berdichevsky 24).

American and European communications would be expedited and promoted if they were each communicating in the same language. But as mentioned above Europe is a land of many tongues. If the EU decides that English will be the universal language, that will be a serious detriment to the people who identify themselves with a culture due to their language and cannot accommodate the change. Such people may become the latest flotsam and jetsam of history.

Europeans would have to conform and change their present way of thinking and acting because of the new supranational language. This is the concern of neither the United States nor the people in charge of the EU. Consolidating communication helps

business and economics so it is no wonder why the push for a universal language is happening. And for the European union, will it be English that will be its national language? Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission is quoted as saying, “It will be broken English, but it will be English” (Barbour 10).

The use of language in the development of cultural identity is nothing new. In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther produced a Bible in German for Germans to read, eschewing Latin or Greek, the traditional languages of the Bible. This event was important because a script that was printed in the German language as ‘standardized’ by Luther broke people’s connection to the ‘Roman’ church or the Latin tradition:

“Though there were fourteen editions and reprints of German translations of the Bible between 1466 and 1522, they used stilted and archaic language and contained only brief glosses. Using the language of the people with its clarity and energy of expression, Luther wished to make his translation of the Bible widely available” (Po-chia 44).

Luther’s Bible helped create, in the welter of states of the Holy Roman Empire, a sense of themselves and a bonding amongst the German-speaking peoples - something Germans lacked prior to this time.

Martin Luther’s innovation helped facilitate language consolidation and national unification over the next few hundred years amongst German-speaking people. By the twentieth century, conditions were ripe for the emergence of Nazi Germany where the homogeneity of ideology was guaranteed by direct communication by the leader with every member of the state. During this time the Nazis employed every facet of the new technologies to convey one message to the people (i.e. radio, films, newspapers etc). But one basic tool was paramount: Language. Hitler’s speeches to crowds were far more affective than the newspapers. People could hear the rhetoric Hitler used. The radio only

quantified this effectiveness yet the union of Germany's ideology "depended far more on Hitler's charisma" than anything else (Speer 15). While communication with people and rapport with a leader may not be something new today, it certainly was something new to the Germans in the 1930s. People were constantly being bombarded with the same message, but more importantly, with the same language.

Hitler would make many speeches using new technologies and techniques and this allowed him eventually to communicate with every single person in Germany. As Albert Speer said in his final speech to the war crimes tribunal at Nuremberg:

"Hitler's dictatorship was the first dictatorship of an industrial state in this age of modern technology, a dictatorship which employed to perfection the instruments of technology to dominate its own people. By means of such instruments of technology as the radio and public-address system, eighty millions persons could be made subject to the will of one individual" (Speer 615).

The way Hitler spoke and acted allowed him to guarantee that the ideology of Germany was one and the same. But the use of propagandistic phraseology in language was critical. Consider the Hitlerian phrase: "*Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Fuehrer*" (Speer 124). This translates: "One people, one nation, one leader." To boil down the reality of 80 million Germans living in a number of nation-states into six words is a feat of gross oversimplification unparalleled in history. And it led, before the world crushed the Nazi horror, to the greatest agglomeration of power in the hands of one person in history. By the constant repetition of such phrases, especially in day-to-day language (where Germans were required by law to greet each other with the salutation "Heil Hitler" Hail Hitler), Hitler eventually was able to secure the 'blood oath of loyalty' of every German to himself alone (Speer 323). The German people paid a terrible price for this folly – but

not so terrible as those people who did not speak German or who were identified as 'different, dirty, lesser'. Hitler's pathologically evil preoccupation with the Jews was given free reign, so that European Jewry narrowly escaped extinction at the hands of the German people. Germans were the 'master race' and Jews were 'the accursed' (which is the worst word you can use in German). And so, every form of perversion and indignity, down to extermination, were inflicted upon Jews and Russians and any others who did not measure up in the Hitlerian racial schema.

With one language, people will have a certain way of thinking and acting. Larry Hauser, the author of the essay Doing Without Mentalese argues: "Our languages of thought are public languages" (Hauser members.aol.com/lshauser/dwment.html). This literally translates into what we think is how we speak to others and what Hitler and the Nazis did with the German language was simplify it. Joseph Goebbels, the man credited for creating Hitler's propaganda machine, made sure that the speeches and radio broadcasts were kept simple as possible so the majority of people would understand it. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler writes: "I must not measure the speech of a statesman to his people by the impression which it leaves in a university professor, but by the effect it exerts on the people" (Hitler 477). This idea of 'the more people you speak in front of, the simpler the message must be' was something methodically used by the Nazis and it is what helped them maintain their stranglehold on the German mind. The thought of every German was to be a mirror of the thought of the Fuehrer, and all thoughts outside of this context were superfluous or irrelevant. After all if one is only receiving a simplified message with simple words it is fair to say that person will probably think in a simple manner as has been observed above by Hauser and Orwell.

