

THE IDEOLOGY OF NATIONAL AND STATE LANGUAGE

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F. de Saussure's Desocialization of the Concept of Language

In a certain sense the starting point for modern linguistics originates in the works of F. de Saussure. His *Cours de linguistique générale* freed language research from the logicism, prescriptivism, normativism, and philology of the past and it for the first time embarked on the description of language as language. Because for him "language as language" was the central issue, one had to divorce language from the social and political conditions in which it is found. But in reality language takes on various social forms within a concrete social and political milieu. Some languages are national languages, others are unwritten languages belonging to small tribes or other ethnic populations. In the regions bordering the Germanic area of Europe there is to be found a continuum of Germanic dialects. Whereas the Alsatian and Swiss German dialects, for instance, are not called languages, a dialect or variation of the language in Luxemburg is referred to as the Letzeburgisch language, only because it has been established as the official orthography of that state. The political situation thus very much determines whether a dialect is called a language or simply a dialect. Every linguistic form has its own denotation of these variations, such as language, dialect, "parler," "patois," and jargon, all assigned according to the subject's sociopolitical status. In other words, language refers to a specific social form and is only given substance within that form.

Saussure, in his attempt to analyze "language as language," discarded many of the previous biases assigned to the terms "language" and in its place adopted the term "idiome" to refer to all such forms of communication. English, French and German (what Antoine Meillet referred to as the "langues de civilisation") could now be treated in the same manner as Ainu, Gilyak, and Oroko—as "idiomes." Only in so doing could language be examined "as language." His purpose was to describe exclusively the inner mechanisms of language, so phenomena external to the language itself, such as its social, cultural, and political context, were ignored. Languages analyzed under this model were now simply "tools of communication." Almost every introductory text on language after Saussure treated it according to this contentless definition. In this connection, we know from the research of the zoologist Karl von Frisch that bees have an elaborate means of communication through their dance. But because each swarm of bees does not possess a different form of communication, they can not be divided as a species according to their means of communication, which in the case of human beings is done according to regional or social dialects. In that sense,

interpreting speech as a method of discommunication would perhaps more accurately reflect a language's characteristics.

The Neo-Grammarian's Scientific Naturalism

In working out his concept of language, Saussure sought to overcome problems he found in the methodology of the nineteenth-century Neo-grammarians, in particular the manner in which they atomistically analyzed changes in the individual elements of a language. In general, however, he did not make any revision to the latter's scientific naturalism or biologism. According to the Neo-grammarians, language changes independently of the will of the people speaking it. Instead they believed that it was an organism that grows through its own inner drive. They made comparative analyses of Indo-European languages and discovered that there was phonetic correspondence among them. This, they asserted, was the result of a single proto-Indo-European language coming into existence according to fixed rules. They also believed that they were able to discover the principles behind subsequent changes through language comparison. What they called "sound laws" ("Lautgesetze"), they contended, were the result of their alleged exact science and the greatest advancement in the field of human science. This wisdom became so popularized in its day that even among intellectuals today this research comes to mind when asked what the field of linguistics does.

The conviction that the human phenomenon was independent of human consciousness and that it blindly came into existence according to some set formula ("die blinde Notwendigkeit der Lautgesetzwirkung") was characteristic of much nineteenth-century thought, in particular Marxism. F. Engels in *Die Entwicklung des Sozialismus von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft* wrote, "They work themselves out, therefore, *independently of the producers*, and in antagonism to them *as inexorable natural laws* of their particular form of production, *working blindly*. The product governs the producers." (German original text: Sie [die von der Warenproduktion untrennbaren Gesetze] setzen sich also durch ohne die Produzenten und gegen die Produzenten, als blindwirkende Naturgesetze ihrer Produktionsform. Das Produkt beherrscht die Produzenten.) This is quite similar to what the Neo-grammarians said about "sound laws."

The evolutionism of nineteenth-century biology directly led to the rise of the scientific naturalism found in linguistics. We can see how consciously the former was adopted by looking at August Schleicher's 1873 letter to the biologist Ernst Haeckel, entitled "Die Darwinsche Theorie und die Sprachwissenschaft." In this Schleicher argues that the manner in which language evolves is in conformity with laws regarding the evolution of living organisms ("Naturorganismus"). At the end of the letter, much more so than in other things he wrote, Schleicher clearly speaks of "the survival of the fittest in languages" ("Kampf der Sprachen um ihre Existenz"), and notes that the Indo-Germanic languages were a victor in that battle.

The Influence of Linguistics on Our Conception of Language

The reason why it is so important to examine theories of language debated from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries is because the views of language established in this period very much control our manner of thinking today. These views include the belief that the origins and development of language must be interpreted in terms of genealogical relationships; that there is a thick wall separating one language from another, with no interpenetration between them; and that each language is organized according to its own innate principles. This has led to the demand that a high level of language purity be maintained. For loyal subjects of the sovereign state it has become a moral imperative. This explains the fact that Esperanto has been regarded with contempt and even hostility by linguists who regard themselves as the true defenders of a genuine science.

