

GENERAL SECTION

English in the mirror –

*How the Germans characterized the English language in the 17th to 19th centuries.**

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For many centuries, speakers of (probably) all European languages have appreciated and scolded, praised and denounced ‘foreign’ languages, after the Greeks had called every language but their own ‘barbaric’. General assumptions about the relations between a language and the properties of its speakers were used as the underpinnings of these statements; ‘barbaric’ languages were expected to come out of the mouths of barbaric human beings. So far, little historiographical research has been done on the history of this kind of language evaluation, although, once you think about it, it discloses itself as a frequently occurring and almost popular topic.¹ The following paper presents this topic with the focus on what the Germans thought about English as a national language, i.e. on one single case among many possible ones. Some era-dependent works, from the 17th to the 19th centuries, will be discussed. Most certainly, not all relevant sources have been found and interpreted so far. My own endeavours on the topic² are therefore bound not to be free from serious gaps.

Besides its many intellectual and artistic innovations, the European Renaissance was marked by a growing awareness that many vernaculars were spoken (written and eventually printed) in Europe – a fact which had hitherto been hidden behind the all-powerful use of Latin in intellectual discourse. Authors like Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558), or Conrad Gessner (1516-1565) explored their historical interrelations as far as their knowledge allowed them to do this.³ In many countries of Europe this led to what could be called a national linguistic consciousness. It goes almost without saying that ‘national’ has none of the semantic overtones which the word adopted in the 20th century.

At that time, the most important languages on the continent were French, Spanish, Italian, and German, each of which thrived for some time on a regionally

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¹ For a political perspective see Römer (1989).

² See Werner Hüllen, “On Calling Languages ‘Foreign’”, orig. in: John L. Flood et al. (eds.), *Das unsichtbare Band der Sprache. Studies in German Language and Linguistic History in Memory of Leslie Seiffert*. (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Heinz, 1993), 393-410; “Good Language - Bad Language. Some Case-Studies on the Criteria of Linguistic Evaluation in Three Centuries”, orig. in: Klaus D. Dutz and Kjell-Åke Forsgren (eds.), *History and Rationality. The Skövde Papers in the Historiography of Linguistics* (Münster: Nodus, 1995), 315-334; and “Some Yardsticks of Language Evaluation 1600-1800 (English and German)”, orig. in: Vivien Law and Werner Hüllen (eds.), *Linguists and Their Diversions. A Festschrift for R.H. Robins on His 75th Birthday*. (Münster: Nodus, 1996) 275-306. All these papers reprinted in Isermann (ed.) 2003, 187-200, 201-218, and 219-246. For an earlier discussion of the topic, see Hüllen (1999).

³ For the linguists mentioned, see the relevant entries in Stammerjohann (1996); for early comparative linguistics, see Robins (1990:114-115, 180-187).

influential cultural, political, or commercial superiority. English was not among them. It had some influence in the area around Antwerp and Bruges which was adjacent to the British Isles across the Channel, but otherwise it had the status of a language spoken on an island off Europe. This started to change in the first third of the 16th century, as can be shown by the two most popular books for foreign language teaching on the continent: *Introito e porta*, first published in German and Italian in 1477, presented English for the first time in 1535; *Colloquia et dictionariolum*, first published in Flemish and French in 1530, did this in 1576.⁴

In their interest in English today, German scholars are guided by their historiographical hindsight and the knowledge that, for cultural and political reasons, English developed into a very important foreign language in Germany during the 18th century, that it gained more and more weight among the European languages, parallel to the extension of the British Empire in the world, and that it finally arrived at its position as the medium of world communication in which we know it today.⁵ But the origins of this development were quite humble.

Justus Georgius Schottelius (1612-1676) is the first scholar to be mentioned in the present context. Escaping from the evils of the Thirty Years' War with the help of his sponsor and friend, Duke Anton Ulrich of Braunschweig-Lüneburg in Wolfenbüttel, he devoted his scholarly life to demonstrating that German, at that time existent only in its various dialects, was, like the other European languages, of capital importance and prime standing and deserved more acknowledgment from and care by its speakers. He worked for the development of a national standard which would, first of all, end the intrusion into German of foreign elements, mainly French words and phrases. His main work is the *Ausführliche Arbeit Von der Teutschen HauptSprache* (1663), in whose ten introductory so-called eulogies (*Lobreden*) he laid the theoretical foundations of his grammar of the German language.⁶ He does not deal with English in any detail, but mentions it in a significant context.