It is no mystery that the Nazis used folk language to subdue the people and it should not be forgotten. During a convention in 1934, Goebbels was quoted as saying “We must speak the language which the folk understands. Whoever wants to speak to the folk must, as Luther says, pay heed to folk speech” (Speer 35). This is not the first time someone has used this way of persuasion to capture people. Martin Luther would often use rhymes in Latin to make his case against the Catholic Church. The rhymes were easy to remember and did not use logic but appealed to emotions than anything. For example, his famous dictum “*Decreta Papali est Excreta Diaboli*” (The Decrees of the Pope are the Devil’s excretals) stated in earthy, blunt terms the primary issue of the struggle with Rome (Enninger 10). The idea here is that someone hearing this does not have to worry about politics or theology and the message is so simplistic that most people will swallow unquestionably the underlying premise.

But what made Germany such a unified nation in the 1930s to the early 1940s was the manipulation of language. It was perhaps more unified than Soviet Russia where Marxist terminology and a ruthless policy of ‘Russification’ were used to unify that giant state. The Soviets employed an ever more fawning cult of personality, which led almost to the deification of Stalin in his own lifetime. While the radio did allow Hitler to gain mass communication with many people, it was his speeches that had the most affect. People could see how he acted and how he said the words. Rhetoric played a great part in how Hitler merged the German nation – and Hitler worked very hard at this (Speer 105).

This is one instance of many where the conformity of thought was guaranteed by the communication of the leader to the people. Hitler was able to do this because he and

his men studied the language of the people. And as will be pointed out below, language is a necessity for anything above primordial communication to exist.

Even people who may speak the same language may have differences between them based on their various locations within the larger homeland. These differences are usually called dialect (sometimes ‘slang’) and can lead to many varieties of the same language. This is important because many linguistic theorists including Jurgen Habermas place importance on the concept that human beings are “...symbol-using animals. What raised us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know: language” (Habermas 234). Language is believed by many to be the one thing that separates humans from other animals and what has allowed for the creation of unified nations. Habermas demonstrates this in his study of rhetoric. He created a theory where if people are to be at peace and to have discourse, two things must happen. The first of the two concepts is called ‘ideal speech situation’. For this to occur the people who are in conversation must all have the right to defend or question anything that is being said and the information cannot be constrained or subdued in anyway. In addition to this the participants must be motivated to discover the truth of whatever is being discussed. But there is still another step to be mentioned.

The second concept Habermas mentions is “communicative competence”. This relies on that “fundamental system of rules that adult subjects master to the extent that they can fulfill the conditions for a happy employment of sentences in utterances” (Habermas 497). People must be able to understand what is being said and have a grasp on the slang that is being used. After these two concepts have been achieved, a discourse can happen.

The second concept is the most important yet it is the most difficult. For communicative competence to exist requires the fertile soil of one strong language. Very rarely, if at all, will it occur in nations that are bi-lingual. But this concept is so important because if someone does not understand what is being said or if they cannot grasp the nuances of the language, then the communication process is lost and with it any hope for unification of a nation to exist.

Habermas has written many works on how the process of language is so important to society. His main thesis is that speakers are already participants of a kind of rational subjectiveness. Habermas states that:

"The phenomenon to be explained is not the knowledge or submission of objectivity nature considered in themselves, but the intersubjectiveness of the possible understanding, both in the interpersonal and intrapsychic levels. The central point of investigation changes from instrumental-cognitive rationality into communicative rationality. For this one, the paradigmatic is not the relation between one individual with something in the objective world which can be represented and manipulated, but it is the intersubjective relation that is established by the individuals who can speak and act when they understand themselves about something. In this process of understanding, the individuals, when they act communicatively, go through the natural language, make use of interpretations that are culturally transmitted and make reference to something in the objective world, in the social world, which they share, and each one makes reference to something in its own subjective world simultaneously". (Habermas 499-500).

Basically Habermas is stating that people create their own realities through discourse with others, through speaking, and through language. Language can give meaning to substances that before hand may have had no meaning. The power of naming items and objects is what allows for understanding and for people to communicate with one another. This occurs when two or more individuals' shared language of communication

creates the conditions for a social consensus. This can lead to groups forming with the same ideology and over time, a nation is born.

It is hard to imagine a society or nation without language. But besides this, it is no wonder why many nations that speak the same language often have close ties to one another and are allies in war. One has to look no farther than the relationship between the United States, Canada, and Britain. One could make the argument that the only reason these three countries have close ties today is because of their historical past and their locations, i.e. Canada is right next to the United States. But it should be stated that Britain and Canada have both been at war with the United States and if locality is the reason for the communication, why then is Mexico not as close an ally with the United States? Surely the determinant must be language. But what does Sir Winston Churchill, a master of communication, who knew how to employ the English language to his advantage, have to say on this subject?