This desocialized biological view of language can and was easily used for racist ends. The anti-semitism of Nazism was a direct extension of the development of the concept of the purity of the German language. Soviet linguists in the 1920s and 30s attacked from a theoretical angle the dangerous racist strains inherent in such beliefs about language. N. Y. Marr, the leader of this movement, rejected the genealogical view of the Neo-grammarians and asserted that languages had a single origin and that the force behind the creation of language was in their crossing and mixing. From the nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, when the study of Creole languages was not an established field as it is today, the concept itself of the mixture of languages was a taboo. Only Hugo Schuchardt, an Austrian linguist, took a position against the accepted theories of the Neo-grammarians and defied this taboo. As a result of his pioneering research, Marr won the Stalin Prize in 1934, but his views were later to be rejected in Stalin's own 1950 essay "Marxism in Linguistics." Soviet linguistics consequently lost its "proper mission" and degenerated into the same mold as the traditional "bourgeois" linguistics that was firmly established in that period.

The Political Context of Language

Language as the object of linguistic research is considered a self-evident phenomenon, with a universality that is given from the outset, but this is not the case at all. In attempting to understand how language should be studied as an object of research, one must start from the fact that it is defined according to meanings derived from historical conditions in the particular society in which it exists. Also, linguistics is given direction by people's attitudes toward language, which is very much determined by the sociopolitical situation at the time.

In the nineteenth century a number of nation states came into being through the demands of large numbers of races for self-determination. Even if they were unable to obtain this, the latent belief in the formation of separate nations spurred the creation of nation-states. If this is the case, then the question becomes what is a nation. This is not at all an abstract question and is very intricately related to political matters. If, for example, an ethnic group does not meet the criteria of a nation, it has no right to form independent political institu-

tions, such as an autonomous republic or autonomous district. In Soviet ethnopolitics this issue became part of an endless debate over the definition of and conditions surrounding a "nation."

The most important prerequisite for a community to be recognized as a nation is that it be in possession of a specific language. This was an important outcome of the debate between the Austro-marxist Otto Bauer and the German marxist Karl Kautsky. Kautsky held that in defining a nation it was not to be based upon such an idealistic criterion as "national character." He instead affirmed that "materialistic" criteria, in his case language, were much more important. Kautsky's theories concerning "nation" greatly influenced the views of Lenin and Stalin and became the basis of the "Marxist theory of nation."

At any rate, the possession of a "specific language" was one of the most important criteria for ethnic communities to be successful in their demands for obtaining the status of a nation. Sometimes their languages were simply dialects of neighbors, or it was not just of a single variety. They had to be completely distinct languages, and those which were clearly differentiated from neighboring languages. Antoine Meillet in his 1918 work, *Les langues dans l'Europe nouvelle*, lamented over the fact that the rise of languages with little value and literary languages resembling dialects would bring about the collapse of a unified European civilization. He contended that Ukrainian and Belorussian, for example, were languages of no significance, primarily maintained for the purpose of distinguishing themselves from those speaking the Russian language. Meillet was obviously strongly against language particularism, and he asserted that the Russian Revolution fruitlessly propelled this. The independence of peoples speaking these barbarian tongues would bring about the collapse of a unified civilization.

The strongest demands for the purity and staticity of language and their language's uniqueness came from those speaking "peripheral" languages—those who felt the necessity of preserving their independence against hegemonic languages. This was an important ideology among Germanics and Slavs, whose languages came into being later than that of French. In France, in contrast, the belief in the universality of their own language played an extremely important role.

The Emergence of National Languages

Today the official use of non-everyday languages or dead languages, such as Latin and classical Chinese, has been abolished and the vernacular has become the norm in all parts of society, including that for official use. In Europe this process of language modernization was consciously pursued. In the age of François I, for example, the Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts, proclaimed in 1539, required that the official language used was to be the "langage maternel françois et non autrement." The expression "langue nationale" had not yet appeared. The "non autrement" in the above phrase refers to not only Latin but to such languages as Brittonic and Occitain which were spoken within France at the time. A century later the Academie Française was established with the purpose of preserving the purity of and standardizing the French language.

The French Revolution of 1789 marked the pinnacle of efforts to modernize the French language. It was then that the expression "langue nationale" came into currency, for the

first time linking a national language with the state. This was not simply a means to propagate the national language, but was a symbol of the future potential of the French state and civilization. Already by 1784 Rivarol had argued in his *Discours sur l'universalité de la langue française* that her language was at the basis of France's overwhelming superiority. Barère's remarks at the Convention Nationale in 1794 about "le fédéralisme et la superstition parlent bas-breton" and "la contre-revolution parle italien et le fanatisme parle basque" are also reflective of this point.

