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Nationalism and Language

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NATIONALISM AND LANGUAGE

While the link between language and nationality is often presented as though it developed at some primordial point in the past, its appearance is, in fact, quite recent. This is hardly surprising inasmuch as the conception of the nation itself is relatively modern. Thus, the idea that language is the medium by which nationality is established, that language is the key to the nation, has to be traced historically. Two distinct but related contexts may serve as examples concerning how and why the connection was made.

In the sixteenth century, the Tudor monarchy sought to exercise its dominion over Ireland, a colony which had been nominally under English rule since 1169 but which had never quite been successfully subjugated. Part of its centralizing project was the imposition of English upon the whole of the island of Ireland on the ground that the use of the native language, Gaelic, along with other cultural factors such as behavior and dress, led the Irish to think of themselves as being "of sundry sorts, or rather of sundry countries" (*Statutes* 1786, 28H8.cxv) rather than as members of one polity united under the English crown. This stress on the significance of linguistic difference, embodied in the "Act for the English Order, Habit and Language" (1537), formed the basis of the English policy of linguistic colonialism in Ireland, but, of equal importance, it heralded the connection between language and national **IDENTITY**. In his 1617 *Itinerary*, Fynes Moryson, an English adventurer in Ireland, articulated the lesson that the colonialists learned from their struggle to impose English language and order: "[C]ommunion or difference of language hath always been observed a special motive to unite or alienate the minds of all nations.... And in general all nations have thought nothing more powerful to unite minds than the community of language" (Moryson [1617] 1903, 213). Under specific historical conditions – the clash between an early modern nation-state and one of its colonies – linguistic difference came to signify national difference through the operation of military and discursive power. The link established in this context served as a portent of a more general connection that appeared later in Europe and beyond.

Although his seminal account of nationalism identifies its origins in the New World in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Benedict Anderson also discusses the appearance of a

whole set of "ethnolinguistic nationalisms" in Europe immediately afterwards. Though the historical differences between the various social movements cannot be elided, they were inspired by a number of German post-Kantian idealist thinkers. J. G. Herder's assertion in 1768 that "each national language forms itself in accordance with the ethics and manner of thought of its people" (2002, 50) was an important articulation of the link between language and nation; by the time that William von Humboldt gave his definition of a nation in 1836 ("a body of men who form language in a particular way" [1988, 153]), the connection appeared almost axiomatic. In 1808, J. G. Fichte spelled out the political significance of linguistic nationalism by arguing that "wherever a separate language is found, there a separate nation exists, which has the right to take charge of its independent affairs and to govern itself" (1968, 49). The implications of the doctrine were realized in the role that it played in national independence campaigns conducted by Greeks, Czechs, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Finns, Norwegians, Afrikaners, and the Irish. Some postcolonial activists today, the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, for example, use the same model of linguistic nationalism in their contemporary struggle, not so much against colonialism but in order to counter the legacy of colonial rule.

Anderson's account of the nation as an "imagined community" drew attention to the constructedness of the concept by pointing to its precise historical origins. Yet the role of language in the imagining of the community of the nation is also one that arises at particular moments in history and serves specific functions; it is neither transhistorical nor general. It is also worth noting that the conception of language underpinning this act of imagination is one that has been criticized. Thus, M. M. Bakhtin, in the important essay "Discourse in the Novel," points to the fact that national languages are produced by various types of institutional forces – intellectual (linguistic theorizing), educational (grammars and dictionaries), political (legislation) – which act centripetally in order to create a determinate, fixed, and knowable form. As part of this process, the realities of heteroglossia (see **DIALOGISM AND HETEROGLOSSIA**) – social difference inscribed in language by means of variation past and present – have to be banished. Historians, such as E. J. Hobsbawm (1990), have noted the historical significance of such linguistic selection and ranking, while linguistic anthropologists have drawn attention to the fact that the homogeneous language of nationalism is as imaginary as the community that accompanies it (Irvine and Gal 2000).

The extent to which such insights will have an impact in political and linguistic thought remains to be seen. It is certainly the case, however, that the postulated relationship between language and nation is now treated much more skeptically. At the reactionary edge of forms of linguistic nationalism, there are still those who argue for the "purity" of language as a way of guaranteeing the "integrity" of the nation. But the very fact that the vast majority of nations past and present have been multilingual communities – including a number of those whose very entrance into history depended on an emphasis on their supposed monolingualism – radically undermines the ideological case for linguistic nationalism.

