

LOCAL ANTHROPOGENIES - LINGUISTICS

LOGICS OF TEN INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

2. ENGLISH AND THE SEA

The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time. Kerouac

2A. The language

In many ways, English is at the opposite of French. It privileges noise, as the reverse of sound information. It favours the information in genesis, by opposition to complete information. It first believes in the madness of the speaker, of any speaker, not in his reason. It is almost brutally physical.

2A1. Phonosemics

It reappears with phonetics. Syllables are far from having the same length, accents are mobile to the point of defying almost every general rule, and there are often two or three per word, of varying intensities: ‘interme diary’ for English diction, ‘intermediary’ for the American diction. In non accentuated syllables, vowels disappear to the profit of a neutral sound, noted as an tipped over ‘e’ (that is not the active hollow of the French ‘oe’ of ‘coeur’), and in accentuated syllables, where vowels are pronounced, they are often double (‘out’), or at least they sound double (‘low’, ‘free’), meaning that they are impure and fluctuating. Consonants too are noisy, such as the very inhaled ‘h’, the very internal ‘r’ (which is even more noisy in American than in English), the occlusive ‘t’, ‘p’, ‘k’ pronounced explosive in the manner of corresponding Chinese notations. The ‘th’ and final sounds (‘god’, ‘dog’) favour an affected diction at the opposite of French, which aims at being spoken without affectation (simpering plays between the natural and affectation). The musical virtuosity of the elocution even affects the features. It is even more necessary that the dissimilation of phonemes is weak; current American assimilates dully occlusive to they sound counterpart: ‘predy’ for ‘pretty’, ‘viabilidy’ for ‘viability’.

In the same stride, there is a semantic profusion of designations of physical movements: 'having undergone a rotation', is translated by a unique syllable 'spun'. These efficient designations are specified using prefixations that are sometimes naive, 'up-grade', sometimes subtle 'a-do', 'be-have'. Confirming the generalized sound effects, they are more often than not analogue, sometimes even onomatopoeic: 'up', 'down', 'clash', 'check-in', 'check-out', 'clip', 'chewing', 'slab', 'slack'. Even further, they are still very vivid: 'glitter', 'glitz', 'glitzy', mark the sparkle, the shine. In summary, the English speaker perceives 'ways' where the French perceives manners, ways of: 'to do something in a certain way' to 'do something in a special manner, in a certain fashion'. Rather than the conducts, it records behaviours that are common to both livings and machines.

Even more, the phonic analogy, not content with playing between the designating and the designated, also intervenes between the designators themselves. To render great physical movements, as well as the forms or sentiments resulting from it, some sorts of phonic brotherhoods are created: 'blunt, bluff, bold'; 'baubles, bangles, beads'; 'scrap, scrape'; 'whiff, fluff'; 'bottle, battle', which are however of different etymology. This is also the case for portmanteau words, from the brunch (breakfast + lunch) to the stagflation (stagnation + inflation) and Reagonomics (Reagan + economics) right down to the abysses of Lewis Carroll's *snark* (snake, snag, etc + shark, spark, etc.). As we can see, portmanteau words where the sound similitude synthesizes composite beings, are the contrary to the French play on words, where the similitude creates a bifurcation. Seeing the verbal brotherhood, we cannot see why every moneme should do without a word class to another. From a word: 'slack' a verb is engendered in plain language (to slack), an adjective (slack), an adverb (slacky). And every verb can simultaneously be made into a substantive as an infinitive and gerundive: 'reading French is easier than speaking it'.

2B2. Syntax

Let us broach the crucial relation of the determiner and the determinatum. Still at the opposite of French, the determiner is canonically placed before the determinatum. Indeed, in a grasping of the world using physical movements, the accidents or qualities are the main designated of the discourse, and substances are furtive: 'the ones who (...) burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles', continues Kerouac in the passage quoted in the epigraph. This makes the joy of physiologists, who can speak as one, and without compromising the general syntax of the sentence, of 'split-brain subject', 'split-chiasm cat', and even of 'specified labelled line coding'.