It is in the third eulogy that Schottelius explains an argument of great importance which was generally accepted at his time. This is how the argument reads: There was perfect linguistic communication between God and Adam in Paradise and even later, conducted in Hebrew. After the flood, Noah's four sons migrated to the four points of the compass, i.e., according to the geography of time, to the various continents of the earth, but before doing so their language was confused in Babel. It was not that new languages came into existence then, but the old perfect one became unintelligible, because of the inversion, transposition, addition or deletion of its signs. Consequently, the language of the post-Babylonian era that is the most valuable is the one which can claim to be nearest to the pre-Babylonian state. This claim was indeed made for the Germanic language and its later branches. Its founder was supposed to be Ascenas, a direct descendant of Japhet, the son of Noah, who migrated towards the West, i.e. Europe. The claim could be upheld only because the Germanic peoples, who included the Celtic tribes, were supposed to never have adopted any different language

⁴ For details see Hüllen (2006), chapters IV and IX.

⁵ This long historical development was analysed from the point of view of language learning and general reading culture in Klippel (1994); there are plenty of references for further reading in this book.

⁶ For a concise introduction see the entry by Dieter Cherubim in Stammerjohann (1996:838-841). There is a reprint (facsimile) of Schottelius' main work, 1967.

in the course of history or to have mixed their own with others.⁷ Contrary to this, all non-Germanic languages were said to have either become mixed with other ones or to have been lost altogether.

English, however, although a Germanic language, has none of these merits. With reference to the grammarian Valentin Ickelsamer (c.1500-c.1540)⁸, Schottelius criticises his German countrymen for their eagerness to find foreign elements in their own language and to introduce new ones into it. This, he says, makes the German *HauptSprache* '[...] as if it were English': 'Was man von der Englischen Sprache zuschertzen pflegt / *quod sit spuma linguarum* [...] Den[n] als in einem Topfe / wie man sagt / alle Sprachen gekocht worden / were der Schaum davon die Englische Sprache geworden: weil dieselbe ein lauter Geflick und Gemeng / wiewohl im Grunde Teutsch ist.'⁹ This is, Schottelius continues, why people travelling to the British Isles find the English language useful only for their communication with servants and labourers (*serviteurs ou facteurs*¹⁰) about the more practical necessities of life, but for nothing else. In his text, Schottelius is obviously thinking of the well-known facts of language contacts and language mixture in the history of English. He shows himself to be informed about these processes, above all when speaking about the acceptance of structure-words, prepositions, prefixes and rules of word-composition from other languages, mainly from Greek and Latin, by English.

But Schottelius did not always follow the theories of other linguists without criticism. For example, he has his doubts whether Hebrew really is the original language of mankind. But in the case of English, he agreed with the mainstream: the admixture of linguistic elements alienates a language from its origins, and this is *per se* a bad thing. It is this kind of 'purity' which increases the value of German and decreases the value of English. In time-dependent garbs, this idea will later be presented again. And so will the other idea, that an interest in English as a language is, if at all, grounded in the practicalities and necessities of everyday life, and not in more ambitious endeavours like those in theology.

The ducal court at Wolfenbüttel, where Justus Georgius Schottelius had found a home and splendid conditions for his work, actually played an important role in Germany for the cultural exchange on a European scale at that time, i.e. under the reign of the Dukes August and Ferdinand Albrecht. Foreign languages were taught to the ducal children, foreign books were bought for the library. So it is almost natural that at least one voice is to be heard which rings a more sophisticated tone without flatly contradicting the authority of Schottelius. Karl Gustav von Hille (c.1590-c.1647), *Haushofmeister* to the Duke's mother Sophie Elisabeth, had an important

⁷ 'Ist also die uhralte Sprache bey den freyen Teutschen vornemlich nach dem Grunde geblieben / auch ihren Nahmen von den Teutschen / als dem vornehmsten Hauptgeschlechte der Celten / hernachmals behalten.' Schottelius (1967:35).

⁸ First German grammarian, or rather phonetician, famous for his ideas about how to learn and to teach reading. He was a teacher in Rothenburg and in Augsburg. See Stammerjohann (1996:457).

⁹ When all languages were cooked in one kettle, the suds became the English language: because it is nothing else but patchwork and mixture, although in its nature German. (This and all following translations are mine.) See Schottelius (1967: 35).