This model of a French national language ignored the existence of various ethnic groups within France itself. The French language alone was to be used and that in itself was to lead to the creation of a nation. Language was equated with the state and with the populace within that state.

In the Prussian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, in contrast, conditions were quite different. Not only German, but Polish, Czech, Slovakian, and other languages were regarded as national languages. In France they were able to equate the nation with the state, but in these other areas the state encompassed several nations. "Sprachenkampf," which do not exist in France, was an inevitable part of these other regions of Europe. The term "Staatsprache," or state language, for which we first find documentary evidence in 1848, came to be used around the 1860s and 70s in state institutions and intermediated between the various individual languages in those empires. The appearance of this term was a precondition for recognition of the state as plurilingual. The differences between these two terms can be effective in analyzing the linguistic modernization of the Japanese language as well, our next topic at hand.

The Meaning of the Japanese Language for the Japanese People

If one asks in Japanese "How many languages do you know?" there is no other possibility but to say "How many *national* languages do you know?" For most Japanese "language" is equated with "national language." It is also rare for Japanese to refer to their mother tongue as the Japanese language; instead they say "national language" ("kokugo"). The texts that Japanese pupils use in schools are called "National Language" ("Kokugo") texts, and Japanese dictionaries are usually entitled "A Dictionary of the National Language." This expression that is so familiar to Japanese people today in fact has a very short history, spanning a period of just 100 years. The word "kokugo" or "national language" first came into only sporadic use in documents in the 1880s. Dr. Hepburn's *Japanese-English Dictionary*, for example, which scrupulously recorded modern Japanese vocabulary, for the first time had an entry for the term "kokugo" in its third edition published in 1886.

It was Ueda Kazutoshi who first consciously used the above term. In public addresses he appealed to people to love and to express loyalty for the national language in the same manner that one would the state. From 1890 Ueda studied linguistics in Berlin, Leipzig, and Paris, and shortly after he returned to Japan in June of 1894 he gave a lecture entitled "Kokugo to kokka to," or "National Language and the Nation." The Sino-Japanese War had started only two months before, so his address was replete with chauvinistic nuances. He introduced the expression "love for the Muttersprache," which was popular in Germany

at the time and which he hoped to have implanted in Japanese minds as well. Ueda's thinking at the time was influenced by the language nationalism of Fichte and Ernst Moritz Arndt in Germany, as well as the "academy-ism" popular in France.

In a related matter, about twenty years before (1872) Mori Arinori (later to become Minister of Education) wrote a letter to W. D. Whitney, Professor of Sanskrit and Comparative Linguistics at Yale University, asking his opinions on Mori's proposal to adopt the English language "as the future language of the country." This, he believed, was necessary for Japan's success at modernization. In 1875 Mori established the Commercial Law School, what was later to become Hitotsubashi University, and he invited Whitney's cousin, W. C. Whitney to the school to teach bookkeeping.

In the 20 year period from 1870-1890 Japanese language nationalism markedly increased. But it was hardly anticipated at the time that there would be other peoples within Japanese territory who spoke languages other than Japanese. It is well known that Ueda at the time was active in promoting the concept of "kokugo" ("national language"), so here I would like to turn attention to what Hoshina Koichi said about the matter.

Hoshina was a student of Ueda, and from 1911 studied in Europe for two years. Based on notes from Ueda's lectures, he was the first to publish a *Kokugogakushi* (*History of the Study of Japanese Philology*), but his primary field was language policy, much more so than linguistics itself. He collected a number of documents relating to ethnopolitics in the Prussian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, which were both plurilingual and multi-ethnic societies. Based on these in 1933 he wrote the paper "Kokkago no mondai," or "The Problem of the State Language." This was largely a summary of German-language documents regarding language policy in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and contained little originality. He clearly understood, however, the multi-ethnic and plurilingual conditions within that empire, however, and he introduced into the Japanese language for the first time the concept of "Staatssprache" (state language), which had great potential for language policy in Japan. But the concept itself never caught hold in Japan, and it was never recorded in most dictionaries. At least we see no trace of it in dictionaries used today. This concept was only able to come into existence when several national languages were officially recognized within one state, as in Austria-Hungary but not in Japan.

The fact that Hoshina departed for Europe in 1911 is quite symbolic. The preceding year Japan annexed Korea and for the first time a national language other than Japanese was now being spoken by people within Japanese territory. His stay abroad was for the purpose of exploring the possibilities for monolingual language unification within Japan and his ideas concerning language policy were formulated in anticipation of new conditions, one in which several new linguistic groups were to exist within Japanese territory. But the research that Hoshina conducted in Europe was neglected in Japan.