The determiner is so much at one with the determinatum, it prevails so much, that very often it is in its initial that we must look for the entry in the dictionary: Analog computer, Digital computer, Hybrid computer (and tomorrow perhaps Neuronal computer) are different entries in the Webster's, where a French dictionary would have inserted the entry under 'Computer', making a distinction in the article between analog, digital, hybrid, and neuronal computers. Of course, in the English non-substantialist view, there is no special privilege of the substantive, which has some of the marks of the plural, since we are still in the Indo-European territory, but not genders, except for sexed beings. And still in reason of the perception of concrete

movements, the vocabulary is frank: a woman is easily 'a human female', and the Webster's specifies that 'intercourses' occur with or without penetration.

It goes without saying that the phonic, morphologic, semantic character that we have highlighted so far engenders a syntax that is a lot more paratactic and less marked than that of French. In view of the usual antecedence of the determiner, the relation between determiner and determinatum does not need to be otherwise noted than by their simple juxtaposition: 'a customs official' for 'in charge of customs'. The relative proposition being nearly the sole determining to follow the determined does not fatally call for a relative: 'the boy I met'. And the same applies for the subordinate proposition, which can sometimes make do without conjunctive introduction and characterization via modes: 'he said he swam'. All the more, adverbial liaisons between sentences ('nevertheless', 'hence', 'consequently') are exceptional.

Therefore, the basic element of the language is not the word and the phrase in the French sense, but sound and semantic whiffs called phrases, where words are not very individuated, and whose juxtaposing, often devoid of conjunction, is called 'sentence', which mainly comprises a 'noun phrase' and a 'verb phrase' since Chomsky. Follows that global modalisations such as 'it is obvious that', 'it is necessary or useful that', are rare, not very conceivable, not conceived.

The paratacticism means that punctuation is rather weak; for example, there is no comma between the temporal and the principal. And, in this global noise and absence of concords, words can be repeated without taking on a particular rhetoric weight. There is therefore no need to avoid the repetition of terms, which allows for a remarkable constancy of the vocabulary and favours the objective exactness of the discourse in texts of physics, biology, or economics. The 'referees' of mathematical economy magazines return the copy to the author until every single word is fully elucidated. On the other hand, the scientist who drafts his contribution needs not worry of finding transitions and avoiding alliterations.

In a word, very little grammar. Or rather, because English grammars are voluminous, a grammar that is a logic, a logic that is refined, sophisticated, not the globalizing logic of Descartes (if we avoid the repetition of words, like in French, we can only have a global logic). To the 'one' of the French correspond the three precisions: 'a', 'one', 'any'. The prepositions give way to subtle spatial-temporal distinctions where French only uses 'of' or 'to'. The adverb has delicate position rules depending whether it is spatial, temporal, qualitative, etc. The tenses of the verb, also attentive to physical movements, distinguish past actions whose effects persist in the present ('I have seen'), as in the Greek perfect, and those where we do not specify if the effects persist (I saw). At the opposite, in such a weaving of physical movements and phonic reveries, we cannot expect much differentiation between modes. The indicative and a few conditionals suffice to about everything, and in particular to quoted words: 'he said he would like'. Apart from some rare archaic and optative expressions ('God forgive you'), the indo-European subjunctive and the optative are given without their own forms.

2A3. *Semantics*

In this mechanism, the speakers take great pleasure in using locutions and foreign worlds and by respecting diction as much as possible: ‘coup de force’, ‘tour de force’, ‘restaurant’, ‘noblesse oblige’, ‘fait accompli’. ‘Brahma’ is sometimes pronounced 'brokmo', in the Indian manner, in a huge consonantal density (b-r-k-m), which allows understanding that it could be the supreme principle, like Krishna (k-r-sh-n) almost is. If we read a text out loud, we imitate the voices of the interveners, meaning that, in a radio reading of Lewis Carroll, the reader speaks like the little girl, the old queen, Humpty Dumpty, something that would be of bad taste in French. These as so many other ways of giving sound effects to the phrase, of giving it variations of rhythm and intensity, in a word, of marrying the phonetic, syntactic, semantic strangeness and craziness that every language is.