¹⁰ For this verdict, which would develop an afterlife of its own, Schottelius goes back to Claude Duret (1565-1611) and his *Tresor de l'histoire des langues des ces univers* [...]. See Stammerjohann (1996:162-163).

share in these endeavours. He knew England and the language from his travels and was well read in contemporary English literature. In his book *Teutscher Palmenbaum* (1647) he argues that in spite of its mutilated and mixed character, English has enough pleasantness and elevated word meanings for the printing of spiritual as well as of worldly books.¹¹

Ob nun wohl die Englische / vor eine aus vielen zusammengesetzte und verstümelte Sprache gehalten wird; so ist sie dennoch mit Wahrheit nicht eine so gar geringschätzig und schlechte / wie sich solches dieselbe Unverständige einbilden: Sondern sie bestehet in einer solche Lieblichkeit und hohe Sinnbegriff / dass auch die allerwürdigste Geist- und weltliche Bücher / nicht von ihnen in der Lateinischen; sondern viel ehe in ihren eigenen Muttersprache beschrieben / zu lesen seynd: [...].

This means that von Hille does not doubt the common verdict of *spuma linguarum*,¹² but he counterbalances it with the simple statement that the English language has all the means to express the most dignified spiritual and secular thoughts of the time. A secular, in fact a functional viewpoint, corroborated by experience, is thus introduced instead of Schottelius' theological one, which was only theoretical.

In the course of the 18th century, the convincing power of theological argumentation became weaker, which entailed that criteria like the age and purity of a language lost their hold on linguists. In the article *Sprache* of Zedler's *Universal-Lexicon* (1732-1750), the German counterpart to the French *Encyclopédie*, for example, the author Samuel von Pufendorf (1632-1694)¹³ floated the idea that, contrary to the concept of a perfect *lingua adamica*, the oldest human language must have been quite imperfect and the idea of the holiness of Hebrew was a myth.¹⁴ This brought the enlightened notion of historical improvement – not deterioration like in Babel – into play, with new functional criteria of evaluation. They were quite international in reflections on the nature of languages during the Enlightenment.¹⁵ In the case of English this meant that the admixture of linguistic elements now appeared in a new light.

At the end of the 18th century we know of Daniel Jenisch (1762-1804), a court preacher living first in Braunschweig and then in Berlin who worked as a stylist, historian and translator of Greek, French, and Polish texts and published a considerable poetic oeuvre.¹⁶ He brought the description and evaluation of English

¹¹ There is a reprint of Karl Gustav von Hille's *Der Teutsche Palmbaum*, 1970; quotation 123-124. See also Bepler (1988: 96-97, and *passim*).

¹² The translation of *spuma linguarum* 'Sprachenschaum' appears in the works of other German writers of the time, for example that of Georg Philipp Harsdörffer (1607-1658).

¹³ Mainly known as a lawyer and historiographer of the Prince Elector Friedrich III of Brandenburg, the so-called *Grosse[r] Kurfürst*. He also published on theology and philology. Zedler integrated an older paper of Pufendorf's, together with those of other authors, into the article on language.

¹⁴ Zedler 1744, vol. 39. On the article 'Sprache' see Wichter (1996).

¹⁵ Brigitte Schlieben-Lange (1992), moreover Lieve Looken and Pierre Swiggers, unpublished.

¹⁶ For more biographical details, see Brekle et al. (1997:50-53).

(and other languages) to a first scholarly perfection. He did this in a *Preisschrift* advertised by the *Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften* in 1794.¹⁷

Jenisch's merit is to have clearly defined the yardsticks for measuring languages. They are functional to the general task of language, namely communicating concepts (*Begriffe*) and emotions (*Empfindungen*). These yardsticks, taken from classical rhetoric, are: (i) 'copiousness' (*Reichtum*), i.e. the number of words for the denotation of objects (*sinnliche Gegenstände*) and abstractions (*Reflexionsbegriffe*), and also the potential of word-formation (*lexikalische Bildsamkeit*); this is a semantic criterion. (ii) 'effort' or 'energy' (*Nachdrücklichkeit, Energie*), i.e. the directness of expressions which is achieved by the fullness and range of concepts as well as by the intensity of emotions; this is a stylistic criterion operating on the lexical and the grammatical levels, where it shows in the brevity of expressions. (iii) 'clarity' (*Bestimmtheit*), i.e. the non-ambiguity of word-meanings and the nature of grammar; this is again a semantic, but most of all a syntactic criterion. And (iv) 'euphony' (*Wohlklang*), i.e. the interplay of vowels and consonants; this is an aesthetic criterion on the phonotactic level. These criteria gave Daniel Jenisch the opportunity for almost excessive praise of the English language which turns old verdicts into their opposite. Phenomena which caused the derisive description of a *spuma linguarum* are now regarded as linguistic merits.