In the period between the annexation of Korea in 1910 and the Pacific War, Japan came into possession of territories where numerous other languages were spoken, but even at the close of the war Japan did not have any concrete language policy. Japanese policy toward her colonies and occupied lands included nothing more than very crude or rudimentary assimilation attempts, and could hardly be called "language policies" as such.

Shortly after Japan's defeat in the war, however, language reform movements of considerable size and influence quickly revived. Numerous people took a negative attitude toward the Japanese language, which since the Meiji period had used a number of different

writing systems in modern practice. Just as was the case with Mori Arinori, an air of "language pessimism," by which people believed that the Japanese language had little future, reigned. There were again increasing calls to abandon Japanese and adopt the English language. In 1946 a famous writer, Shiga Naoya, stated that Japan should adopt French as the official language.

The Japanese people's own critical stance toward their language manifested itself also in the *kana* movements (movements encouraging the complete adoption of the Japanese syllabary for all writing) and the romanization movement. Such movements had the purpose of not only democratizing language use within Japan, but also of making it easier for foreigners to learn the language.

The Japanese Language at the Crossroads

The Japanese people are now confronted with a new age, one never experienced before in the history of her language. Japanese has now become a language which foreigners are learning out of their own interest, through their own expenses and not out of coercion. This is something which the Japanese people never expected, and for many it has created a quite perplexing situation.

For the Japanese the Japanese language is not simply an art form that any human being can learn. Instead, most Japanese feel that speaking it can not be divorced from Japanese feelings, a Japanese mentality, and Japanese ethics. They furthermore contend that this spiritual complex is something that the Caucasian race can not acquire. This attitude, which is frequently misunderstood outside of Japan, is not the result of a Japanese feeling of superiority but one of inferiority. They also have the prejudice that the Japanese language is an extremely complicated language, unique to the Japanese islands, and without any similarity with other languages. Until quite recently Japanese people invariably referred to English when they used the word foreign language. Perhaps they believed that the numerous languages other than English and certain European languages did not have enough importance to master.

Recently, however, things have begun to change. People have begun to learn, for example, albeit at a rudimentary level, Korean and they have discovered that it very closely resembles their own language. It is quite clear that this will be a powerful impetus in changing the Japanese people's opinions about their language. The people of the West know such languages as English, German, French, and Spanish and they have formed impressions of foreign languages based on similarities in these languages. In the same manner the Japanese will come to reconsider the position of their own language through knowledge of structurally comparable languages, as well as through knowledge of completely different European languages.

In the last 100 years of language modernization in Japan there have been no fundamental structural changes in the Japanese language, but there have been major transformations in her people's conceptions of the language, its social and political meanings, and its functions. To the traditional view of language, some European conceptions of language have been selectively added, and both elements combined now constitute the Japanese language view. This Japanized version of language ideology, based on borrowings from

Europe, has also found its way into the Chinese and Korean languages through the transmission of new Japanese compounds of Chinese characters.

The rapid growth of the Japanese economy has led to an increase in the number of those abroad studying the Japanese language, in particular those from neighboring countries. Although this should have the effect of internationalizing the Japanese language and dismantling the exclusivism that permeates her society today, it is also having the reverse effect of strengthening language conservatism. When Japan was poor and people felt isolated internationally, there were moves to reform the Japanese language, but with the feeling of satisfaction that is accompanying economic success, there are increasing calls to value and adhere to tradition.

Paradoxically, this language conservatism has its roots in the American concept of cultural relativism introduced into Japan in the 1950s. In postwar Japan the relativist viewpoint freed people from the ethnocentrism and absolute value judgements that they held. It taught the Japanese people that "other" cultures and outsiders were equal—each culture or tradition has its own values and merits. With relativism, however, one loses one's critical stance toward idealistic aspirations, and in Japan this belief has been transformed into an ideology fostering a neo-ethnocentrism.

The strengthening of language conservatism has served to fortify the wall separating one language from another and has led to an emphasis being placed on that aspect of Japanese society which does not tolerate Japanese being spoken by foreigners (including some segments of the Japanese population itself) who do not accept the value judgements embedded in the Japanese language and culture.

Today all national languages are taking on the characteristics of "sovereign state languages." A sovereign state language, even within its own borders, creates obstacles for social mobility between social classes and between regions. It also functions as an effective means of restricting immigration from abroad and gives rise to increasing numbers of social outcasts. The theoretical underpinnings of sovereign state language have been the political interpretations of the biologism, genealogism, racialism, and the so-called homogeneity of languages still found in modern linguistics. The various principles behind these ideologies of language, which have very much controlled our interpretations of humankind over the last 150 years, have come under critical examination in recent sociolinguistic research, in particular work on the Creole languages. It is the task of language, as a science of human liberation, to discover whether or not these new insights will lead to the acquisition of new concepts whereby we can rid ourselves of sovereign state ideology.