Moreover, it is the English as such that, because of its half-Latin and half-Germanic origins, confronts not only two languages at every moment, but two linguistic groups. Assuredly, for English speakers ‘respect’ is not a French word, it is English. Still, its relationship with ‘worship’ is a bit like that of ‘mutton’ (the mutton on the table) and ‘sheep’ (the sheep in the field). The language thereby has a medieval coefficient, just like the English parliament. Hence the importance of etymology that the Collegiate Webster’s give with such luxury that it sometimes occupies more than the body of the article. In this sea of words in becoming, semantic is a perpetual exercise, and many articles end on a lexical discrimination: ‘behave’ is only understood in its relation to ‘conduct’, ‘deport’, ‘comport’, ‘acquired’. There is no way of fully speaking such a language without being linguist and logician. The intricate spelling contributes to this, testifying of anterior states and giving each word a graphic fabric as rich as its sound material.

In opposition to French, which practices the judicial disembodiment, the English language is immediately corporal, and even eroticized. It is jazz, and ‘intercourse’ means both sexual relation and verbal communication (in French, the word ‘commerce’ bears this double sense). The pastor during his sermon and the Beatles at the BBC studios can begin by talking, continue singing, and come back to speaking without any difficulty whatsoever. Recent studies demonstrate that singing English rhymes encourages the learning of English reading for children. It would be enlightening to measure the extent to which French rhymes has the same influence on reading the French language.

In any case, this time the language does not step down before its designed. It is neither mirror nor glass. It is a wave that moves as much as the wave of the entire real, whether the latter is the environment or the body of the speaker. The machinery of the breadth is never eluded, and the best compliment made to a writer is that he is ‘breathtaking’.

2B. Cultural consonances

At the opposite of the French speaker, who is self-assured, the English speaker immediately thinks that it is only by moments and fugitively that he will reach some consistence and exactitude. Shakespeare's last play, *The Tempest*, symbolically opens on the cries of sailors in distress, bordering unintelligible. We can at most postulate a 'common sense', not a 'good sense' (un bon sens). In the same way that we may invoke 'human rights' (droits humains), which are not completely the rights of Mankind (Les Droits de l'Homme), which invoke a species and an essence.

Also, in the daily news, the fact, the comment and the opinion are continuously differentiated, except in the tabloids. And when speaking of a conflict, it is customary to expose the arguments of each party, since it is understood that everyone is somewhat right and largely wrong. The coefficient of incertitude of each information is increasingly-easy to specify that very short formulas such as 'allegedly', 'reportedly', 'presumably' are supplied by the universal derivation of adverbs where, to reach the same result, the French is condemned to formulas that are cumbersome ('to believe what is reported'), cutting ('supposedly'), or aggressive ('I quote'). Seeing that the English speaker feels that any language is a lie, the deliberate lie, often valorised by the French speaker like a proof of composure, is seen in a bad light, particularly at the highest levels (Watergate, Iran gate). Right takes over jurisprudence. Monarchy is symbolic before all. No written constitution. A Magna Charta dating back to 1215.

Speaking this language of sound effects, which gives more than its due to the animality of the body, while being attentive to concrete movements, the philosophers, like Hume, had to doubt the principle of substance, which Descartes thought that he saw "very evidently, very certainly", and even that of causality. They had to think, like Berkeley, that "esse est percipi", and, like Russel, that there were in a first while only 'sense data'. Correlatively, they also must have had an acute sense of the geological, then biological evolution of the planet and the species, and be sensitive to the fact that this evolution occurred less by active adaptation (by active concords, like with Lamarck) than by way of natural selection on natural chance, with Wallace, Darwin, right up to Spencer's cultural selection. Any handicap is a singularity, and every singularity is an event; the interest for the handicapped (constant special reports on the radio) is not only social but cosmic, or more precisely evolutionary. And we shall not be surprised that the Absolute of Carroll, instead of being Cartesian 'perfect', is a "Snark", of which we can only say that it is (that it was) a "Boojum": "For the Snark *was* a Boojum, you see".

Similarly, at the opposite of the massive logic of Cartesian proportions, a subtle logic has constantly developed. Very quickly, the English logic insisted on the opposition between the denotation of words and their connotation, a word that still is absent from the Dictionnaire de l'Académie, known by the academy, and which has been in the English language since 1532. With Peirce, it notes that alongside the arbitrary signs that symbols are, every semiotic must take into account the *index*, sometimes frankly motivated, while waiting before Spencer Brown proposes a "logic of indication's". Finally, it sub-distinguished in (a) a syntax, studying the

relation of signs between them, (b) a semantic, studying the relation of signs to the thing, (c) a pragmatic, studying the relation of signs to interlocutors and outsiders. In French, this last aspect was neglected very normally for a very long time, and Watzlawick's *Pragmatics of Communication* is reduced into *A logic of communication*. Moreover, the taste for sophistication is found everywhere. In *Alice in Wonderland*, a children's book, but also a bible for logicians. Like in the colours of the biscuits, sweets, every food, which is never 'straight', but always 'odd', askew, meaning comprising internal leaps.