English is the most 'copious' of all European languages – and hence of all languages in the world – because of the happy mixture of its vocabulary and the generally favourable conditions for language development. For Jenisch, this is also true for the potential of word-formation in English.¹⁸

In semantic 'effort' or 'energy' Jenisch finds a generally superior character in the Germanic languages compared to the Romance ones. But he praises the Latinate English vocabulary highly because the words have not only their special Germanic character but also the more general meanings of their Latin origins. Jenisch thinks that this is particularly propitious for poetry. His praise of the grammatical 'effort' of English is almost enthusiastic:

Alle Sprachen Europens überraget durch die bewundernswürdige, und doch zugleich dem Ausdruck jeder Feinheit dieser Art vortheilhafte, Einfachheit ihres grammatikalischen Baues — die Englische. [...] Man könnte von der Englischen Sprache beinahe rühmen, daß sie von einer Gesellschaft von Philosophen erfunden worden, welche sich von alle dem entledigten, was Zufall und Eigensinn allen andern Sprachen anheftet [...].¹⁹

¹⁷ Jenisch 1796. See Schlieben-Lange and Weydt 1988, moreover Isermann (2002:234-238).

¹⁸ 'alles dies zusammengenommen, welches sich bei keiner Nation jemals vereinigt hat, noch jetzt vereinigt, [...] möchte ich fast behaupten, (so viel Anmaßung auch eine solche Behauptung voraussetzen scheint) daß die Englische Sprache unter allen Europäischen Sprachen, d.h. unter allen Sprachen der Welt, den größten extensiven Reichthum hat.' Jenisch (1796:62). Note the considerable degree of eurocentrism in the assumption that European languages are in any case superior to other languages of the world.

¹⁹ 'The English language outdoes all European languages because of the admirable simplicity of its grammatical structure which is, at the same time, advantageous to expressing every shade [of meaning]. One could almost say of the English language that it was founded by a society of philosophers who avoided everything that accident and idiosyncrasies added to all other languages.' See Jenisch (1796:331-332 and 384).

Jenisch's arguments with reference to 'clarity' are similar to those with reference to 'effort'. Only as regards 'euphony' is Jenisch's judgment full of reserve. Besides a happy mixture of consonants and vowels which is pleasant to the ear, he generally favours a distinct pronunciation of all syllables, which however is lost in the English habit of truncating endings and contracting two or more syllables into one.

The beginning of the 19th century saw new thoughts in linguistics and language philosophy. They are usually said to cover two domains of the wide field, *firstly* historical linguistics pertaining to the Indo-European languages, and *secondly* ethnic linguistics.²⁰ The one group of linguists²¹ was devoted to establishing genetic dependencies with the help of sound laws, syntactic affinities and etymology. The second²² was devoted to defining the interrelations between national cultures and languages. Their work was carried on as ethnic psychology (*Völkerpsychologie*).²³

There are two methodological features which these two groups of linguists have in common. The *first* is its universalism. National languages are seen as tokens of higher ranking types, they are part of a typological classification. The *second* feature is the comparative method. It is constitutive for the Indo-European group of linguists in any case. This is why they have been labelled 'comparative philologists'. But the ethnolinguistic group was also devoted to comparing languages, if not for their own sake then for establishing the historical process by which national individuality in languages manifests itself as the linguistic form of *menschliche Geisteskraft*.²⁴

From this follows: Characterisations of the English language in the Romantic period are located in a complex situation of a linguistics with diverging tendencies. The historical linguists and Neogrammarians use English to support their ideas on language typology. The ethnolinguists use it to show their ideas on the national spirit of a language.

The various language typologies of the time were not only descriptive but also evaluative. August Schleicher (1821-1868), for example, differentiated between monosyllabic, agglutinative, and inflectional languages. For him the latter represented the highest rank of linguistic and cultural development. Only in inflectional languages is a word considered to be a linguistic unit composed of various parts and therefore

²⁰ See Gipper & Schmitter (1975); there is a separate edition of this essay with the same title, Tübingen: Narr, 1979 (sec. edn 1985).

²¹ - embracing names like Rasmus Rask (1787-1832), Franz Bopp (1791-1867), and Jakob Grimm (1785-1863), furthermore August Schleicher (1821-1868) and, later, the *Junggrammatiker*.

²² - embracing figures such as Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788), Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803)²², and above all Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), furthermore Heymann (Hajim) Steinthal (1823-1899) and Wilhelm Wundt ((1832-1920). As can be seen from their life dates, Hamann and Herder precede the linguists of the Romantic era with their works. This is particularly true of Herder's seminal *Preisschrift* 'Über den Ursprung der Sprache' (1771). A number of remarks made by Jenisch can be understood as being influenced by Herder, in particular by his idea that, in their early stages, languages are more marked by 'poetic energy' than later, when they show more intellectual 'clarity'.