Britain and United States for the most part have been very close and the term “special relationship” has risen out of that. The term is referring to the diplomatic relations between the two nations. It was Winston Churchill who created this term during a speech he gave in Fulton, Missouri in 1947, at the invitation of American President Harry Truman:

Neither the sure prevention of war, nor the continuous rise of world organization will be gained without what I have called the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples ...a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States. Fraternal association requires not only the growing friendship and mutual understanding between our two vast but kindred systems of society, but the continuance of the intimate relationship between our military advisers, leading to common study of potential dangers, the similarity of weapons and manuals of instructions, and to the interchange of officers and cadets at technical colleges (Churchill 418).

What is especially significant about this is the “mutual understanding” which leads to a consensus milieu wherein these two “English-speaking” nations have the same morals and values. As was discussed earlier with Habermas, structures and organizations arise out of language. In addition to this, relationships between two nations often depend on the closeness between the leaders of the nations. But how does language play a part in this?

Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman could and did sit down with each other and enjoy a conversation without the mediation of a translator. While the President of Russia may learn the language of English, it is doubtful he will be able to learn all the various nuances and slang that comes with that language. But communicating in a shared language will permit one leader to welcome these little bits of slang from another; they will have a common link between them that is unchangeable. Churchill won the American nation to himself because his mother was an American and he understood America so well that it eventually made him the only honorary citizen in history, in 1963 (Churchill 20). If two nations are communicating with each other and neither of the two speak the other’s language, conflicts and errors can arise from that which will make the countries less and less likely to be allied for a long period of time. Because of the importance language holds on communication between two nations, it is no wonder why the United States is “...the largest source of inward investment to the UK economy, likewise the UK is the largest single investor in the US economy” (Warhaugh 19).

Another reason why the United States is so close to Britain is because the United States was built using the English language. The founders of America knew of the

importance language had on nation building and language for them was at the essence of a national culture. Professor Simpson of the University of Washington writes: “Language, in other words, is seen from the start as a potential element in constituting a political and cultural unity among the citizens of the new republic; or, if it goes wrong, a means of prescribing or perpetuating disorder” (Simpson 30). Since the creation, the American government has operated using the English language, a language they were reluctant to make their official language after fighting the British. But after all this was the language they spoke.

While it can be argued that the United States is a trilingual nation consisting of English, French and Spanish, the governmental policy has never acknowledge this. Throughout many occasions, the Congress of the United States has banned printings of the Federal law in many different languages. In one instance they banned the publication of the laws in German even to German citizens who were living in the country, in 1843 (http://www.workings.com/LIA_His.htm). While the U.S.A. was forming, many other countries were using language differences to divide and rule their countries. But the collective will of the U.S. government was different. They felt that everyone should have the ability to speak the same language. John Adams felt that Americans should “force their language into general use” (http://www.workings.com/LIA_His.htm). Though the creation of a ‘one language policy’ in America appears to have been made with the noblest of intentions, it still created a cultural divide, especially with the Hispanic citizens.

From the earliest moments the language of America has always remained strictly English. The Federal Law of language in the United States asserts that all government

officials must speak English fluently when they are addressing the public (http://www.workings.com/LIA_His.htm). While translators will be on hand this often ruins any rapport that a person might otherwise establish with an official of the government. There have been groups who have tried to resist this, with little success. The closest attempt was in 1981 when the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity commission stated that employers “could not require workers to speak English on the job” (http://www.workings.com/LIA_His.htm). However the Federal courts of the United States held this decision to be illegal and quashed it. It must be very hard for people who cannot speak English to find employment in America but this is often the case in many countries where one language is the most dominant. It is not just technology that creates a divide between the information ‘haves and have-nots’. But clearly, this insistence on language unity has been a great source of American strength.

The policy of language unification can lead to creating a great nation with efficient communication but it can also lead to massive conflicts where bordering nation-states speak another language. The United States is a close ally of the British because of language and every nation they have gone to war with in the past century speaks a different language. Whether it is Japan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Vietnam, Germany, Spain – language certainly appears to be the great international ‘divider’ as well as a subconscious *casus belli*.

Habermas’s theory of language as stated above helps to explain this phenomenon of language. Language creates a consensus and this is one of the building blocks of a nation. Likewise when two tribes build up over time with their own languages and

cultures “they’re bound to think they’re better than the other” or that their way of life is superior (Gerald 20).