However, '*indicium*' and '*index*', which are so judiciously distinguished in French and Roman languages because of Latin, are confounded in English, which uses 'index' for both. Here, we can see a morphological accident, due to the fact that according to the principle of plural words in '-ex', 'indices' is the plural form of 'index'. Still, when reading Peirce, an infinitely cunning logician, we glimpse at the fact that this grave confusion, which is worsened in the theory of photography for example, concords with a fundamental vision where things are both '*indicium*' (passive, objectal) and *index* (active, subjectal) in their nature. (Emerson's transcendentalism) We need only to think of the acquaintances of any English speaker, believer or secular, with the Divine, or rather with the supernatural. "As to God, open your eyes and you see Him", says Peirce. Kerouac continues "Nothing more than this language and this existential confusion between *indicium* and *index* can explain why so many English castles are haunted. Every creaking is an *indicium*, but also an index of something, therefore of someone".

All this results in an immense literary production, where poetry, novels, and the theatre merge into one another. No belles-lettres literature, but salvation ('and to be saved') where each and every one, often starting from the *Bible*, in King James' remarkable version, rewrites his own Bible, his *Moby Dick*, in verse or in prose, or rather in this blend of verses and prose that characterizes every English sentence. Little credit for the *intelligentsia*, since everyone is mad and everyone is a poet, and that we cannot be embarrassed with quotations, which are always approximate when put into application. One reads because one enjoys it, not because one should have read, remarked Julien Gracq, who belonged to both cultures. However, not everyone can satisfactorily speak such a complex language, and for a long time the level of practice of the English language, as opposed to the title or the means, was the hierarchy of the social classes, whereas Malherbe said that for French his masters were the picklocks of the Port-au-Foin. Moreover, it is chic that the language distinction should be hardly noticeable, just like clothing.

The political discourse then experiences two regimes. On the one hand, a parliament where the government and the opposition, the 'cabinet' and the 'shadow cabinet' face one another, separated by a line, on top of which each side barks louder than the next, since there is no universal reason, but only conflicting forces. On the other hand, there are televised or radio panels where fair-play rules between the three or four party representatives and lobbying groups. There, irony and mockery are excluded to the profit of humour, meaning the perception that every failing belongs to the human genre as such, therefore to the speaker in particular. This does not prevent humour from being ferocious. Voltaire is a lamb compared to Swift.

There is not much classical music production, since the latter banishes noise to the profit of sound information. However, there is a considerable production of rock, pop, and disco, which elaborate the sound effects of language. The radio is very polyphonic, where it is frequent, in a half-hour programme, to hear fifteen or so speakers on one same theme, hence displaying their symphony and cacophony. A frequent mixture of speech and sound effects.

Several radio dramas per day, which are of a great sound subtlety. Innumerable ‘talk shows’, because every language is interesting, that of man, that of animal, that of scientific ‘vulgarisation’ in the sense that there would be a distribution of knowledge ‘possessed’ by ‘scholars’ against facilitations and embellishments for the vulgar, but true ‘stories’ (historia = research) of the technique and of science (which is not knowledge) where researcher and reader go forth with the means at hand in the maze of the Real through questions and answers shared by all and grasped as transitory. Last witness: Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time*. At the opposite of Versailles, the gardens mime the forest, which is perceived as a ‘tapestry of songs’. Some English speakers for the present study would have preferred as title: ‘English and the forest’, quoting Macbeth’s moving forest.

Extricating among the sound whiffs of the surroundings the ‘phrases’ and their phonemes is a harsh task for the English baby. The acculturation of children therefore raises an issue and demands treatments that are reminiscent of the handicapped. Lewis Carroll’s Alice is more lost before the world than the *Bon Petit Diable* of the Comtesse de Ségur. Amongst other things, she wonders whether words are said or eaten. Since they are assuredly sung, and, to hear Humpty Dumpty, are also often swallowed.

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