²³ See Davies (1975:607-716).

²⁴ Wilhelm von Humboldt (1968:VII, 15). His essay 'Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluß auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts [1830-1835]' is probably the most influential essay in this context.

comparable to an animate organism.²⁵ This not only places the languages of the Indo-European group above all other languages of the world, it also places those highest among the Indo-European languages which have a rich inflectional morphology. In consequence, Schleicher's evaluation of English is negative: Schleicher says: English has kept its Anglo-Saxon type, but is one of the most truncated ones and the poorest regarding grammatical endings. Most of the originally Germanic words have sunk to monosyllability – at least in pronunciation, which is the only relevant part here.²⁶

Franz Misteli (1841-1903)²⁷ developed a system of six language types, one of them being *flectirende Sprachen*. He is much more reluctant than other historical linguists and Neogrammarians to attribute a value to a language type *per se*, and looks upon language change as something occurring naturally in history rather than by deterioration. Yet, he argues, of the modern examples of Indo-Europeanism the Baltic-Slavonic languages are the most genuine old ones, while the Germanic and Romance languages are now very distant from the original type, in particular English which outdid all other branches of the stem in the reckless curtailing of forms and inconsiderate treatment of syntax.²⁸

These two applications of the Romantic language typology to English show various degrees of appreciation of inflecting languages. There can, however, be no doubt that the high degree of acknowledgment of inflecting languages with its preference for the Indo-European, the European, and finally the Germanic languages was widely accepted and adhered to in the following century. It was not only the linguists of the first group who did this. Wilhelm von Humboldt (17767-1835), for example, saw the *Geistesarbeit* incorporated in languages most clearly expressed in their grammatical systems. He maintains that there are more and less perfect languages in the world and that the inflecting ones, compared with the incorporating and agglutinative ones, belong to the most perfect. For him inflection is an ingenious principle emerging from the true intuition of language.²⁹ Most criticism of the

²⁵ 'Die flectirenden Sprachen stehen somit am höchsten auf der Skala der Sprachen: erst hier ist im Organismus des Wortes eine wahrhafte Gliederung entwickelt, das Wort ist die Einheit in der Mannigfaltigkeit der Glieder, entsprechend dem animalischen Organismus, von welchem dieselbe Bestimmung gilt.' Schleicher (1983:9).

²⁶ '[...] die Sprache hat den angelsächs[ischen] Typus zwar bewahrt, ist aber eine der abgeschliffensten, an grammatischen Endungen ärmsten Sprachen unseres Sprachstammes. Die meisten ursprüngl[ich] deutschen Wörter sind sogar zur Einsylbigkeit herabgesunken — wenigstens in der Aussprache, die hier allein massgebend ist.' Schleicher (1983:231).

²⁷ There is no entry on Misteli in Stammerjohann (1996).

²⁸ Franz Misteli starts the chapter on Indo-European (he says Indo-Germanic) languages with the sentence: 'Unter den Völkern, welche die indogermanischen Sprachen reden, befinden sich unläugbar die begabtesten Völker der Erde: Inder, Griechen und Römer, Germanen. Aber nicht alle Völker, welche indogermanische Sprachen reden, sind besonders begabt [...]'. 'So sind von den modernen Vertretern des Indogermanismus die baltisch-slavisches Sprachen wohl die altertümlichsten, während die germanischen und romanischen sich weit vom Urtypus entfernten, besonders die englische Sprache, welche in rücksichtsloser Beschränkung der Formenmenge und in souveräner Behandlung der Syntax alle andern Glieder des Sprachstammes überholte.' Quotations from Misteli (1893:487 and 489).

²⁹ Verglichen mit den einverleibenden und ohne wahre Worteinheit lose anfügenden Verfahren, erscheint die Flexionsmethode als ein geniales, aus der wahren Intuition der Sprache hervorgehendes Prinzip.' (Humboldt, 1968:163). The idea is mentioned time and time again, so many quotations could be given.

grammatical structure of languages is a direct corollary of this viewpoint and led to many cases of unfavourable judgements concerning English. In popular pedagogical thinking, for example – in particular by classicists – Ancient Greek ranked higher than Latin, Latin higher than French, and French higher than English. Slavonic languages were simply ignored.