Whereas the drive of America to be a unilingual nation has led to some individual difficulties within the nation, Canada has taken a different approach. Canada, a bilingual nation, has had many conflicts within itself. The Quebecois and English Canada have clashed very harshly with each other and in 1995, Canada avoided complete disintegration and separation by a mere one percentage point in a referendum on national unity. It is questionable as to whether bilingualism is a policy that has had any historical success and the issue of Canadian Federal unity has been fought in every Federal election since Confederation in 1867. It has never gone away and despite massive efforts by the Federal government to placate Quebec, duality of language continues to represent a threat to Canada’s unity.

There are so many tangents one might pursue in a topic so broad and abstruse. The emphasis here has been on the incontrovertible link between language and the etiology of nation-states. It has also been observed how language can be made the willing servant of dictators and men of ill will. But let us look for a moment at democracy and the democrats who have molded what Churchill wryly called “...the worst political system, except for all the others” (Churchill 2). Here, too, the same basic principles are at work: technology and unity of language permitted Americans to enjoy weekly “fireside chats” with their President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Churchill 4). It is true that language and modern technology may be put to ignoble purpose – even a pistol may be put to a use good or evil, depending upon the will of the master. The forces of democracy utilized language and technology far more effectively than their totalitarian

counterparts. One need look no further than to that exemplar of both democratic virtues and eloquent language usage - Sir Winston Churchill. Availing himself of the first radio broadcasts to be heard around the world, Churchill delighted, astounded, educated and uplifted the masses of the British Empire and at home in England – prompting them to heroic acts of valour of the highest order, imbuing them with a sense of their innate goodness as arrayed against the Hitlerian evil. Every single news broadcast of the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), the only radio system capable of spanning the globe during the Second World War, began with the Morse code dot-dot-dot-dash of the four opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The symbolism was overpowering: dot-dot-dot-dash stands for letter 'V' – and V stood for Victory. To use Germany's most brilliant composer in this way to constantly emphasize the inevitability of Victory by Britain over Hitler proved to be deeply demoralizing to the German people, all of whom knew the beloved Fifth. As one reflected upon this simple but very profound propaganda tool, one realized that Churchill (whose closest aide William Stevenson was responsible for this) and the entire British leadership were couching the war not in terms of nationalism, but rather in terms of democracy versus totalitarianism, the mass of mankind versus "Hitler and his gang", and finally, as a struggle between Western Christian civilization as against a sub-demonic monstrosity. Churchill's elevated language, rather than 'brainwash the masses', uplifted the English-speaking peoples in their travail. He promised them nothing but "blood, toil, tears and sweat" (Churchill 206). He assured friend and foe alike that: "We shall never surrender" but one would expect a wartime leader to say this (Churchill 218). What was unexpected – and gave Britain the moral

high ground that she never surrendered – was his framing the war in the language of religion and of freedom:

“Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. Upon it depends our own British life and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire. The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in the Island, or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be freed, and the life of the world may move forward into broad and sunlit lands. But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, and all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister and perhaps more prolonged by the lights of perverted Science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty, and so bear ourselves that if the British Empire and Commonwealth lasts for a thousand years, men will still say: ‘This was their finest hour’” (Churchill 220).

And humor – something that escaped Hitler – was employed with vengeful glee. Churchill observed, upon declaring Britain’s support for its newly attacked Soviet ally (with whom it had nearly gone to war over Finland and for whom Churchill himself had the deepest loathing): “If Hitler invaded Hell, I should at least make a favorable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons” (Churchill 291).

Adolf Hitler had stated, in 1938: “England is our Enemy Number One” (Speer 198). Over and over, Churchill assiduously avoided references to Germany, targeting Hitler and Nazidom as the enemy. Britain took the high ground and never relinquished it. While it is said that the victors write history, no reputable German author would presume to assert that Germany won the propaganda battle in World War II.

It is an irrefragable reality that one language can build up a nation to great strengths and superb communication such as in Nazi Germany or the United States. One language may eventually unify the world. Hundreds of millions of people are studying English in China, India and Europe. The language of Shakespeare may yet win the field.

But, on the obverse side of the coin is an irony. Language is the greatest tool for a nation to be built upon and the greatest support. It is critical to the flow of precise communication and creates allies. But throughout history, it is one language in particular that does this. Far too often when two countries clash, it is because of their cultural differences, which are rooted in their different languages. Is there a solution to this problem? One would be to try and unite nations using a single language. Various nations have tried this in the past such as the United States and it is now being tried, in far more difficult conditions, by the European Union. But while this helps the flow of goods on an international level, the local people who do not speak the language of commerce are left out. Perhaps the only solution is to accept people and their cultures for what they are and not try to instill our own agendas on them. One cannot help but wonder: with what is gained in unity, what perishes in the loss of diversity? We may achieve unity and universality of language only to emerge from Babel as linguistic automatons. It is very much a work in progress.

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