– Tony Crowley

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NATURAL KIND TERMS

Natural kind terms (NKTs) are, to use Plato's ancient metaphor, those terms that carve Nature at her joints; they are the terms that correspond to unities and diversities in nature (*Phaedrus*, 265e-266b). They therefore enable lawlike generalizations, descriptions of natural patterns, and explanations of natural phenomena.

From this characterization of NKTs it is clear that science strives to use such terms in its classification and explanation of nature. It is also clear that, as a rule, NKTs are developed together with the growth of our knowledge of nature, and they both result from a better understanding of phenomena and advance that understanding. For instance, the biblical classification of plants into "grass, the herb yielding seed" and "fruit tree yielding fruit ... whose seed is in itself" (Genesis 1:11) is no longer used in botany, which classifies some trees together with some "grass" as angiosperms, the flowering plants, in contrast to some other trees, which are gymnosperms. The same point is illustrated by the recent scientific controversy over the definition of *planet*: Scientists aimed at forming a concept that would reflect and allow a better understanding of the different characteristics and origins of bodies orbiting the sun.

The most common examples of NKTs are names of substances. *Gold*, *water*, *alcohol*, and *metal* are names of natural kinds of matter; *Homo sapiens sapiens*, *primates*, *mammals*, *animals*, and *eukaryotes* are names of natural kinds of organisms. But often enough one finds names of natural phenomena, such as *heat* or *pain*, counted among these terms as well.

Various terms and phrases can be cited as examples of non-natural kind terms. "Student with a long nose who visited Malaysia" denotes a kind whose defining properties are not related together in any lawlike regularity, and is, therefore, of no use for the understanding of nature. A term like *nonhuman* designates a group that is too heterogeneous. Another example often cited is that of artificial kind terms, such as *pencil* or *apartment*. But this is perhaps problematic: It seems to presuppose that humans, with their artifacts, constitute a kingdom within a kingdom. But if *Homo sapiens sapiens* is a natural kind, and as such part of nature, then terms useful for describing its life and behavior - for example, *apartment* - should perhaps count as NKTs.

Recent philosophical discussion has concentrated on the meaning of NKTs. Until the 1960s, philosophers spoke of these terms as if they were synonymous with a group of identifying descriptions of the kinds. The statement that some liquid is water, say, would then be synonymous with the statement that it has (at least most of) the properties that would be used, for instance, in a good, scientifically informed dictionary to characterize water.

This *description theory* of NKTs is problematic. According to it, if a scientist asks a child for a glass of water, what the scientist means by "water" is very different from what the child means by it, and the latter cannot even understand the former. But this is unacceptable, for fluent communication is a criterion for understanding.

The most influential theory of the meaning of NKTs nowadays, **ESSENTIALISM**, was developed during the 1970s by Saul Kripke (1980) and Hilary Putnam (1975). Both claimed that the meaning of an NKT is determined not by descriptions but by ostensive reference to samples. Natural kinds are assumed to have essential properties, and the NKT means *something having the same essential properties as (most of) these samples*, although, as a rule, when introducing an NKT, people would be ignorant of these essential properties.

Kripke also claimed that NKTs are *rigid*, but this seems confused. First, an NKT - say, *tiger* - is not rigid in the sense of designating the same particulars in every **POSSIBLE WORLD**, since in different possible worlds there exist different tigers. Secondly, it is not rigid in the sense that if it designates a particular in one possible world, it designates it in every possible world *in which it exists*: The queen bee is presumably a natural kind, but whether larvae develop into queen bees depends on how they are fed. So an insect that is a queen bee might not have been one, and *queen bee* designates it only in some of the possible worlds in which it exists. Lastly, and perhaps more importantly, if what was meant in calling NKTs "rigid" is that they preserve their *meaning* across possible worlds, then this is true of non-NKTs as well, such as "student with a long nose who visited Malaysia," and it would trivialize the meaning of rigidity (cf. Schwartz 2002).

A hypothetical example supporting essentialism that many found convincing was developed by Putnam. He asks us to imagine a remote planet identical to ours (Twin Earth), apart from the fact that instead of water, that is, H₂O, it contains a superficially identical liquid of an entirely different composition, say XYZ. (Let us ignore the fact that such a liquid would not quench our thirst, and so wouldn't even be superficially like H₂O.) Since Twin Earth's liquid is superficially indistinguishable from water,