However, the picture would not be complete if the ideas of Jakob Grimm (1785-1863) were left unmentioned. As is well known, Grimm subsumed Anglo-Saxon, and consequently English, under *deutsch*, which made Rasmus Rask speak of “his [Grimm’s] patriotism”.³⁰ In spite of this, Grimm’s high evaluation of Anglo-Saxon and the later English is obvious in many comparisons when, for example, he says that the ‘Low German’ dialects split up and their noblest part went away from the continent with the Anglo-Saxons. Out of the womb of Anglo-Saxon, he says, the English language emerged rejuvenated and mighty.³¹ Although the admixture of languages is even for him ‘against nature’, Grimm finds in the case of English that the inevitable loss of concrete word meanings under French influence is counterbalanced by a gain in abstract ones.³² This means that, in order to understand the English language, the French and (Germanic) English parts must be seen as fully integrated. This is also important for understanding the English people.³³ The climax of these thoughts is the well-known passage from Grimm’s ‘Über den Ursprung der Sprache’. The passage is famous and deserves full quotation.

keine unter allen neueren sprachen hat gerade durch das aufgeben und zerrütten alter lautgesetze, durch den wegfall beinahe sämtlicher flexionen eine grözere kraft und stärke empfangen als die englische und von ihrer nicht einmal lehrbaren, nur lernbaren fülle freier mitteltöne ist eine wesentliche gewalt des ausdrucks abhängig geworden, wie sie vielleicht noch nie einer andern menschlichen zunge zu gebote stand. ihre ganz überaus geistige, wunderbar geglückte anlage und durchbildung war hervorgegangen aus einer überraschenden vermählung der beiden edelsten sprachen des späteren Europas, der germanischen und romanischen, und bekannt ist wie im englischen sich beide zueinander verhalten, indem jene bei weitem die sinnliche grundlage hergab, diese die geistigen begriffe zuführte.³⁴

³⁰ For the problem of this terminology see Sonderegger 1989.

³¹ ‘aus dem schosz der anglesächsischen sprache aber erhob sich, mit starker einmischung des romanischen elements, verjüngt und mächtig die englische sprache.’ Jakob Grimm (1970:580).

³² Grimm’s adjectives are ‘sinnlich’ vs ‘geistig’.

³³ See Sonderegger (1989). For Grimm’s attitude towards indigenous and foreign words in a language see Grimm (1965:5).

³⁴ None of all the modern languages has gained more power and might than English, precisely by abandoning and disregarding old phonetic laws [and] truncating almost all inflectional endings; and its unteachable, but learnable, richness of central [vowels] has become the essential strength of its expression as perhaps no other language ever had. Its perfectly spiritual and miraculously felicitous design and structure emanated from a surprising marriage of the two most noble languages of the later Europe, the Germanic and Romance ones; and it is well known how the two are related to each other, the one providing the sensual foundation, the other adding the mental concepts. See Grimm 1965, 293. My translation. The passage was translated into English as early as 1853 in *Notes and Queries* 7 (1853), 294.

For Grimm, who can scarcely be reproached for a lack of German national feelings, these features gave the English language a chance to become *the* medium of world-wide communication. However, Grimm was not the only German to have this foresight.³⁵

As concerns the ethnolinguist group, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) and Wilhelm von Humboldt show conceptual affinities.³⁶ Fichte's *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, held in 1807-1808 enjoyed great public acceptance. They exercised a strong influence, for good or ill, in shaping the German national mentality until the middle of the 20th century. At a time when all of Europe was occupied by Napoleonic forces and when there was no German nation, Fichte aimed at a pedagogical programme of national self-determination. The role of German as a national language in this process is explained in the fourth *Rede*.

According to Fichte, the origin of language is not only determined by man's free will to use sounds as the signs for something, but also by man's lack of free will in the choice of these signs. A language comes into being neither by the act of an individual nor by any convention established between several individuals but by a national principle which Fichte calls a *Grundgesetz* (basic law). Fichte says that just as objects are mirrored in the senses of the individual with a certain figure, colour, etc., so they are mirrored in language, the instrument of man in society, with a certain sound. It is not man who speaks, but human nature which shows itself to others as of the same kind.³⁷ It is an idea which was later much more often attributed to Humboldt than to Fichte, according to which language appears in history not as such ('nicht die Eine und reine Menschensprache') but as a deviating national type ('eine Abweichung davon'). Of course, all languages change in the course of time, but they nevertheless remain identical with themselves when used by one indigenous linguistic community. The language of this people is something determined, and it is not the people which expresses its knowledge, but knowledge expresses itself in it. However, the condition for a speech community to enjoy this development is that they never adopted a different language or that its own language was never mixed with another one. Fichte claims that the Germans are the only people in Europe to fulfil this condition. It is obvious that the verdict of having lost or polluted their own tongues is addressed to the speakers of the Neo-Latin (i.e. Romance) languages and of English, whereas the speakers of the Scandinavian languages are subsumed under German(ic) and the speakers of Slavonic languages are excluded from these deliberations altogether. According to Fichte, it does not matter which language mixes with or replaces one's

³⁵ See reference to K.M. Rapp in Sonderegger (1989:30).

³⁶ They share the concept of 'transcendentalism' in the way in which Immanuel Kant understood the term, i.e. they reflected on the conditions of the possibility ('*die Bedingungen der Möglichkeit von [...]*') of human existence, concentrating however, contrary to Kant, on the role of language. The most important feature of this is grammar, a statement which proves the ideas of the two Romantic thinkers to be dependent on the idea of a universal human grammar in the preceding century. See Müller-Vollmer (1981), also Ziegler (1997:101-119).

³⁷ 'So wie die Gegenstände sich in den Sinnenwerkzeugen des Einzelnen mit dieser bestimmten Figur, Farbe, u.s.w. abbilden, so bilden sie sich im Werkzeuge des gesellschaftlichen Menschen, in der Sprache, mit diesem bestimmten Laute ab. Nicht eigentlich redet der Mensch, sondern in ihm redet die menschliche Natur, und verkündigt sich andern seines Gleichen.' All quotations from Fichte (1997:595-612).

own; it is the incompatible foreignness of a different language (or of different languages) which does the damage.

The philosopher, who actually had little expertise in linguistics, pursued his ideas on another, more concrete level of deliberation. Denotation of what he calls ‘das Übersinnliche’, i.e. abstract (mental, spiritual, moral, ideational) concepts, is achieved by a metaphorical transposition of the denotation of concrete referents. Fichte’s example is the Greek lexeme *idea* which can only be understood properly if the original meaning, i.e. ‘vision’, ‘dream’, is known. Without this background the word remains dead. In a language mixed with foreign elements (or in a foreign language altogether) people do not understand these transpositions intuitively but must learn them as something external to their genuine linguistic habitat. The ‘foreign’ part of the language no longer follows its own *Grundgesetz*. Such languages appear to be alive on the surface, but are dead in the depths and cut off from their own roots. From this hypothesis, Fichte explains – in words which have readily lent themselves to later political exploitation – why Germans, if guided by their own language, are (supposedly) superior (in education, in culture, in morals) to everybody else in Europe. They have their own genuine language. He maintains that speakers of French and other languages do not understand their own idioms because they cannot follow the genuinely Latin processes of denotation and the shifts of meaning. If at all, it is only the educated who are able to do this. But this has serious consequences, because it creates two kinds of nations. The first kind is of course the *deutsche Nation* as Fichte wants to shape it by his public speeches. Here people use their language according to its national *Grundgesetz*. The second kind are the neo-Latin nations France, Italy, and Spain. Here people use their language blindly unless they are highly educated and understand its linguistic origins. Fichte never mentions English, but his ideas can be (and were) readily applied to the English language as a blend of Romance and Germanic elements and to the estrangement between the educated and the non-educated members of the speech community that is said to follow from this.

For linguists towards the end of the 19th century interested in the languages of their own days, the question arose of how the Humboldtian individuality and Fichte’s basic law of a language could be proved, for example for English. Apart from analysing the grammatical structure and allocating a language its place in the current typologies, cross-linguistic semantic investigations obviously seemed appropriate. They provided an opportunity for pinning down the *Weltansicht* (or *Innere Form*) of a language in a concrete domain of its lexis. A generalisation might then be possible. Such investigations could theoretically be based on many of Humboldt’s statements, for example:

Denn der Zusammenhang aller Theile der Sprache unter einander, und der ganzen Sprache mit der Nation ist so enge, dass, wenn einmal diese Wechselwirkung eine bestimmte Richtung angiebt, daraus nothwendig durchgängige Eigenthümlichkeit hervorgehen muß. Weltansicht aber ist die Sprache nicht bloss, weil sie, da jeder Begriff soll durch sie erfasst werden können, dem Umfange der Welt gleichkommen muss, sondern auch deswegen, weil erst die Verwandlung, die sie mit den Gegenständen vornimmt, den Geist

zur Einsicht des von dem Begriff der Welt unzertrennlichen Zusammenhanges fähig macht.³⁸

This notion stimulated an abundance of investigations which were to come into their own only in the first half of the following century when Humboldt's ideas were re-introduced into linguistic thinking by the so-called neo-Humboldtians (e.g. Leo Weisgerber) and when the idea of the semantic field (*Wortfeld*) was coined and gained wide acceptance. One of the first people to do this was the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). In his essay 'Über Sprache und Worte', for example, he compared a series of related words in several languages, among them *ingénieux*, *sinnreich*, *clever*, *esprit*, *Geist*, *wit*; and *malice*, *Bosheit*, *wickedness* in order to show that they are not interlanguage synonyms in the strict sense.³⁹ For foreign language learning this means that one must delimit several new concepts in the mind; conceptual areas come into being where there were none so far. One does not learn just words but acquires concepts. This idea corresponds to Humboldt's statement that learning a foreign language should mean finding a new hold in the old view of the world. This is so because every language contains the whole texture of concepts and imaginings of some part of mankind.⁴⁰ Schopenhauer goes on to explain that the sum total of all concepts expressed in the lexis of a language constitutes the spirit of the language to be learnt. A national language is related to this spirit of a nation in the same way in which a personal style is related to the spirit of an individual. We find a clear parallelism here between the individual and the nation as a kind of super-individual. This (pseudo-)psychological idea will gain much ground in the following century, and there will also be much criticism levelled against it. Not surprisingly, it is above all the theory of foreign language teaching that is interested in such concrete applications of abstract ideas.⁴¹

³⁸ 'For the interconnection of all parts of the language and the language as a whole and the nation is so strict that, once this interconnection points towards a certain direction, a general individuality must necessarily follow. Language is not only a world view because it must encompass the whole world, as any term must be expressed [in it], but also because it enables the spirit [of people] to recognize the inseparable interconnection with the world only by the individualisation of things.' See Humboldt (1968:V, 387) ('Grundzüge des allgemeinen Sprachtypus'). There are also statements in which Humboldt warns people not to try and describe the individuality of a language because the task is too complex. Note, for example: 'Die Untersuchung dieser Individualität, ja sogar ihre genauere Bestimmung in einem gegebenen Falle ist das schwierigste Geschäft der Sprachforschung. Es ist unleugbar, dass dieselbe, bis auf einen gewissen Grad, nur empfunden, nicht dargestellt werden kann, und fragt sich daher, ob nicht alle Betrachtung derselben von dem Kreise des wissenschaftlichen Sprachstudiums ausgeschlossen bleiben solle?.' (IV, 421) ('Über den Nationalcharakter der Sprachen').

³⁹ Schopenhauer (1965:667) ('Parerga und Paralipomena', Paragraph 298-303a). Schopenhauer also mentions *comfortable*, *disappointment*, *gentleman* as untranslatable.

⁴⁰ 'Die Erlernung einer fremden Sprache sollte daher die Gewinnung eines neuen Standpunkts in der bisherigen Weltansicht seyn und ist es in der That bis auf einen gewissen Grad, da jede Sprache das ganze Gewebe der Begriffe und der Vorstellungsweise eines Theils der Menschheit enthält.' Humboldt (1968:VII, 60) ('Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaus'.)

⁴¹ After all, Humboldt was *ex officio* the reformer of the *Preußisches Gymnasium*. Pedagogical reflections on how to apply the results of the new linguistics to foreign language teaching started quite early. Note, for example, Asher (1859) and Bernhard Schmitz (1859). The latter book is very rich in reports on philological and pedagogical literature. It points out the importance of *Volkscharakter* for

The foregoing historiographical overview leads to some noteworthy, if preliminary, results. Although the three periods under analysis are, of course, quite different in their basic assumptions, there is an astonishing parallelism. In the Romantic period, the theological argument of Schottelius and others is repeated in a national (political) variant. Whereas in the 17th century the originally divine quality of human language was the starting point of linguistic evaluation, this was in the 19th century its originally ethnic quality. Fichte's *Grundgesetz* takes the place of the *lingua adamica*. Consequently, the argument leads to similar results, viz. the critical rejection of English as a mixed language and a language with a poor inflectional system. The rational and, in the historical sense of the word, enlightened method of linguistic analysis by Daniel Jenisch got lost, at least in what would today be called the mainstream linguistics of the 19th century. It had its somewhat timid forerunner in von Hille. The way in which von Hille contradicted Schottelius in the earlier century is also repeated in Jakob Grimm's even more impressive praise of English as a contradiction to mainstream linguistics in the later period. The underlying historical pattern, as far as it is discernible now, is that an ideological approach moves from theology to ethnology and politics, and that a functional approach runs alongside. It remains to be seen what happened to this competition during the 20th century. Here the ideological approach was certainly adopted by the followers of Neo-Humboldtianism, and the functional approach, for example, by Otto Jespersen (1860-1943) who was, of course, not German but very influential among German scholars.

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the teaching of foreign languages (mostly French), but the author also has his doubts concerning this vague term: 'Es gibt immer noch Menschen genug, denen solches Gerede imponiert und Wunders tief klingt' (1859:28).

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